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Rising From a Placid Lake

China's Three Gorges
at the Intersection of
History, Aesthetics and Politics

By

Corey Jonathan Byrnes

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

Chinese Language

in the

Graduate Division
of the
University of California, Berkeley

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Abstract

Rising From a Placid Lake: China's Three Gorges at the Intersection of
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Corey Jonathan Byrnes

Doctor of Philosophy in Chinese Language

University of California, Berkeley

Professor Paula Varsano, Chair

Researched and written in the shadow of the recently completed Three Gorges Dam, this dissertation begins with an "Introduction" that describes the earliest mythology of this mountainous region, which is said to have been hand-hewn by the deity-civil servant Yu the Great, so that the waters of a cataclysmic flood could drain to the sea. This proto-governmental response to natural disaster stands at the core of all later accounts of the Gorges, helping to form an aesthetic tradition that views the landscape as not only a site of trauma but also a surface created through and primed for physical alteration.

Chapter 1, "Tears in the Void: Traces of the Past in Du Fu's Three Gorges Poetry," focuses on this tradition as manifested in the interplay of the personal and the national at a moment of grave political crisis, the An Lushan Rebellion (755-763), when the iconic poet Du Fu (712-770) sought refuge in the wilds of the Gorges. In the strikingly fragmented verse that he wrote during this period, Du's fevered visions fail to coalesce into a stable landscape in the monumental mode of Yu the Great. Instead, they flicker across the surface of the Gorges in the form of fleeting, hallucinatory traces (*ji* 跡) of a fractured personal, cultural and spatial order.

Chapter 2, "Reinscribing the Trace: The Three Gorges in the Song Dynasty," shows how a new genre of travel diaries and essays (*ji* 記) from the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279) transforms Du Fu's traces, stabilizing and re-inscribing them as touristic landmarks through physical and literary practices of marking, recording and verifying (*lu* 錄, *ji* 記, *ji* 紀). The authors of these texts, writing barely a generation after the cataclysmic loss of the northern half of the empire to an ethnically non-Chinese dynasty, were acutely aware of the vulnerability of the landscape as cultural topography. For them, Du Fu offered not only a sympathetic model of the loyal minister in southern exile, but also a set of geographical and historical associations that elevated the Gorges to a landscape imbued with powerful moral significance.

Chapter 3, "Specters of Realism and the Painter's Gaze in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*," turns to a new aesthetic of fragmentation that, while reminiscent of Du Fu's, is finely attuned to the contemporary pressures of global capital and national development. Focusing on Jia Zhangke's 2006 film *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren*), this chapter explores how The Three Gorges, now on the brink of inundation, serve as the ideal venue for Jia's disassembly and recombination of earlier artistic forms—portraiture, Socialist Realism and Chinese landscape painting, as well as Tang poetry and contemporary pop music—in a work that reveals precisely how cultural practices

work trans-historically to constitute this particular landscape.

While pre-modern artistic forms serve as occasional components of Jia's eclectic hybrid style, they are the very warp and weft of the American-based Chinese artist Yun-fei Ji's painting practice, the subject of Chapter 4, "Ink in the Wound: Trauma and The Three Gorges in the Painting of Yun-fei Ji." In his Three Gorges paintings Ji self-consciously manipulates spatial and temporal codes borrowed from classical Chinese painting to depict the dam project as a violent act of physical inscription and traumatic displacement. This chapter details how Ji imagines the landscape of The Three Gorges as a site of traumatic experience: both a raw wound that opens onto past traumas, especially the Cultural Revolution, and a frame for the physical and psychic consequences of the dam project.

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Introduction

Imagine encountering an unfamiliar landscape—sheer cliffs and a raging river, steep defiles and towering mountains all around. When the wonder fades, the question that naturally follows for many of us is, "how was this place formed?" However amateur, we bear a geological eye that looks for signs of erosion, glaciation and violent eruptions; the magic of frozen time recorded and readable in the exposed strata of earth and soil. We see the earth as a medium that displays the unmistakable traces of past geologic events and forces, layered like so many sheets of paper, one atop the other. Nearest to the surface that we inhabit, floating atop the record of deep time, there is a thin stratum of traces left behind by our human forebears.¹ Humanity's recent and disproportionate environmental impact notwithstanding, we recognize these traces, whatever their relative antiquity, as ephemera compared to the monumental and ancient geological text writ large in the landscape.

For most of Chinese history, however, those who contemplated a landscape such as the Three Gorges would have recognized no such gap between deep time and human time. For them, the Gorges constituted an historical landscape produced by acts of political, social and aesthetic inscription. As the conceptual thread that knits together the works discussed in this dissertation, inscription encompasses a range of practices—not only the physical manipulation of the landscape, but also representational practices such as writing, painting, film production and photography and the various ways in which space is mobilized by politics and ideology. In Chinese, its scope is equally large—including *ke* 刻 (to inscribe; inscription), *shu* 書 (to write; writing), *hua* 畫 (to paint; painting) and *jilu* 記/紀 (to mark, record, note, document), as well as *shu* 疏 (to clear out, dredge), *zao* 鑿 (to chisel; chisel) and *fu* 斧 (to ax; ax). Inscription is not, however, limited to the act of marking. It also encompasses the ways in which marks act to describe, circumscribe and prescribe space.

In Chinese, marks that act in such variegated ways often fall under the general category of *ji* 跡 (also written with the characters 蹟 and 迹), a word that is usually translated as "trace." Ranging from the monumental to the microscopic, and as likely to appear on the psyche as on the surface of the earth, the inscriptional trace is at heart paradoxical: it indexes the moment and place of its creation and the presence of its creator, but only through the absence of the creator and the passage of time; it materializes the passage of time through decay, gaining in historical power and symbolic presence as it fades; even after it is totally effaced, it lingers in memory and in the form of surrogate traces (marks adjacent to, representing or commemorating the original trace), hovering evocatively and mysteriously between absence and presence. In his study of the curious history of ruins in Chinese culture Wu Hung offers this taxonomy of the trace:

'divine traces' (*shenji*) [神跡] as ambiguous signs of supernatural power; 'historical traces' (*guji*) [古跡] as subjects of antiquarian interest; 'remnant traces' (*yiji*) [遺跡] as loci of political

¹ Some scientists have begun to argue that the rise of humans marks a new geological era—the "anthropocene"—in which human interventions have definitively altered the earth's atmospheric and geologic makeup. For more on the recent history of this term, see: Jan Zalasiewicz, Mark Williams, Will Steffen and Paul Crutzen. "The New World of the Anthropocene," in *Environmental Science and Technology* 44, no. 7 (2010): 2228–2231.

memory and expression; and 'famous historical sites' (*shengji*) [勝跡] as meeting places of elite and popular culture.²

Drawing implicitly on a pattern of stimulus and response that is at the core of traditional Chinese aesthetics, Wu goes on to sum up these traces "as general signs of the past" that "can stimulate the *huaigu* [懷古] sentiment," a profound yearning for the past. The affective component that Wu highlights is essential here: it reminds us that the trace does not simply encapsulate the past, it serves as both the stimulus and expressive medium of the emotions of the beholder. But to fully grasp the nature of the trace, one must reverse the direction of the phenomena-affect pattern implied by the normative stimulus model. This is because, in isolation, the material trace has no intrinsic power to move or act. It must await an emotionally receptive viewer—one, at the very least, educated and invested in history—to imbue it with meaning and sentiment, and thereby stimulate it into a new mode of being.

Over the more than 2000 years spanned by the works under discussion here—from before the Christian era to the present day—the aesthetic, political and geographical entity known as the Three Gorges has been shaped and reshaped through the inscription and affective activation of traces. I have brought together a selection of five particular bodies of work from four different time periods because they represent some of the most transformational moments in the inscriptional history of the Three Gorges: from the *wu*-inscriptions of early myth, to their lyric transformations in the writings of the Tang Dynasty poet-in-exile, Du Fu; to their proto-scientific corrections and adjudications as offered in the travel diaries of some of the great writers of the Northern and Southern Song Dynasty; and finally to the elegiac inscriptions on a disappearing topography by two contemporary visual artists, Jia Zhangke and Yunfei Ji. Together, these powerful modes of transformative inscription and re-inscription constitute not only a selective but well-rounded record of why and how the Three Gorges have remained a culturally significant site for so long, but also a perspective on how and why 'Chinese landscapes' are produced and sustained.

I first gauged the depth and longevity of the Gorges' inscriptional legacy when I started to explore recent artistic responses to the transformations set in motion by the planning and construction of the Three Gorges dam and reservoir. Conceived by Sun Yan-set in the second decade of the 20th century, the dam project finally broke ground in 1994 and reached completion in 2008. To describe it demands superlatives: it is by most measures the largest dam in the world, standing 652 feet high and stretching for 1.4 miles across the Yangzi. Its reservoir stores nearly 40 billion cubic meters of water, a small portion of which feeds the largest power plant in the world. At 414 miles long, the reservoir extends over one tenth of the length of the Yangzi, which is the world's third longest river. (To put this in perspective, the driving distance between San Francisco and Los Angeles along Highway 5 through the Central Valley is just under 400 miles.) Together, the dam and reservoir required the destruction of 13 cities, well over a hundred towns, and over 1000 villages, as well as innumerable archaeological and historical sites, many of them in and around the Three Gorges. By the time the reservoir reached capacity, somewhere between 1.3 and 1.9 million people had been displaced by the project.³

² *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Art and Visual Culture* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012), 64.

³ There is a measure of variability when it comes to statistics for engineering projects in China, especially those related to displacement and relocation. These figures are based mostly on information provided by International Rivers, a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting rivers around the world. For more information, see: http://www.internationalrivers.org/files/attached-files/3gorgesfactsheet_feb2012_web.pdf. For slightly older,

Working as the waters rose, artists such as the filmmaker Jia Zhangke and the painter Yunfei Ji envisioned the landscape of the Gorges as a repository of traces that bear testimony not only to the glories of the distance past, but to the upheavals of recent times. To capture this material and visual history, both men drew deeply on the aesthetics of 'traditional Chinese' art. Appropriating and modifying formal and material aspects of poetry and painting, Jia and Ji evoked the vulnerability of the geographically embedded trace through artistic forms that are themselves traces of now moribund cultural, political and social systems. Inspired partly by Jia and Ji, this project developed out of a desire to rethink and retell the long history of the Three Gorges from the perspective of the Three Gorges dam and its massive transformation of the region. An investigation of inscription and the trace, which encompass a spectrum of activities and objects from over two millennia, will show what happens when we integrate the material and cultural history of the Gorges into a pre-history of the dam project —not as a teleological narrative that leads inexorably to the dam, but as an account of how people, ideas and practices come together to produce, and destroy, the Chinese landscape.

The First Trace: Yu the Great

At the beginning of this (pre-)history stands the mythical founder of the Xia 夏 Dynasty (21st-17th century BCE), Yu the Great 大禹, who is said to have created the Three Gorges and the Yangzi River by boring through the granite, limestone, schist and shale that make up this mountainous area so that the excess waters of an epic flood could drain into the sea. In most Chinese flood myths, Yu is the son of Gun 鯀, who had made his own attempt to end the devastation caused by the great flood. Working against the natural tendency of water to flow from high to low, Gun tried to stop the flood by building dams and dykes. When these methods failed, Gun was summarily executed. Faced with the same devastating floods, and having inherited Gun's position, Yu solved the problem by reversing his father's work, dredging out the land and guiding the water into rivers that drained into the seas. When writers depict the Gorges, they describe them as products of manual labor, stone conduits "opened up and carved out" (*shuzao* 疏鑿) that still bear the vivid "scars" (*hen* 痕) left by Yu's axe.

The significance of Yu's dredging extends far beyond flood control, however. According to early accounts, Yu's taming of the untamable waters bolstered the centralization of state power, led to the creation of an empire-wide travel network and established a system of tribute and taxation. Yu's deed was at heart a civilizing act, one that definitively inscribed the boundary between watery chaos and the (spatial and moral) order of a society grounded in agriculture. The profundity of Yu's contribution to the creation of Chinese civilization is set out quite clearly in the following passage, from the "Yi and Ji" chapter of the *Shangshu* 尚書:

The [Thearch] Di said, 'Come Yu, you also must have excellent words (to bring before me)! Yu did obeisance, and said, 'Oh! what can I say, O Di, (after Gao-Yao)? I can (only) think of maintaining a daily assiduity.' Gao-Yao said, 'Alas, will you describe it?' Yu replied, 'The inundating waters seemed to assail the heavens, and in their vast extent embraced the hills and overtopped the great mounds, so that the people were bewildered and overwhelmed. I mounted

but more extensive information from the United States government, see this 2008 publication by the U.S. Geological Survey and Department of the Interior: http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2008/1241/pdf/OF08-1241_508.pdf. The Three Gorges Corporation, which is responsible for managing the dam and reservoir, also provides information at their website, <http://www.ctgpc.com/>.

my four conveyances, and all along the hills hewed down the trees, at the same time, along with Yi, showing the multitudes how to get flesh to eat. I (also) opened passages for the streams (throughout the) nine (provinces), and conducted them to the four seas. I deepened (moreover) the channels and canals, and conducted them to the streams, sowing (grain), at the same time, along with Ji, and showing the multitudes how to procure the food of toil, (in addition to) the flesh meat. I urged them (further) to exchange what they had for what they had not, and to dispose of their accumulated stores. (In this way) all the people got grain to eat, and the myriad regions began to come under good rule.' Gao-Yao said, 'Yes, we ought to model ourselves after your excellent words.'⁴

In the course of traveling through the realm to teach the people "how to procure the food of toil" and reminding them to pay their taxes in kind, Yu left behind his most important traces, those formed by his feet. The phrase *yuji* 禹跡—literally, the footsteps of Yu—came to be used to refer both specifically to Yu's flood project and more generally, to the entirety of the Chinese realm, what in the *Shangshu* is called the "nine provinces" or "regions" (*jiuzhou* 九州).⁵

The most basic definition of *ji* in *yuji* is "footprint," an imprint in the earth that combines negative space and physical outline to show that someone has walked in a particular spot. It is a mark of a former presence that can signify only in the absence of its maker. As a mark that generates presence through absence, the footprint is imbued in early Chinese culture with significant generative power—not only was the ancestor of another royal house, the Zhou, supposed to have been conceived when his mother stepped in the massive footprint of the thearch *Di* 帝, but Chinese characters are said to have been modeled on the tracks of birds in the earth (*niaoji zhi wen* 鳥跡之文). According to this latter myth, *ji* is not merely a footprint, but also an accidental inscription, the very first inscription, a pre-linguistic text that inspires the invention of the Chinese writing system. In both cases, the trace of the foot marks the inception of a culture (*wen* 文) that will be venerated and propagated through the ages.⁶

From the perspective of these famous footprints, the *ji* in *yuji* (the footprints in Yu's footprints) represent a potent civilizing force that indelibly inscribes the "nine regions" of China. When combined with the marks of Yu's ax on the walls of the Gorges and the list of contributions that accompanies his story, we are reminded that the *ji* in *yuji* is also cognate with another *ji*, the one meaning "achievement" or "contribution," as in *gongji* 功績. Indeed, in the literature surrounding Yu, we hear again and again of "Yu's merit" or "Yu's achievements," *Yugong* 禹功. For those who traveled along the Yangzi and every other river within the "nine regions," not only could the landscape be read as evidence of Yu's meritorious act and potency, it was his personal mark, a signature left not in the process of writing, but in the process of dredging, boring and then, walking. Indeed, it was the civilizing projects of his post-flood control journey that elevated Yu to the status of Chinese culture hero—to someone whose very footprints were coterminous with the space and culture of what has come to be called China.

⁴ This translation comes from James Legge's *The Chinese Classics* (5 Vols.), Volume III, Part II, *The First Part of the Shoo-King* (London: Trübner & Co., 1865), 78. For the Chinese text, see: *Shangshu Zhengyi* 尚書正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1979), vol.1, *juan* 5, p.141.

⁵ Early maps of the realm were often given the generic title, "map/chart of Yu's footprints" (*Yuji tu* 禹跡圖).

⁶ Borrowing from Sarah Allan's study of water in early Chinese philosophical thought, we might view the footprint or trace as a "root metaphor" of aesthetic thought, a "concrete model that is inherent in the conceptualization of the 'abstract' idea" (13). Following her logic, the footprint is not as example of figurative language used to "illustrate and structure philosophical concepts" related to time and space or presence and absence, but a concrete figure that "provided the *root metaphor*" for the aesthetic conceptualization of time, space and even civilization. See: *The Way of Water and Sprouts of Virtue* (Albany NY: The State University of New York, 1997).

Following in Yu's Footprints

A parade of famous men and women, gods and goddesses would come to follow Yu, retracing his footsteps and reinscribing his cultural legacy. The landmarks and texts associated with these figures joined Yu's traces, building up, layer after layer, an aesthetic landscape every bit as monumental as its physical counterpart. For officials and scholars who had never been to the Three Gorges, these texts—Li Daoyuan's 酈道元 (d. 527) 6th century annotation of the now-lost *Water Classic* (*Shuijing* 水經), the famous *Gaotang Rhapsody* (*Gaotang fu* 高唐賦) attributed to Song Yu 宋玉 (3rd century B.C.E.), Du Fu's 杜甫 (712-770) Kuizhou 夔州 poetry and the travel diaries of Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210) and Fan Chengda 范成大 (1126-1193), among many others works—provided a comprehensive vision of this remote area. Even those who visited the landscape saw through a textual lens, connecting topographical landmarks, cities, temples and ruins with specific poems and poets and historical and mythological figures. This is the place where the marks from Yu's ax were still visible, where the same gibbons seemed always to be wailing, the same clouds scudding and the same poet weeping blood into the void. In short, this is an iconic 'Chinese landscape'—a landscape that from the very beginning has been wrapped up in conceptions of shared aesthetic and political cultures and more recently, in conceptions of China as both a modern nation state and inheritor of a culture distinct from the rest of the world.

This inextricable history, and the inscriptional analogy that structures it, are what guide the four chapters of this dissertation. My first chapter, "Tears in the Void: Traces of the Past in Du Fu's Three Gorges Poetry," centers on the poetry that the Tang poet Du Fu produced during his extended journey down the Yangzi River, especially between 766 and 768 while living in Kuizhou, the city that marks the western entry to the Gorges. Writing shortly after the An Lushan 安祿山 Rebellion (755-763) and during a wave of fierce assaults by proto-Tibetan forces on the capital at Chang'an, Du Fu is forced to confront not only his own displacement, but also the disintegration of the empire as he had known and imagined it. For Du, the wild landscape of the Gorges mirrors the chaos of the north, offering itself as an emblem of personal displacement and national fragmentation. The Gorges also offer Du Fu the only fixed point from which he can spatially and textually map the realm and its history, and in the process, find a way to emplace himself, however temporarily and despite his exilic status.

He achieves this tenuous emplacement through two related modes of poetic expression. The first of these is the long and storied tradition of exilic poetry, particularly those works inspired by and written from 'on high.' An important subset of *denggao* 登高 (climbing high) verse, these poems take their inspiration from the vistas available from a tower, city wall, grave mound, mountain or nearly any other climbable prominence. When the sky is clear, the expansive panorama available from on high opens a line of sight towards (but rarely *of*) home, offering a promise of access and the suggestion of proximity, both of which eventually reveal themselves as cruel chimera. When the sky is overcast, the poet can either face his condition without the temporary comfort of such empty promises, or project his thoughts and dreams onto the surface of the clouds, creating his own equally temporary vistas. For Du Fu, the exilic *denggao* poem never ceases to magnify his spatial displacement, but it also helps to locate him within a lineage of earlier poets of exile. By drawing on familiar imagery and mobilizing chains of allusions and citations, Du Fu places himself squarely within the abstract confines of poetic tradition, which, however immaterial, is still a home of sorts.

Du's second mode of emplacement is through his association with the rich regional culture of the southland. Defined by a cast of colorful mythological and historical figures, iconic (and exotic) literary works and events of monumental historical significance, southern culture looms large in the poetry Du Fu wrote while living in Kuizhou. Though he could never be truly at home in Shu or Chu—his natal home and ancestors were unchangeably northern—he is able to emplace himself there by creating links with sympathetic southerners of the past, men who had similarly failed to achieve their desired ends, men like Qu Yuan, Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang. In Kuizhou he is surrounded at all times by faint and fading traces of these famous figures—the crumbling ruins of an ancient city; the empty shrine of a failed strategist; even wisps of clouds, bouts of rain, ancient texts and local accents. When understood as a state of mind, an attitude rather than an object, the trace becomes almost infinitely flexible, relying only on a certain kind of viewer and thinker to activate it as such. This flexibility is on display in the five "Yearning For the Traces of Antiquity" (*Yonghuai guji* 詠懷古跡) poems, three of which close this chapter. These poems, which center on famous southern figures, stretch the traditional range of the "ancient trace" (*guji* 古跡) to its limit, challenging the reader to uncover the truth hidden in each poem: that traces of the past exist as much on and in Du Fu as on and in the landscape.

By the 11th and 12th centuries, Du Fu had joined (and in some cases surpassed) these figures as part of the lore of Sichuan and the Gorges. Driven by Du's ascendance to the pinnacle of literary fame, writers and travelers scoured the southern landscape looking for his literary and material traces. Often finding only fragments and ruins, they rebuilt the landmarks mentioned in his poetry, turning them into sites of near religious pilgrimage. This transformation of the fragmentary trace into the 'original' whole was part of a larger Song tendency to actively adjudicate, verify and reinscribe the trace through the proper methods of looking, reading and writing. What Ronald Egan writes of Ouyang Xiu's 歐陽修 (1007-1072) ground-breaking scholarship on "old" (*gu* 古) stone inscriptions (most of which dated from the not so distant Tang Dynasty) holds equally true for those who pursued Du Fu's traces: "Ouyang evidently thinks of himself as living on one side of a chasm that separates his era from that of pre-Song times. He is not happy about this, and he feels keenly the desire to reach back in time and connect himself with persons on the other side of this temporal gap."⁷ The personal pursuit of the past through scholarly practice was related in part to the rise of a *guxwen* 古文 sensibility, which promoted a return to a pared down "ancient prose style" that embodied the values of the past.⁸ These intellectual currents found one of their ultimate literary expression in *ji* 記 (and *lu* 錄), a broad generic term that encompasses short travel accounts or essays as well as longer diaries.

In Chapter 2, "From Trace to Record: The Three Gorges in the Song Dynasty," I focus on the role of this type of travel literature in the systematic reinscription of historical traces related to Du Fu during the Southern Song Dynasty. Just as the trace for Du Fu was more a product of mind rather than a fixed ontological category, the Song *ji* (記) transcends generic boundaries, functioning more as an observational and representational stance than a strict set

⁷ *The Problem of Beauty: Aesthetic Thought and Pursuits in Northern Song Dynasty China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2006), 39.

⁸ It was also partly a manifestation of the observational and pseudo-scientific ethic of *gewu* 格物 ("investigation of things") that is so-often associated with Song Neo-Confucianism (see Chapter 2 for more on this). For more on *guxwen* in the Tang-Song transition, see Peter Bol's *This Culture of Ours: Intellectual Transitions in T'ang and Sung China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), especially the Introduction.

of formal rules. This stance is the defining characteristic of Fan Chengda's (1126-1193) *Wuchuan lu* 吳船錄 (*Record of a Wu Boat*; *lu* and *ji* are often used interchangeably for longer diaries), one of the most famous travel diaries of the Chinese tradition, and the core text for this chapter. For Fan Chengda, the trace is a troublesome thing, subject to error, confusion and falsification and thus requiring correction, adjudication and verification. The adjudicative practices (*bian* 辯, *xiang* 詳, *kao* 考) that he brings to bear under these uncertain conditions transform the trace from an often accidental or incidental imprint or index of the past into something that must be actively and textually reinscribed through travel and as part of a contemporary record of action.

Fan was limited to observations made in passing (on his way downstream), but Northern and Southern Song men who were more permanently based in the areas associated with Du Fu were able to go deeper, both in textual exploration and in their alteration of the landscape. Fan Chengda's close friend Lu You, for example, was stationed in Kuizhou beginning in 1170 and wrote an essay on the site of one of Du Fu's former residences, the "Lofty Retreat" at Dongtun (*Dongtun gaozhai* 東屯高齋). In that essay, Lu describes a local man named Li Xiang 李襄, who is supposed to have reconstructed Du's old home as a kind of shrine. In a later essay, another local official, Yu Xie 于熨, explains how he and some fellow officials bought Li's property in order to restore his now decrepit reconstruction, turning it into a public memorial for the Tang poet. When Du Fu's legacy was re-assessed in the Song, he was invested with a set of values that spoke directly to a "larger contemporary pre-occupation with self-definition," especially the Song scholar's identification with the "central Confucian value of the moral, concerned official."⁹ Du Fu's traces were thus not only concrete links to an exemplar of these values, they offered the Song official an opportunity to perform and memorialize those same values through the restoration of his former residences.

Given the potential moral power of the trace, it should come as no surprise that Fan Chengda would seek to produce texts and objects that could definitively solve the problem of the unreliable trace. This chapter ends with a survey of Fan's attempt to reform the standard literary treatment of Mt. Wu (*Wushan* 巫山). Long associated with a famously sensual goddess (*shennü* 神女) described in the rhapsodies of Song Yu, Mt. Wu and its "clouds and rain" (*yunyu* 雲雨) were favorite topics of erotic poetry, bywords for sexual intercourse. Through this tradition, the landscape came to be gendered and sexualized: cloaked in mystery, mercurial, by turns alluring and forbidding, real and dream-like. According to Fan and a number of his Song Dynasty peers, however, the goddess's reputation as a figure of sensuality and her appropriation for use in erotic poetry are both based on careless misreadings of Song's text. Fan repeats this argument in three separate poems and in his diary, citing texts and inscriptions that explain the goddess's essential role in the story of Yu the Great's creation of the Gorges. His most noteworthy attempt to reform the popular understanding of Mt. Wu and the Wu Gorge, however, takes the form of a painting that he commissioned during his journey. Fan tells the readers of his diary that the professional painter he hires faithfully "traces" (*moxie* 摹寫) the mountain *en plein-air*, from a small boat drifting in the Yangzi. His goal is to document the realistic appearance of the swirling clouds and mists so often associated with the erotic depictions of the goddess as local atmospheric phenomena rather than symbols of sexual congress. Fan naively hopes that once the fog of innuendo has cleared, the narrative of the

⁹ Chou, Eva Shan, *Reconsidering Tu Fu: Literary Greatness and Cultural Context* (Cambridge UK: University of Cambridge Press, 1995), 26.

goddess's contribution (*gong* 功) to the formation of the Gorges will finally be acknowledged and spread.

Though Fan's reform agenda was shared by a handful of other writers, it had little impact on the popular imagination, and the standard image of the sensual goddess remains common to this day, appearing in everything from kitschy semi-pornographic digital images to avant-garde cinema. She is not alone. Many of the same historical figures and stylistic features that appear in Du Fu and Song Yu's poetry or in Fan Chengda's travel diary have been taken up by contemporary filmmakers and visual artists in their responses to the Three Gorges dam project.¹⁰ Chapter 3, "Specters of Realism and the Painter's Gaze in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*," explores this type of appropriation in Jia Zhangke's 2005 film *Still Life*. Grounded in an aesthetic of fragmentation and displacement reminiscent of that seen in Du Fu's poetry, *Still Life* is nevertheless finely attuned to the contemporary pressures of global capital and national development. By combining contemporary, modern and pre-modern art forms—European portraiture, Socialist Realism and Chinese landscape painting, as well as Tang poetry, contemporary pop music and digital effects—Jia produces a profoundly hybrid work that reveals precisely how cultural practices work trans-historically to form and transform landscapes.

To fully understand the radical nature of Jia's experiment, however, one must first confront the powerful discourse of realism through which critics in China and around the world often read his work. This chapter begins with a survey of some of the many types of "realisms" that have been ascribed to Jia—from "hometown realism" (*guli xianshi* 故里現實) to "Bazinian-style realism" to "deep/thick description realism" (*shenhoumiao xieshi zhuyi* 深厚描寫實主義)—most of which fall into the trap of conflating realism as a representational or interpretive mode with an objective reality that can theoretically be captured through film. To counter this tendency, I situate Jia's work within the context of a recent reappraisal of the theory of André Bazin, which defines classical filmic realism as a form of representational ethics rather than a medium of a reality. This approach also seeks to reframe the discussion of the influence of the New Documentary Movement (*xin jilu yundong* 新紀錄運動) on Jia's work and to suggest a mode of contemporary "documentation" (*jilu* 紀錄) that records and investigates the travails of the residents of the Gorges and their relationships to its historical traces without "fixing" them as part of a realist framework.

In *Still Life*, which centers on a handful of Three Gorges cities in the midst of being demolished to make way for the Three Gorges dam and reservoir, Jia's representational ethic and mode of recording are bodied forth by formal structures adapted from earlier artistic forms. One of the most striking of these structures is based on different modes of portraiture, including European figural painting of the Romantic period, Cultural Revolution era poster art and Southern Song Dynasty paintings of literati gazing into the depths of landscapes. These historical styles offer Jia the formal building blocks for his own representation of the relationship between figures and landscapes. Drawing on the phenomenology of space developed in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Edward Casey, I describe this relationship as one of emplacement, or what Casey calls "implacement," whereby people and places are held together in a mutual (and mutually constitutive) embrace. Jia's film demonstrates how such an embrace might emerge out of the everyday practices and movements of humans in space. It also

¹⁰ In an expanded version of this project, this contemporary material will be preceded by two new chapters: one on the growth of local history writing during the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) Dynasties, and another on the early twentieth century history of the Gorges as a subject of scientific and nationalistic inquiry.

exposes how doomed that embrace was in the cities of the Three Gorges during a brief period before their inundation.

While pre-modern artistic forms serve as occasional components of Jia's eclectic hybrid style, they are the very warp and weft of the American-based Chinese artist Yun-fei Ji's painting practice, the subject of Chapter 4, "Ink in the Wound: Trauma and The Three Gorges in the Painting of Yun-fei Ji." In his Three Gorges paintings Ji self-consciously manipulates spatial and temporal codes borrowed from classical Chinese painting to depict the dam project as a violent act of physical inscription and traumatic displacement. In this chapter, I detail how Ji casts the landscape of The Three Gorges as a site of traumatic experience: both a raw wound that opens onto past traumas, especially those of the Cultural Revolution, and a frame for the physical and psychic consequences of the dam project.

Ji achieves this through the visualization of what I call "collapsed time," which refers both to the combination of distinct historical styles and events within individual works and to the specific temporality of demolition in modern China. This temporality is perfectly embodied by the character *chai* 拆 (to demolish, to tear down), which is often inscribed in paint on the exterior of buildings in area slated for redevelopment. *Chai* not only performatively proclaims a future demolition on the present surface of a building, it also marks that building as an instant ruin, a fragment of the past in the midst of a landscape of forward progress. Ji's work, which does not explicitly depict the *chai* character, presents this exact type of temporal collapse through the literal collapse of pictorial space: by foreshortening his images and creating compacted vertical compositions that press down on human figures, often crushing them within dystopic scenes of rubble and refuse. Robbed of depth and covered by debris, the landscape is no longer capable of offering a trace-bearing ground.

In a text written at the end of his "Three Gorges Migrants Scroll" (*Sanxia yimin tu* 三峡移民圖), a color woodblock handscroll commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art Library as an "artist's book," Jia describes his work as a kind of alternate trace, a "record" (*jilu* 紀錄) of the displacements caused by the Three Gorges dam and reservoir. Like the Song Dynasty writers discussed in Chapter 2, Ji bases this "record" on events that he "personally witnessed" (*zidu* 自睹) while traveling through the Gorges. Unlike those earlier writers, but like Jia Zhangke, Ji records what he sees not to fix and adjudicate the cultural and social landscape, but to create an image of it in the moments before its destruction. As with all the artists under discussion here, Ji is concerned with how the complex relationships between people and place are created and sustained through everyday activities and cultural practices. Of course, it is easy to look at his work and see only displacement and suffering. This is not a false impression. And yet it overshadows a far more important and productive inquiry, one that views those displaced not as silent victims, but as social agents capable of creating space, place and landscape through their actions and interactions. It is this collective productive capacity (with its millennia of history) alone that has the power to resist the destruction that has been unleashed on the region of the Gorges.

Tears in the Void: Traces of the Past in Du Fu's Three Gorges Poetry

*The Valley Spirit never dies.
It is named the Mysterious Female.
And the Doorway of the Mysterious Female
Is the base from which Heaven and Earth sprang.
It is there within us all the while;
Draw upon it as you will, it never runs dry.*

—Chapter 6, *Daodejing* 道德經¹

Introduction

In 755, the Tang Dynasty 唐代 (618-907) was brought to the brink of collapse by a rebellious general of Sogdian and Turkic descent. An Lushan 安祿山 (703?-757), long a favorite of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗 (r.712-756) and his beloved consort, Yang Guifei 楊貴妃 (719-756), had managed to build a large and powerful base unchecked in the area around modern-day Beijing. When his forces rose against the Tang in 755-6 they tore through the eastern capital of Luoyang 洛陽 and then Chang'an 長安 with shocking ease, forcing Xuanzong and Yang Guifei to flee south to Sichuan. Yang never finished the trip—accused of distracting the emperor from his duties and aiding in her family's unseemly rise to power within the upper echelons of the state bureaucracy, Xuanzong's generals demanded that she be executed at a way station between Chang'an and Chengdu.² Du Fu 杜甫 (712-770), who by the mid- to late-Song Dynasty 宋代 (960-1279) would become one of the most famous of all Chinese poets, remained in the north for a number of years following Xuanzong's flight: between the winter of 756 and the spring of 757 he was held captive in rebel controlled Chang'an; in the summer of 757 he escaped the city and traveled north to serve the new emperor, Suzong 肅宗 (r.756-762), at his temporary court; between 758 and 759 he briefly held office and sought, but failed to find, a secure haven for his small family.³ By the beginning of 760, Du and family had decided to

¹ D.C. Lau trans., *Tao Te Ching* (Ware, UK: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 1997), 13.

² For more on the origins of the rebellion, see E.G. Pulleyblank's *The Background to the Rebellion of An Lu-shan* (London: Oxford, 1955).

³ There is no shortage of secondary material detailing all aspects of Du Fu's life and travels. Basic information about Du Fu's movements during this period can be found in a number of Chinese language chronologies (年譜 *nianpu*), including Li Chunping's 杜甫年譜新編 *Du Fu nian pu xin bian* (Taipei: Xi nan shu ju, 1975) and Liu Mengkang's *Du Fu nian pu* 杜甫年譜 (Hong Kong: Huaxia chu ban she, 1967). For more detailed biographical

follow Emperor Xuanzong south to Chengdu, capital of modern-day Sichuan. There, Du Fu experienced a period of relative stability and bucolic ease that yielded some of his most successful poems in the eremitic mode.⁴ By 765, the family was on the move again, travelling slowly down the great Yangzi River (*Jiang* 江) to points east, but longing always for a clear route back north. For the last decade of his life, however, Du Fu remained a wanderer, victim of a cruel exile to the southern reaches of the foundering empire. He had become, in the parlance of the early anthology of southern poetry, the *Chu'ci* 楚辭, a "soul not yet summoned back" (*wei zhao hun* 未招魂) home.⁵

Midway through his years in the south, in the spring of 766,⁶ the poet and his family sailed east to the commandery of Kuizhou 夔州府 for a stay that would last until the autumn of 768. Located just upriver from Kuimen 夔門, the monumental natural gateway to the famed Three Gorges, Kuizhou was a major transportation and commercial hub for those travelling between the Sichuan basin to the west and the fertile plains and expansive lakes of the ancient state of Chu to the east. Famed for its deadly rapids, changeable weather and exotic lore, the region was closely associated with a number of culture heroes—proto-hydraulic engineer and supposed founder of the Xia 夏 Dynasty (traditionally ca. 2100 B.C.E. – ca. 1600 B.C.E.), Yu the Great 大禹; scion of the royal house of the Han 漢 Dynasty (206 B.C.E. – 220 C.E.), Liu Bei 劉備 (161-223) and his reluctant but loyal strategist, Zhuge Liang 諸葛亮 (181-234); and the *sao* poets Qu Yuan 屈原 (ca. 340-278 B.C.E.) and Song Yu 宋玉 (3rd century B.C.E.), among others.

During his time as a refugee, Du Fu wrote prolifically about these figures and the oppressive experience of living at the gateway to The Three Gorges, integrating both into a poetic map of empire and exile. At the center of this map is Kuizhou, the fixed point from which he looks outward to take measure of both personal and imperial history. Casting his gaze across space and back in time, Du Fu obsessively observes and reconstructs the processes and transformations that constitute his many worlds—social, aesthetic, political, cultural, physical. Through these observations and imaginative reconstructions, he establishes Kuizhou as a nightmarish double of Chang'an, the rationally gridded capital city that had defined Chinese imperial spatial imagination for the previous 1000 years. Physically "joined" (*jie* 接) and "united" (*yi* 一) by sheets of cloud and the shared asterisms of the night sky, these two places loom large in Du Fu's most famous poetry of exile.

In those works Kuizhou and The Three Gorges assume a paradoxical role as both the physical obstacles that block Du Fu's return, and also the conduits by which he projects himself northwards and backwards in time, to his glorious homeland, "the realm of emperors and kings" (*diwang zhou* 帝王州). Simultaneously the source of the poet's impotence and the perspective from which he celebrates Chang'an as locus of political power, the region of the

information see William Hung's classic *Tu Fu, China's Greatest Poet* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952) and Chen Yixin's *Du Fu Ping Zhuan* 杜甫評傳 (Beijing: Beijing daxue chuban she, 2003).

⁴ These include the well known "Divining a Building Site 卜居," "Madman 狂夫," "River Village 江村," and "Concealing My Traces, Three Poems 屏跡三首" among others. See: Du Fu, *Dushi xiangzhu* 杜詩詳注 edited and annotated by Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2004) 729, 743, 746, 882 respectively. For ease of reference and quality of commentary, I have selected Qiu's edition of Du's collected works (this will be referred to hereafter as *DSXZ*) as my primary source for Du's poetry.

⁵ See Du's haunting "Reflected Light 返照," *DSXZ*, 1336

⁶ Du's "Written upon Moving my Residence to Kuizhou 移居夔州作" (*DSXZ*, 1265) describes a bucolic scene of spring awakening.

Gorges fulfills its double role so well because its own mythology is defined by extremes of abjection and power. According to the foundational texts of the Chinese tradition, the Yangzi River and The Three Gorges—and with them all the rivers of China—were dredged by Yu The Great so that the waters of a cataclysmic flood could drain to the sea.⁷ When writers such as Du Fu and the Southern Song poet-statesman Fan Chengda (topic of Chapter Two) describe the walls of the Gorges, they speak of their having been "opened up and carved out" (*shuzao* 疏鑿) and note the still vivid marks of Yu's axe (*fuzao zhi hen* 斧鑿之痕). "Yu's act of merit" (*Yugong* 禹功) is credited not only with channeling the floods to dry the land, however, but also creating the conditions necessary for the establishment of agriculture, taxation and centralized government. It is within the larger context of Yu's contribution to the establishment of Chinese civilization that we must understand the Three Gorges' status as his physical "trace" (*ji* 跡/迹/蹟).

The most basic definition of *ji* is "footprint," an imprint in the earth that combines negative space and physical outline to show that someone has walked in a particular spot. It is a mark of presence that signifies first and foremost through absence. The topographical features that we identify as gorges and valleys are almost identical to the *ji* in structure: though outlined by solid walls of stone, gorges and valleys are defined by absence, by the space between walls. A gorge exists in any given space because there is, in fact, 'nothing' there. And yet, as the epigraph from the *Daodejing* that opens this chapter reminds us, the emptiness of the valley (*gu* 谷), like that of the *ji*, is inexhaustibly fecund. Perhaps it should come as no surprise, then, that the *Shijing's* 詩經 account of the birth myth of Hou Ji 后稷, ancestor of the Zhou royal house, opens with a footprint:

She who in the beginning gave birth to the people,
This was Jiang Yuan.
How did she give birth to the people?
Well she sacrificed and prayed
That she might no longer be childless.
She trod on the big toe of God's footprint.
Was accepted and got what she desired.
Then in reverence, then in awe
She gave birth, she nurtured;
And this was Hou Ji.⁸

⁷ The earliest of these texts are the *Shangshu* 尚書 and the *Shijing* 詩經. The latter contains at least six references to Yu, in poems #201 (信南山), #244 (文王有聲), #261 (韓奕), #300 (閟宮), #304 (長發), #305 (殷武). The former is perhaps the most important early source for Chinese flood myths related to Yu and his father Gun. Though Yu appears in a number of early chapters, the "Tribute of Yu" (*Yu gong* 禹貢) chapter contains the most thorough account of Yu's success in ending the flood, dividing the realm and then traveling along each major waterway in order to set up a tribute system for different regions based on the quality of their soil and local products. There are also lengthy accounts of Yu's deeds in the *Guoyu* 國語 and Mencius 孟子. Mark Edward Lewis's *The Flood Myths of Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006) is a remarkably rich source of information on both these early texts and the copious secondary literature in Chinese, English and other European Languages. See especially 163, n.28 and 164, n.30.

⁸ *Shijing* 245 (*Shengmin* 生民). For the original see *Maoshi zhengyi* 毛詩正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1979), vol.1, *juan* 17, p.528. This translation comes from *The Book of Songs*, trans. Arthur Waley (New York: Grove Press, 1996), 244. All other translations are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

Although in the language of the *Shijing*, God's (*Di* 帝) "footprint" is *wu* 武 and not *ji*, this story suggests the religious and cultural significance of the trace as an index of godly presence. As early as the *Book of Documents* and the *Zuo Commentary*, the phrase "Yu's footprints" (*Yuji* 禹跡) has a similarly generative status: it is used to refer to the entirety of the geographical entity associated with Chinese cultural and political influence, which is constituted by the post-diluvian survey of the realm that Yu undertakes. This conception of topography as index of physical presence and individual power exerted a profound, but also ambivalent, influence on Du Fu. Not only were the Gorges a trace of Yu, they were an example of his "meritorious act" (a secondary definition of *ji*) and potency, a quality that contrasted sharply with Du Fu's own infirmity.

Layered atop Yu's heroic footprints in the south were the fainter traces of a type of historical figure that offered Du Fu a more immediately relatable example. Like Du Fu, Qu Yuan, Song Yu, Liu Bei, Zhuge Liang, Wang Can 王粲 (177-217) and Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581) were victims of geography, exiled from their homelands or blocked from achieving their political and territorial ambitions. Simultaneously heroic and abject, morally powerful but politically thwarted, these men serve as models and historical avatars in Du Fu's own poetry of exile. The *ji* that they left throughout the landscape were also fundamentally different from Yu the Great's footprints. If the latter encompass the full semantic range of the *ji*—not just traces, but also monuments to great "achievements"—the former (scattered structures, place names) signify more narrowly through their ephemerality, as figures of decay and change, of the unstoppable passage from presence to oblivion to which all things man-made eventually succumb.

Rather than traipsing reverently in the footprints of the peripatetic gods, Du Fu takes his measure from this other type of trace. As a result, he generates a body of work that is both haunted by the inevitability of decay and death and also tightly woven into a textual and spatial tradition of exile and political failure. Though he can never fully escape his predicament, Du Fu uses the trace to overcome his isolation temporarily, to bridge the gap between exemplary historical exiles and himself and between the site of his exile and his distant home. This productive act of bridging is made possible by the imperfect mediation of the poet's memory and vision as symbolized in the act of "turning back" (*huishou* 回首/*huibaitou* 回白頭) and gazing intently (*wang* 望) on the natural world.

When Du gazes out into the landscape to observe the physical shapes and textures of the Gorges, especially where they are supposed to have been marked by ancient men and women, lost worlds of poetic suffering, imperial glory and barbarian treachery flicker into sight. These fleeting images of the past transform the forbidding southern landscape into a vehicle that spirits Du Fu, if only temporarily and in his mind's eye, to his native gardens in the north, to the known and imagined limits of the Tang world and into a rich realm of textual experience. Du Fu saw the landscape of the Gorges not simply as a set of landmarks, but as a site comprised of traces—of text, memory, history—in which he could wander at will. Over time, his biography and his beloved Kuizhou oeuvre came to constitute one of the most indelible layers of this landscape, a trace of his presence that resonated powerfully with latter-day travelers. As we will see in the chapters that follow, The Three Gorges—both topographical reality and monumental mnemonic device—continue to be an evocative space constitutively suited to the obsessive explorations of vision, memory, time and space that define Du Fu's poetry.

I. "Though the merit of clearing and boring is indeed glorious..."

Long before Du Fu sailed down the Yangzi it had become *de rigueur* for the historically minded traveler to eulogize the landmarks of the region—Baiyan Mountain 白鹽山,⁹ Baidi City 白帝城,¹⁰ Wu Mountain 巫山,¹¹ the Yanyu islet 灩澦堆 and, of course, The Three Gorges—as proof of Yu's heroic and civilizing engineering project. Not surprisingly, just as those who had visited Sichuan before him, Du Fu incorporates many such references to Yu into his poetry. His first poem on Yu (traditionally dated to 765), however, was inspired by a visit to the latter's shrine in Zhongzhou 忠州, well upriver from these Kuizhou landmarks:

禹廟

禹廟空山裏，
秋風落日斜。
荒庭垂橘柚，
古屋畫龍蛇。
雲氣噓青壁，¹⁴
江聲走白沙。
早知乘四載，
疏鑿控三巴。

Yu's Shrine¹²

Yu's Shrine stands amidst empty mountains,
Where setting sun slants on autumn wind.
In ruined courtyards hang tangerine and pomelo,
Within the ancient hall—painted dragons and snakes.¹³
Clouds and mists are exhaled from verdant cliffs,
River sounds race across white sands.
Long I've known that by riding the four conveyances,¹⁵
And dredging and leveling, he mastered The Three Ba.¹⁶

⁹ The Baiyan Mountain forms the southern half of the so-called Kui Gate (*Kuimen* 夔門). The northern half is called Chijia Mountain (*Chi jia shan* 赤甲山). Liu Yuxi, who also spent time in Kuizhou as an exile covers much of the same territory as Du Fu, including in his "Bamboo Branch Lyrics 竹枝詞九首." See *Liu Yuxi shiji biannian jianzhu* 劉禹錫詩集編年箋注, ed. and ann. by Jiang Weisong 蔣維崧 et al. (Jinan: Shandong da xue chu ban she, 1997), 274.

¹⁰ Both Chen Zi'ang (d.702) and Li Bai (701-762) have famous poems that touch on Baidi City, including Chen's "Yearning for Antiquity at Baidi City 白帝城懷古" (*Chen Zi'ang ji* 陳子昂集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1960), 17) and Li's "Departing Early from Baidi City 早發白帝城" (*Li Taibai quanji* 李太白全集, ed. Wang Qi 王琦 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2006), 1022).

¹¹ Mt. Wu, as the site of a famous assignation between King Xiang of Chu 楚襄王 (3rd Century B.C.E.) was the subject of a great number of poems, many of which are categorized as Music Bureau (*yuefu* 樂府) ballads and collected in Guo Maoqian's 郭茂倩 (1041-1099) great compendia, *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1979), 238-244.

¹² *DSXZ*, 1225.

¹³ This region is famous for its citrus fruit, a local specialty that was presented to Yu as its special form of tribute. In addition to carving out the waterways of China, Yu is also credited with having driven away snakes and serpents from the land.

¹⁴ There is variant for this line that reads "*sheng xubi* 生虛壁" ("issues from empty cliffs") for the *DSXZ*'s "*xu qingbi* 噓青壁."

¹⁵ In the course of Yu's flood control project and subsequent journey he is said to have used four different conveyances (*sizai* 四載) depending on the terrain. When traveling on water he used a boat (*zhou* 舟); when traveling overland he used a chariot (*che* 車); when traversing muddy or swampy areas he used a sledge (*chun* 輶); when crossing mountainous terrain he relied on a sedan chair (*lei* 轎).

¹⁶ I have rendered *kong* 控, as "to pierce," in the sense of "run through" or "link up." The Early Tang poet Lu Zhaolin 盧照鄰 uses *kong* in a similar way in his "Reflections on Chang'an of Old 長安古意." This is in place of the more obvious "to master," which is how the *Hanyu da cidian* 漢語大辭典 glosses Du Fu's line, though I believe that both meanings are at play here. The Three Bas (*san Ba* 三巴) refers to a late Han Dynasty administrative re-

Yu's shrine is depicted here as a lonely building, hidden away within the sparsely populated mountains, surrounded by trees heavy with unpicked fruit and cloaked in mysterious mists. In the opening couplet Du Fu refers to the temple's mountain setting as "empty" (*kong* 空), and describes the play of autumn wind and setting sunlight; in the third couplet, he describes the landscape as filled with "clouds and mists" and "river sounds." By framing the description of the temple itself in the second couplet with these most "empty" or immaterial of phenomena—wind, light, air and sound—Du Fu draws on the contrastive capacity of the regulated octave (*lüshi* 律詩) to amplify the historical and ritual fullness that surrounds Yu and his legacy. For example, though "ruined" (*huang* 荒), the shrine's courtyard is full of tangerine and pomelo, the local specialties that were presented as tribute to Yu following his quelling of the flood and subsequent survey of the realm. The ripe fruit are offered now in a religious context that draws meaning from the narrative accounts of Yu's act. In the fourth line, the walls of the shrine structure, unlike the empty cliff "walls" (*bi* 壁), are covered with images of dragons and snakes, pestilential creatures that were said to have invaded the central states along with the waters of the flood. Yu is heralded as much for ending the floods as he is for driving away these creatures and thereby reestablishing the separation and distinction between man and beast.¹⁷ Neither these images painted within the temple nor the fruit trees planted outside it are merely ornamental. Within the larger ritual context of the shrine, a space dedicated to maintaining a connection to the dead, they embody Yu and help to perpetuate his presence. This play of presence and absence is typical of Du Fu's temple poems, many of which pair the cultural fullness (*shi* 實) of the dead and the ritual promise of continued presence with the vacancy (*xu* 虛) of the temple setting.¹⁸

What finally gives greatest substance to this setting are Yu's deeds, which have long been recognized (*zaozhi* 早知): by the locals who built his shrine, by the textual record, and most importantly, by Du Fu. The written sources are clearly indicated by Du's use of the archaic terms "four conveyances" (*sizai* 四載) and "dredging and boring" (*shuzao* 疏鑿), which had by the Tang become intimately associated with the mythology surrounding Yu. Of course, Du Fu uses the verb "to know" (*zhi* 知) in the penultimate line without indicating a clear subject, ultimately rendering the closing couplet ambiguous. Are we to assume that Du Fu came to this place with full knowledge of Yu (as I have translated above), or, should we take the closing as a statement of Yu's magical knowhow, which allowed him to open up a path through the Three Ba in the direction that Du Fu so wished to travel? This last possibility sets up a

organization of the ancient land of Ba, which included Kuizhou and the Gorges. This is one of a number of ancient designations that Du Fu uses to refer to this area. For more information and an early source on the history of this region see Chang Ju's 常璩 (ca. 291-361) *Huayang guozhi* 華陽國志, edited by Ren Naiqiang 任乃強 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1987).

¹⁷ For more on the importance of this portion of the myth, see Lewis, *The Flood Myths of Early China*, 53. For one of the most famous versions of this aspect of the myth see *Mengzi Zhengyi* 3B "Teng Wen Gong xia," in *Shisan jing zhushu*, 263-72.

¹⁸ See, for example, "Zhuge's Shrine 諸葛廟" (*DSXZ* 1674) and the fourth of the "Yearning for the Traces of Antiquity 詠懷古跡" series (*DSXZ* 1505), translated below. Literally "full" and "empty," *shi* 實 and *xu* 虛 are used extensively in literary criticism to distinguish semantically significant words from grammatical function words and to differentiate language that describes a concrete (*shi*) scene from language that imbues that scene with an abstract (*xu*) mood or effect. For more, see Stephen Owen's definition of *shi* in his *Readings in Chinese Literary Thought* (Cambridge: Council on East Asian, Harvard U., 1992), 590. Paula Varsano also has a very thoughtful summary of approaches to the *xu/shi* pair, especially their application to the so-called Li-Du debate. See *Tracking the Banished Immortal* (2003), 4-12 and throughout.

poignant contrast between the poet as proud but impotent bearer of knowledge and Yu the Great as one who possesses and knows how to wield power.

Du Fu reads precisely this type of power into the landscape in a slightly later poem, traditionally dated to his arrival in Kuizhou:

瞿唐兩岸

三峽傳何處，
雙崖壯此門。
入天猶石色，
穿水忽雲根。

獠獍鬚髯古，
蛟龍窟宅尊。
羲和冬馭近，
愁畏日車翻。

The Two Cliffs of Qutang¹⁹

Whence begin The Three Gorges?
Here, where paired cliffs fortify this gate.
Entering far into the sky—all one sees, the color of stone,
Piercing the river—suddenly they become the roots of
clouds.

Gibbons' whiskers and beards grow hoary,
Snake and dragon lairs are ever venerable.
As Xihe's winter course draws near,
She grows mournful, afraid that her sun chariot will
topple.

Du Fu begins "The Two Cliffs" with a striking but seemingly rhetorical question: "where do The Three Gorges come from?" This abrupt question mimics the shocking verticality of Kuimen and the frenetic imagery of the poem's second couplet, disappointing the reader's expectation for a descriptive opening that grounds them in the landscape. Just as quickly, in the second line, he provides his own answer: 'they start with the Qutang Gorge, which begins here, at this so-called gate.' Neither the question nor the answer are as straightforward as all that, however. To begin with, Du Fu's use of the verb "to pass down" or "to transmit" (*chuan* 傳) seems out of place in this context. Transmission is a human action associated with scholarly learning, moral precepts, modes of governance and esoteric practices. One transmits a text or a teaching, but not the stone and water of a landscape. Du Fu is playing with his reader by invoking old textual debates about where The Three Gorges actually start (or which formations should be counted as the true Three Gorges).²⁰ That traditions of classifying and describing this particular landscape could have clashed must have seemed absurd to Du Fu as he confronted the massive grandeur of Kuimen. These gate-like cliffs loom just east of Kuizhou, channeling the surging waters of the Yangzi into the unmistakably gorge-like confines of the Qutang Gorge 瞿唐峽 and on through two more gorges before entering the ancient lands of Jing 荆 and Chu 楚.

The question that Du poses, however, is not merely spatial or textual. He is also obliquely alluding to the creation and "transmission" of the Gorges by Yu the Great. This mythic association is reinforced by the final couplet's hyperbolic reference to another figure of myth, Xihe, who, charged with pulling the sun across its daily path, is drawn south by the changing seasons towards the Gorges, where the forbidding landscape engenders fears of

¹⁹ DSXZ, 1557. Qiu dates this poem to the winter of Du's first year in Kuizhou, 766, or the first year of the Dali 大曆一年 reign period.

²⁰ Though Du Fu doesn't take up this textual inside joke in the remainder of the poem, his use of *chuan* 傳 encourages such a reading. Qiu Zhao'ao suggests an interpretation along these lines (DSXZ, 1557), which David McCraw develops further in his *Du Fu's Lament from the South* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1992), 52.

foundering. Like Xihe and her sun chariot, Yu and his Gorges are more than figures of myth, they are part of a system that venerates deeds (*gong* 功), service and the spatial and temporal order necessary for the maintenance of centralized rule. If we read this poem alongside "Yu's Shrine," we begin to see The Three Gorges as not simply a set of cliffs that surge upwards into the stony sky or downwards into the river's depths to root the clouds, but as the physical traces of a civic deed, a monument and a resounding material call to remember a distant time, person and event. Yet, for all their solid stability and positive symbolism, the Gorges appear in this poem as a destabilizing force that threatens to throw Xihe and the sun off course. As the flip side of Yu's constructive power, this destructive force shadows the Gorges and suggests the futility of any attempt to enforce order on a chaotic world.²¹

Though Yu, who is one of the most important early organizational heroes (alongside such figures as Fu Xi and Nü Gua) never appears explicitly in the "The Two Cliffs," his presence is palpable in the question that opens that poem. "At Qutang Yearning for Antiquity 瞿唐懷古," which is paired with "The Two Cliffs" in many editions of Du Fu's works, reads as almost a direct response to this question, focusing on Yu and his textually lauded act of landscape formation²²:

瞿唐懷古

西南萬壑注，
勁敵兩崖開。
地與山根裂，
江從月窟來。
削成當白帝，
空曲隱陽臺。
疏鑿功雖美，
陶鈞力大哉。

At Qutang Yearning for Antiquity²³

In the southwest a myriad streams surge,
Potent enemies—these two cliffs open.
When the earth from its mountain roots was rent,
The river from the moon cave came.
Pared to completion it faces Baidi,
An empty bend hides the Yang Terrace.
Though the merit of clearing and boring is indeed
glorious,
The power of the potter's wheel is greater yet!

This octave, though seemingly a reflection on Yu's act, finally begins to answer Du's open question by subordinating Yu's primordial dredging to the violent forces of nature, which he sums up using the conventional image of the "the potter's wheel" (*taojun* 陶鈞). Though the "merit" (*gong* 功) of Yu's act is "glorious" (*mei* 美), it is the focused power of flowing water that separates these "two cliffs," forming the great chasm of Qutang and its gate, Kuimen. In the

²¹ From the very oldest accounts, the early Chinese conceived of their civilization as emerging from a state of primordial chaos and undifferentiation. A cosmogonic narrative of the progressive ordering and organization of the world, as exemplified by the mythology of Yu, coexisted with a cultural memory of original chaos, which "survived as a permanent background condition to human existence." See: Mark Edward Lewis, *The Construction of Space in Early China* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 2-3.

²² These poems come back to back in both *DSXZ* and Yang Lun's 楊倫 *Dushi jing quan* 杜詩鏡銓 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chuban she, 1980). Qiu somewhat enigmatically explains their order this way: "The previous poem must be from when he first saw [Qutang], thus he writes: 'Whence begin the Three Gorges?' This poem must be from when he wrote about them a second time, thus he titles it 'At Qutang Yearning for Antiquity' 前首應是初見時，故云：'三峽傳何處。' 此首應是再詠者，故題云：瞿唐懷古。" Qiu seems to be suggesting that the question in the first poem indicates an initial, curious encounter, while the second represents a more thorough and well-informed treatment of Qutang, its origins and its landmarks. See *DSXZ* 1558.

²³ *DSXZ*, 1558.

first four lines, Du layers images in a dramatic sequence that evokes geological processes: water surges (*zhu* 注) from myriad sources, splitting (*lie* 裂) the earth and creating a channel that allows the river (*Jiang* 江) to arrive from the moon cave (*yueku* 月窟), a term for the residence of the moon and a common poetic image for distant lands. Though the verbs in the first and third lines (*zhu* 注 and *lie* 裂) suggest violent and impersonal forces, they are balanced in the second and fourth with verbs (*kai* 開 and *lai* 來) that evoke the human associations of the doorway (*men* 門) that Kuimen 夔門 forms.

In the fifth line, this strangely welcoming but primal process reaches completion with a precise verb, *xue* 削 (to pare, or cut), that suggests an intentional human act rather than the impersonal force of gushing (*zhu* 注) water and splitting (*lie* 裂) earth. "Pared" to perfection, the entry to Qutang is now civilized by the introduction of two familiar built structures: the first is Baidi 白帝城, a fortified city built during the Han interregnum by the rebellious Gongsun Shu 公孫述 (d. 36), who immodestly titled himself (and his base) Baidi 白帝, or White Emperor, after the mythological Lord of the West (and of the autumn season).²⁴ Located on a hill east of Kuizhou, Baidi is one of the most recognizable landmarks of the region and appears frequently in Tang poetry, including Li Bai's famous "Departing Early from Baidi 早發白帝城." The other structure is the "Yang" (sunny/sun) Terrace (*yangtai* 陽臺). Discreetly hidden in a bend of the river, this is the site of the mythical romantic encounter between an ancient King of Chu and the dangerously sensual goddess of Mt. Wu (see Section III for more on this), a supernatural congress immortalized in the famous "Gaotang Rhapsody 高堂賦" attributed to Song Yu.

Just as the manmade fortifications of Baidi are placed opposite the natural gate of Kuimen, the manmade Yang Terrace rests partially hidden in one of the great river's meanders. Against the ordering impulse embodied by these human structures Du pits the topographical products of gradual but irresistible natural forces. The title of the poem conveys something of this tension. The phrase *huaigu* 懷古 (literally "to yearn for the ancient/antiquity") suggests the contemplation of either historical events, personages or traces, and while the structures in the third couplet fall clearly into this last category, the Gorges themselves, represented here by Qutang, can also be considered ancient traces (*guji*). As if responding to a demand to resolve the ambivalence that underlies this poem's juxtaposition of the human (and I include Yu in this category here, despite his supra-human qualities and appearance) and the natural—the trace and the topography—Du ends with both a concession and an exclamation: Though Yu's act has been called glorious (and though these manmade structures that adorn the landscape serve as traces of other renowned historical figures) it is the power of nature that truly impresses. Du Fu is not simply reviewing these two options and coming out on the side of nature, he is using a textual allusion to oppose the forces of nature, and perhaps by extension, fate, against the human desire to will order on a world that inches always towards entropy.²⁵ In doing so, he implies that the traditional narrative of transmission—though "glorious"—pales in comparison to the might of nature and its dominion over man.

²⁴ For a convenient and thorough summary of the layout of the structures atop Baidi, both during Du Fu's lifetime and in the modern era, see: Chen, *Du Fu ping zhuan*, 879.

²⁵ Of course, that he does this by using the figure of the potter's wheel adds an ironic air to the line. Depending as it does on the proper balance of centripetal and centrifugal forces, the potter's wheel is a tool that, improperly used, can lead to a messy lump of clay rather than an elegant vase. Entropy is a constant specter in both the affairs of nature and man.

Du does this by echoing (but changing the subject of) a passage from the Zuozhuan 左傳, Duke Zhao, year one (昭公, 元年):

天王使劉定公勞趙孟於潁，館於雒汭，劉子曰，美哉禹功，明德遠矣。微禹，吾其魚乎，吾與子弁冕端委，以治民臨諸侯，禹之力也。²⁶

The king by Heaven's grace sent duke Ding of Liu to the Ying to compliment Zhaomeng on the accomplishment of the toils of his journey; and [he accompanied him] to his lodging-house near a bend of the Luo. "How admirable," said the viscount of Liu, "was the merit of Yu! His intelligent virtue reached far. But for Yu, we should have been fishes. That you and I manage the business of the princes in our caps and robes is all owing to Yu."²⁷

Du Fu borrows the language of the Duke of Zhao's exclamation, "How admirable was the merit of Yu 美哉禹功," but silences the tone of awe conveyed by the exclamatory particle *zai* 哉, replacing it with the conditional *sui* 雖 (although) and transposing it to the final line, where it elevates a new and even greater power:

疏鑿功雖美，	Though the merit of clearing and boring is indeed
	glorious,
陶鈞力大哉。	The power of the potter's wheel is greater yet!

According to the Duke of Zhao, it is not simply the draining of the empire that should be attributed to "Yu's power" (禹之力), but also the establishment and maintenance of its system of rule and order, which is carried out by those who wear "caps and robes."²⁸ For the exiled Du Fu, confronted with his own impressive riverscape, the correlation between Yu's heroic hydraulic engineering and the smooth functioning of the "business of the princes" must have seemed a bitter irony and an empty myth. Not only had he repeatedly failed in his desire to don cap and robe and serve the Tang royal house, and in the process establish his name through deeds, he had also been forced from his ancestral lands to this dreary riverine hinterland by a catastrophic breakdown of political, spatial and cultural order. No longer a trace of the mythical act on which the imperial order was based, the Gorges become an emblem of both Du Fu's personal failures and of the fragmentation of that imperial order. To add insult to injury, the Zuozhuan passage on which Du Fu draws describes Duke Ding of Liu's journey to a bend in the Luo 雒 River, which was located in the heart of Du Fu's ancestral homeland, in the Tang Dynasty county of Gong 鞏縣, just east of the eastern capital of Luoyang. This mapping of the familiar, imperial spaces of the north onto the exotic and portentous landscape of the south is one of the defining characteristics of Du Fu's Kuizhou poetry.

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²⁶ *Chunqiu zuozhuan zhengyi* 春秋左傳正義, in *Shisan jing zhushu*, vol.2, juan 41.

²⁷ This is Legge's translation. See *The Chinese Classics, Volume 5, The Ch'un Ts'ew with the Tso Chuen*, part 2, 578.

²⁸ We must be careful not to underestimate the symbolic link between water control and centralized administrative control. In reference to the *Shangshu* account of Yu's deed, Mark Edward Lewis writes that "the work of Yu converted the flooded world into a distinctively human space. It is crucial to note, moreover that his work in establishing this space consisted entirely in performing the administrative tasks that defined the states of early China. Particularly important in this regard are discussions of the proper methods of water control, a question that reflects not only the technology but the moral philosophy of the period." See *The Flood Myths of Early China*, 32-33.

Du Fu was a man rich in words but poor in the kinds of deeds recorded in China's great histories. Lacking proof beyond his poems of his boundless ambition and loyalty, he became, in the words of Stephen Owen, an "autobiographer of 'being' rather than 'deeds'."²⁹ This "being" is constituted through roles and avatars that fragment, bifurcate and ultimately obscure a self that can never really be known in its full complexity.³⁰ For Du Fu during his time in the south, these roles must be understood within a larger context—the poet's attempt to refigure space and time in response to his experience of displacement and exile. From this perspective, Du's displacement of Yu in "At Qutang" is in fact a displacement of one historical spatial/political model (the one outlined in the classics) in favor of a subjective act of mapping that allows Du to make sense of his immediate visual and aural experience of the Gorges by filtering it through the lenses of personal experience, memory and textual learning.

II. What man is this? – Textual Memory and Exilic Experience

Of the many roles that Du Fu had at his disposal, perhaps the most richly textured and textual is that of the exile. A state of dispossession and displacement, exile not only separates the poet from his ancestral or adopted home, it also alienates him from the normal spaces in which conceptions of the empire and the individual's place in it are most powerfully sustained.³¹ Though Du Fu could choose from a vast array of historical exiles, he more often than not identified with men and women who had some connection to the south. In his most densely intertextual works, he marshals these southern figures to create what I conceive of as a textual chain of citation and personal response, a trans-historical dialogue among exiles. This chain serves as both a frame of reference and a linguistic reservoir that Du Fu uses to represent his experience and understanding of the landscape of The Three Gorges.

"The Tallest Tower of Baidi Fortress 白帝城最高樓,"³² traditionally dated to the beginning of the Kuizhou period, contains just such a chain, while also providing a rich example of Du's adaptation of the exilic mode:

²⁹ Stephen Owen, "The Self's Perfect Mirror: Poetry as Autobiography," in Shuen-fu Lin and Owen, eds., *The Vitality of the Lyric Voice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986), 92.

³⁰ Of course such roles are not always the product of the poet's self-fashioning. Du Fu's most famous role is that of the untiring patriot, a thwarted civil servant and "poet historian" who, though loyal to his sovereign, did not hesitate to criticize his policies, even after suffering through the cataclysm of the An Lushan Rebellion. As Charles Hartman's careful study of the textual history of Song Dynasty commentaries to Du Fu's collected works shows, this picture developed between the mid-11th and 12th centuries in response to specific political and historical conditions and at the hands of influential commentators and critics. See Hartman, "The Tang Poet Du Fu and the Song Dynasty Literati," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews (CLEAR)*, 30 (Dec., 2008), 43-74.

³¹ Du Fu was, of course, more a refugee than an exile, but the literary tradition makes almost no distinction between these two types of displacement. In contrast, reclusion, or eremitism, has always been viewed as a powerfully ethical, and distinctly voluntary retreat from the vagaries of the political and social realms. Though Du frequently wrote poems in the eremitic mode during his Chengdu years, poems in this style are less common (and less famous) in his Kuizhou work. Of course, many exiles slipped quite naturally into an eremitic role, reveling (or at least claiming to revel) in the peace and quiet afforded by their of often wild postings. For a short study of questions surrounding landscape representation in Tang poetry of exile, see Madeline K. Spring's article on Liu Zongyuan and Han Yu, "T'ang Landscapes of Exile," in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 117/2, (Apr.-Jun., 1997), 312-323.

³² *DSXZ*, 1276.

白帝城最高樓

The Tallest Tower of Baidi Fortress

城尖徑仄旌旆愁， The fortress rises sharp, its path slanting—flags and pennants
lend a mournful air.
獨立縹緲之飛樓。 Without peer stands this half-hid, soaring tower.
峽坼雲霾龍虎臥， By Gorges rent and clouds lingering, where dragons and tigers
repine,
江清日抱龜鼉遊。 Above clearing river, sun-embraced, where turtles and alligators
sport.
扶桑西枝對斷石， The Fusang tree's western branches face sheered stone,
弱水東影隨長流。 Ruoshui's eastern shadows follow the long river's flow.
杖藜歎世者誰子， What man is this, who clutching a cane rues the age,
泣血迸空回白頭。 And weeping blood, spatters the void, turning back his greying
head?

Du Fu manipulates the reader's sense of spatial orientation and perspective here, unsettling his or her tendency to see through the poet's eyes and replacing it with sudden and disorienting shifts of perspective. The first line of the first couplet opens straightforwardly with a description of Baidi's extreme position and doleful appearance and is followed by a description of the tower from below, where it soars half hidden midst the clouds. The second and third couplets seem to bring the poet to the top of the tower—though there is no description of a climb—where he first describes the immediate surroundings (lines three and four) and then orients the structure within a much larger spatial context (lines five and six). In the final couplet, Du Fu draws back from the tower to ask his readers about the sobbing, aged man crying into the void. Though his question—"what man is this?" (*sheizi* 誰子)—is archaic in language and rhetorical in tone, most readers working with the autobiographical conventions of the genre in mind would merely assume that Du Fu is speaking of, and thus looking at, himself.³³

But can we take such a question at face value? How much, for that matter, should we assume about the six lines that precede it? What type of poem are we really dealing with? Though not explicitly a poem about political exile, the mournful tone and textual allusions of the closing couplet seem to put it squarely in that lineage. On a superficially generic level, however, this poem owes more to the "climbing high," or *denggao* 登高 theme. In the *denggao* tradition, the poet, sometimes accompanied by like-minded companions, climbs a tower, hill, wall or mountain to look out over a vast natural panorama or cityscape, his outward gaze (which is often blocked) inevitably inspiring some manner of personal, philosophical or religious insight.³⁴ There was from an early period, a sense in which the *denggao* poem was the inevitable outcome of climbing high. As Confucius was supposed to have said: "When the gentleman climbs a height he will certainly recite/compose [a poem] 君子登高必賦."³⁵ For

³³ Chen Yixin's playful paraphrase of (and response to) this line suggests just how natural the autobiographical assumption is: "Who is he? I won't say it, since everybody knows [already]." See Chen, *Du Fu ping zhuan*, 886.

³⁴ In his study of Tang poetry on climbing high, Wang Longsheng 王隆升 provides a convenient, if brief, survey of the early origins of the poetic theme. See: *Tang dai denglin shi yanjiu* (Taipei: Wenjin chubanshe, 1998) 11-37.

³⁵ *Han shi wai zhuan* 韓詩外傳, *juan* 7.

exiled literati, climbing high was a popular and clichéd poetic theme that inspired thoughts of a distant home, a failed career and the trials of life in an exotic new locale.³⁶

Du Fu had long experimented with *denggao* poetry. One of his most famous pre-rebellion examples is the "Ascending the Tower at Ci'en Temple with Companions 同諸公登慈恩寺塔." Conventionally dated to a few years before the An Lushan Rebellion, "Ascending the Tower" fully assimilates the conventions of the *denggao* theme but brashly experiments with its traditional rhetoric of enlightenment and obstructed vision.³⁷ This poem is important here because it foreshadows the directional dynamism and antipodal relationships that structure "From the Tallest Tower." Following the opening ascent and observation of the heavens, "Ascending the Tower" describes a shocking transformation in the world below:

七星在北戶，	The seven stars of the dipper hang in the northern portal,
河漢聲西流。	The sounds of the Milky Way westward flow.
羲和鞭白日，	Xi He whips on the bright sun, ³⁸
少昊行清秋。	And Shao Hao brings forth limpid autumn. ³⁹
秦山忽破碎，	The Qin mountains suddenly shatter,
涇渭不可求。	The rivers Jing and Wei cannot be sought. ⁴⁰
俯視但一氣，	Looking down I see only a single expanse of <i>qi</i> ,
焉能辨皇州。	How could I make out the royal precincts?
回首叫虞舜，	Turning back, I call to Shun of Yu—
蒼梧雲正愁。	Yet the clouds at Cangwu are so very mournful.

Once atop the tower, Du Fu looks up to orient himself spatially and temporally by way of celestial phenomena and the godly agents that oversee the passage of time. When he returns his gaze to the world of man below, he discovers "a single expanse of *qi*," that while blocking the capital, seems contiguous with the mournful clouds that hang over Cangwu, the mythical burial place of the sage king Shun in the far south of the Chu region. The disconnect between the ideals of the past (embodied by Cangwu) and the realities of the present (embodied by the

³⁶ The exiled or failed official might also have found the *denggao* theme particularly affirming in light of the Mao commentary's famous statement: "one who climbs high and is able to recite/compose [poetry] can be used as a minister 升高能賦...可以為大夫." See Mao commentary to "*Ding zhi fang zhong* 定之方中," Odes of Yong 鄘風.

³⁷ This frequently anthologized work raises a number of central problems in the reception of Du Fu's verse and biography. Most important are the lines (19 and 20) that are read as lightly veiled critiques of imperial excess and the final six couplets, which shift into a melancholic outburst this is seen as uncannily foreshadowing the coming chaos and thus reaffirming Du Fu's status as prescient "poet sage" (*shisheng* 詩聖) and archetypically loyal servant of the empire.

³⁸ The lineage of the figure called Xihe and her relationship to sun mythology is quite complex and beyond the scope of this paper. For a useful summary, consult Sarah Allen's *The Shape of the Turtle* (1991), especially chapter 2, "Sons of Suns."

³⁹ Shaohao is a mythical ruler of the Eastern Yi 東夷 tribe. According to legend, he is the emperor of the west and autumn.

⁴⁰ The Wei and Jing Rivers are major tributaries of the Yellow River that meet just east of Chang'an. According to popular ancient belief, the Jing River is considered to be "dirty" (*zhuo* 濁) with silt, while the Wei runs "clear" (*qing* 清). (The opposite is in fact true.) When the two rivers meet, their waters converge, the dirty marring the clean. The phrase *Jing Wei* 涇渭 is used metaphorically to contrast purity and corruption, hence when Du Fu fails to find the rivers, he is commenting on the difficulty of even distinguishing between good and bad in a corrupt world.

obscured Chang'an) has been mapped onto the landscape. The poet, standing between heaven and earth, tries to link these two points through the special perspective afforded by the tower and through his investment in the political models of the past. His call to Shun unanswered, however, Du Fu is capable of making only symbolic connections. In the remainder of the poem he is left to reflect on the alienation of the virtuous in a covetous and bestial age. Looking towards the sky and out into the world of natural phenomena, he paints himself and his peers as spiritual exiles at the heart of the empire.

The climb in "Ascending the Tower" evokes exilic experience by ungrounding the poet, taking him up and away from Chang'an to a point where he not only recognizes his own alienation but also maps it onto the landscape below. There is, not surprisingly, a long history of overlap and hybridization between the poetry of exile and that of climbing high. In "The Tallest Tower in Baidi Fortress," it is precisely the theme of climbing to a height (or at the very least imagining the view from the top) that allows Du Fu both to evoke the alienating sense of "being in between" and also to depict the bleak and oppressive landscape of exile. Unlike "Ascending the Tower" however, this poem refuses to yield any straightforward answers about what we are looking at and from whose perspective we are looking. Yet once we set aside our assumption that Du Fu has even climbed this particular tower we begin to see what really matters: the contrast between the movement of the external world and the poet's immobility.⁴¹ This sense of fixedness—enhanced by the claustrophobic effect of "lingering" clouds and "embracing" sunlight⁴²—is brought home in lines five and six, which function through a brilliant spatial inversion. In line five, the Fusang tree, mythical birthplace of the sun, lies in the east but is described by its westernmost branches; in line six, Ruoshui, a mythical stream located far to the west, is described by its easternmost shadows or reflections:⁴³

扶桑西枝對斷石， The Fusang tree's western branches face sheered stone,
弱水東影隨長流。 Ruoshui's eastern shadows follow the long river's flow.

On their own, each of these geographical terms would simply have indicated the cardinal directions (east and west) or served as familiar markers of exaggeratedly distant locations.

⁴¹ Paul Kroll persuasively cautions readers to avoid assuming that Tang poets' first concern was fidelity to a specific scene: "For all [Tang poets] the imperatives of *shih* compositions are a push toward the suggestive arrangement of a selected few images rather than a punctilious depiction of scene." See "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains in the High T'ang," in *T'oung Pao*, Second Series, Vol. 84, Fasc. 13 (1998), 78.

⁴² The second couplet is in fact quite ambiguous. It is unclear whether the second character in each of its lines (*che* 坼 and *qing* 清) should be read as stative verbs (the gorges *are rent*; the river *is* clear), intransitive verbs (the gorges *rent*; the river *clears*) or as adjectives (the gorges *rent*; the river *clear*). The confusion continues with the fourth character of each line (*mai* 霾 and *bao* 抱): *mai* can be used verbally to mean cover, but it also describes the aspect of dust or dirt suspended in clouds or blown by wind. Here, it is possible that both meanings are in play, and that the clouds "cover darkly." This raises the question of whether *mai* is being used intransitively, in which case we need concern ourselves only with the clouds as subject, or transitively, in which case it would take the reclining of the dragons and tigers (*longhu wo* 龍虎臥) as its object. Though this couplet appears parallel, comparing *mai* 霾 with its counterpart in the fourth line, *bao* 抱, offers little help: Does the river clear in the sun's embrace, and is this where reptiles wander, sun-kissed? Though there are a handful of possible configurations, I have translated the couplet as a series of six nearly separate subject-verb pairings in order to bring out the languid but kinetic flow of the original. It is this visually and linguistically dense but fluid quality that informs us that we are seeing a hyperbolically inhospitable version of the natural world from multiple perspectives simultaneously.

⁴³ The Tribute of Yu section of the Shangshu records that Yu traced the Ruoshui (literally "weak waters") far into the western wastes.

Together and in inverted form, however, they draw on the dynamism of the river and the unsettled verbal energy of the previous couplet to orient Du Fu within a center that is itself an extreme, at the edge of the east and the limit of the west, always by the river highway but never able to sail away. This combination of disorientation and fixedness extends to the very structure of the poem, which is written in what came to be called *ao'liu* 拗律, or "skewed regulated verse," a tonally perverse form of the otherwise strictly ordered octave. Du's formal experiment, which extends the jagged dynamism of the middle couplets to the entire poem, is part of his search for a form that is commensurate with his experience of the wild, southern landscape.

In the final couplet, Du Fu turns away from the natural world to zero in on the figure sobbing atop the tower. These lines invoke Ruan Ji's 阮籍 (210-263) 29th "Singing of my Cares 詠懷,"⁴⁴ which, like many of his extant poems, is read as a critique of the Sima clan's hold on power during the Cao Wei 曹魏 Dynasty (220-265).⁴⁵ Ruan's poem is also written from a high perspective, though he climbs a hill and not a tower to look out at the landscape:

幽荒邈悠悠，	The remote wastes stretch endlessly on,
悽愴懷所憐。	Miserable, I yearn for the one I pity.
所憐者誰子，	Who is this man I pity?
明察自照妍。	Brilliantly perceptive, he beamed beautifully and of his own accord.

Du does not borrow any of the emotionally specific language of this poem—there is no direct reference to sadness (*qichuang* 悽愴), yearning (*huai* 懷) or pity (*lian* 憐)—but he clearly echoes Ruan's question, and in the process identifies the "man" (*zi* 子) of his poem as the one "to be pitied." The crucial difference is that while in the 29th "Singing of My Cares" the poet seems to be the clear subject of the verb "to pity," and the "man" its object, in Du Fu's poem the boundary between subject and object, is, like the tower itself, hazy:

杖藜歎世者誰子，	What man is this, who clutching a cane rues the age,
泣血迸空回白頭。	And weeping blood, spatters the void as he turns his greying head?

The natural assumption is that the man holding the staff and shedding tears of blood is Du Fu. Given the autobiographical tendency in both poetic reading and writing practices, as well as the convention of closing regulated octaves with an inward turn, this reading is hard to contradict, though the subject in this poem is never explicitly identified as Du. The rhyming binomial of the second line, *piaomiao* 縹緲, adds to this ambiguity. This phrase describes the faint aspect of something tall and distant, and suggests that Du is observing the tower and its inhabitant from a low position. Du's narrow perspective from below is replaced in the middle couplets by a more

⁴⁴ Ruan Ji 阮籍, *Ruan bubing yonghuai shizhu* 阮步兵詠懷詩註, ed. Huang Jie 黃節 (Taipei: Yi wen yinshuguan, 1971).

⁴⁵ Donald Holzman summarizes a number of traditional Chinese commentaries and their political/historical readings of this poem. According to his reading of the last four lines of the poem, Ruan refers to various mythological figures associated with loyal service, who after fighting a major battle were unable to return to their heavenly abodes and forced to fend for themselves as accidental exiles. See *Poetry and Politics: The Life and Works of Juan Chu A.D. 210-263* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

expansive, though ultimately disorienting one that suggests that he has climbed the tower. By the final couplet, however, we seem to be down below once again, looking up into a sky spattered with tears of blood.

We find the key to navigating these shifts in perspective in the seventh line, where Du Fu appears to use Ruan Ji's archaic, third person reference to refer to himself. This adaptation is simultaneously intimate and distancing: it brings Du Fu and Ruan Ji together through their shared language and their respective roles as the one pitied and the one who pities; but it also alienates Du Fu from himself.⁴⁶ Unlike "Ascending the Tower," which prefigures the spatial alienation of Du Fu's exilic poetry, "From the Tallest Tower" enacts a more radical displacement of the body from the feeling self. In his late post-rebellion poetry Du frequently expresses this sense of displacement through the image of a bifurcated self comprised of viewer and viewed, the latter of which appears as a lone figure, sometimes human (the fisherman) and sometimes animal (the gull or the horse), but always suspended in the vast emptiness of a void. This mirroring of the self in the other is at play in this poem in a particularly subtle way. Here, the poem does not ask us to look directly into the void, but to look at the self-as-other looking out into the void. To answer the question "what man is this?" satisfactorily, however, we cannot use our naked eyes; we must follow the links along a chain of readerly experience and learning, making our way from Du Fu, through Ruan Ji and on into deepest antiquity.

Writing about landscape imagery, Paul W. Kroll has described such textual interconnections as existing within a "lexical loop," a metaphor that captures how landscape is filtered through the circulation of images and themes among poets. Kroll is wrestling here with the fundamental tension between the pervasive influence of previous texts and language and the importance of direct visual perception in Tang poetry. He argues that for men and women of the High Tang, "the cardinal view was of a world seen *through* words—perhaps, a world seen *as* words."⁴⁷ This view posits a model of textual influence in which texts are at least partially constitutive of perception. To read "The Tallest Tower" from the unitary visual perspective of the poet in the landscape we must fabricate a narrative of climbing high, of ups and downs that find no support in the poem's title or content. If we accept these visual shifts as so many intentional perceptual aporia however, the narrative falls away to expose the poem for what it is: neither a description of the tallest tower in Baidi nor the specific experience of Du's exile, but a meditation on how the textual experience of exile, combined with the topos of *denggao*, constitute poetic vision and perspective. That Du Fu leaves unspoken much of the most trenchant language of his sources reflects how easily he expects his readers will be able to read, almost instinctually, the links of the textual chain that he constructs, and, at the end of the chain, find the key words echoing already in their ears. To see how he achieves this effect we must follow the chain beyond Ruan Ji.

The final line, with its wrenching image of tears of blood shed into the void, adds a brutally vivid link. For this, Du Fu borrows loosely from a bit of familiar Chu lore: According to legend, a former king of Chu, Du Yu 杜宇 (posthumously titled *Wangdi* 望帝), tasked a favored minister, Bieling 陂靈, with attending to major flooding. When the latter was away from the capital, Du Yu seduced his wife, but eventually grew so guilty that upon Bieling's return he abdicated the throne and lived out his life in eremitic self-exile. After his death, he is said to have turned into a cuckoo bird that sheds tears of blood. Does this reference answer

⁴⁶ For more on how Du's "most perfect and most difficult autobiographical voice" successfully combines intimacy and distance, see Stephen Owen, "The Self's Perfect Mirror," 94.

⁴⁷ Kroll, "Lexical Landscapes and Textual Mountains," 76. For a similar approach, see Stephen Owen's "The Librarian in Exile: Xie Lingyun's Bookish Landscapes," in *Early Medieval China* 10-11.1 (2004), 203-226.

Du's question by taking on Du Yu, however loosely, as an avatar? Given the popularity of this specific allusion it might be unnecessary to invest too much significance in Du's particular reference. Indeed, the final line cannot be understood solely through the cuckoo because it ends with a faint echo of yet another textual source and historical figure.

Writing near the fall of the Han, Wang Can (177-217) composed a handful of poems that reverberate through Du Fu's late verse. The first of his "Seven Worries 七哀" poems (along with his "Rhapsody on a Climbing a Tower 登樓賦," which I discuss briefly below) is typical of these exilic works:

七哀

西京亂無象，
豺虎方邁患。
復棄中國去，
遠身適荆蠻。
親戚對我悲，
朋友相追攀。
出門無所見，
白骨蔽平原。

...

南登霸陵岸，
迴首望長安。
悟彼下泉人，
喟然傷心肝。

*Qi'ai*⁴⁸

The Western Capital is chaos beyond imagining,
Jackals and tigers, even now, cause suffering.
Once again cast aside, I depart from the central states,
And take myself off to join the savages of Jing.
My closest relatives grieve for me,
My dearest friends and I cling to one another.
Leaving the gate there is nothing to see
But white bones covering the level plains.

To the south I climb the slope at Baling,
And turning my head gaze towards Chang'an.
Finally I understand that man of "The Falling Spring,"
and choking, am consumed with grief.

In the penultimate couplet we find Du Fu and Wang Can bound by the same ties that link Du Fu and Ruan Ji—both poets describe a landscape seen from on high and marked by its desolation, violence and the presence of wild beasts. For Wang and Du, their vantage point also inspires them to gaze north towards Chang'an, the capital and home they were both forced to leave by the violence and machinations of the corrupt. The phrase *huishou* 迴首 that appears in Wang Can's poem is expanded to three characters in "From the Tallest Tower," to *hui baitou* 回白頭. *Huishou* (and its variants) is a common phrase in Tang poetry leading up to Du Fu, and is especially favored in the work of a handful of men, including Liu Changqing 劉長卿 (709-780), Wei Yingwu 韋應物 (737-792) and Gao Shi 高適 (700-765), the latter of whom Du Fu greatly admired and with whom he exchanged a handful of poems. When these poets use this phrase one hears the echo of Wang Can and his influence on the poetry of climbing high: the poet turns his head back when far from home, sometimes on military service, or when he wishes to reflect on the past; he usually looks from some kind of height; very often his vision is blocked by clouds or mists; and more often than not the gesture ends in affective excess—a flood of tears, a searing pain in the gut, a mournful sigh. In Du Fu's oeuvre, however, this shared gesture becomes almost compulsive, appearing in no fewer than 55 separate works.⁴⁹

⁴⁸ *Wen Xuan* (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 1986), v.3, 1087.

⁴⁹ My statistic is the result of a brief search of this term in the *Quan Tang shi* 全唐詩. The well-known "Twenty-two Rhymes Respectfully Sent to Prime Minister of the Left, Wei Zhang 奉贈韋左丞丈二十二韻" (747) and the

In "The Tallest Tower," Du looks back with more than just his own eyes and sees far more than the Chang'an of his memories. Gazing alongside and through Ruan Ji (who pities) and Wang Can (who turns his head) he looks toward a place that is composed of layers of personal, historical and literary meaning. This is nothing new; we see this method of vicarious vision and textual resonance at play in Wang's poem as well. When that poet looks back towards Chang'an we learn nothing of what he sees; instead, his vision inspires a moment of textual epiphany, of encountering in the world certain circumstances that make a familiar text spontaneously signify in its complete emotional depth:

悟彼下泉人， 喟然傷心肝。	Finally I understand that man of "The Falling Spring," and choking, am consumed with grief.
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"The Falling Spring 下泉" is the title of the 153rd poem in the *Shijing*, part of the small collection of Airs from the feudal state of Cao and the final link in our chain.⁵⁰ Like so many poems from late in Du Fu's life, this work describes a restless sleep interrupted by thoughts of the distant and imperiled capital. The opening stanza reads:

冽彼下泉 浸彼苞稂 愾我寤嘆 念彼周京	Splash, that falling spring Soaks that clustering henbane With a groan I start from my sleep When I think of the city of Zhou
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When Wang Can climbed Baling and turned his head towards Chang'an he was surprised to find himself alongside the sleepless man from "The Falling Spring." In "The Tallest Tower," Wang's textual sympathy has become a precondition of the poem, so that the earlier poet's sudden understanding is replaced by Du Fu's intricate fusion of sources and his easy assumption of past perspectives and identities. Thus Du Fu does not simply look in the manner of these ancient men, he looks at a version of himself that embodies, but ultimately transcends Ruan Ji, Wang Can and the man of the "Falling Spring." If our practice of tracing these various links feels more like tumbling down a textual rabbit hole than reading a poem, it is simply a reflection of a contemporary drift (in Chinese and English) away from such complex practices of allusion and the feats of memory required to sustain them.

Time and again after he and his family left the central plains, Du Fu turned back to follow Wang Can's gaze, looking both north towards Chang'an and into the depths of his personal memories and store of literary-historical knowledge. This gesture, almost instinctual for Du, fuses vision as an immediate sensory act with personal memory and the retrospective 'vision' made possible by a deep knowledge and personal connection to a text-based historical and literary tradition. *Hui baitou* in "The Tallest Tower" is both a densely scholarly variation of this gesture—it asks us to recognize the individual links that comprise the poem's textual chain, but exposes nothing specific of Du's memories and visions of the past—and also a deeply unsettling one: the phrase hangs on the brink of its own void, the poem's end, where it leaves the reader to contemplate the spray of bloody tears in silence. For Du Fu, as for those who preceded him, the act of turning back the head is a temporary denial (and in the end, a

"Ascending the Tower at the Ci'en Temple with the Assembled Gentleman" (755) (*DSXZ* 73 and 103 respectively) are among the two earliest examples.

⁵⁰ *Shijing zhengyi* 詩經正義, in *Shisanjing zhushu* 十三經注疏 (1979), vol.1, *juan* 7, 385.

reaffirmation) of the primary fact of exile: that the exile can never return home. And yet, though the south will never be home, it is the primary fixed point from which Du Fu sets out to remap the world according to his experience of exile.

III. Discerning Traces

Du Fu's mapping is defined at every stage by competing and contradictory forces: the aching pull of homesickness and the possibility of accommodation and resignation that comes with the realization that he and his family may never leave the south. Though he turns his thoughts to the places and people of his past, he can transcend neither his own corporeality nor his fixity in the Gorges. Whether or not they actually appear in any single Kuizhou poem, the Gorges exert a steady psychological force on Du Fu's Kuizhou verse. Forced to live on the brink of the gaping maw of Kuimen, he discards the pat praise of Yu and his primordial engineering feats that marks the pre-Kuizhou "Yu's Shrine." In "At Qutang Yearning for Antiquity," the emptiness of the accounts that promote the "glory" of Yu's act exposes a Kuizhou that is the product of natural forces rather than primordial acts of heroism. As Du becomes more familiar with the lore and history of the Gorges, he continues to remap Yu's landscape, transforming it into a highly personal space of memory, history and exile.

This transformation is possible because the Gorges can be conceptualized as occupying either end of a spectrum of culturally coded mark-making—as an enduring monument to man's mastery over nature and as the ground of faint and fading traces of human occupation. At one end stands monumental physical evidence of Yu's deed of merit (*Yuji* 禹跡); at the other lie the scattered and fragmented traces of humbler human lives that persist only through the accidental survival of objects or homes or through the more reliable medium of words. These latter marks, also *ji* 跡, breathe life into the stories surrounding a number of native sons and daughters as well as historical exiles associated with the area in and around the Gorges, all of whom figure prominently in Du Fu's Kuizhou poems. Whether material (as in the case of ruins) or abstract (as in the case of words) the trace serves as an invitation for Du Fu to once again turn back, to look into history for a way to connect with those who might have truly understood him and his experience of The Three Gorges. Though he knew just what to expect when he turned to look back in "The Tallest Tower," the retrospective act as inspired by the trace could often yield surprising results, as it did for Wang Can when he discovered his newfound appreciation for the man of "The Falling Spring."

In the case of a poem such as "The Western Tower 西閣," the assimilation of the southern dialect becomes just such an unexpected trace, an ironic and weary symbol of accommodation and assimilation that overshadows the consoling transhistorical power of the written word:

西閣二首，其一 The Western Pavilion, Two Poems (the first)⁵¹

巫山小搖落，	Atop Mt. Wu, a faint autumn fading,
碧色見松林。	Where jadeite green betrays pine forests.
百鳥各相鳴，	A hundred birds, each responding to the others' calls, ⁵²

⁵¹ DSXZ 1473.

孤雲無自心。	A lone cloud that lacks a purpose-driven mind.
層軒俯江壁，	From the upper gallery I look down on the river and cliff,
要路亦高深。	Even the main road here is sheer and isolated.
朱紱猶紗帽，	Vermillion-sashed and raven-capped,
新詩近玉琴。	For new poems I draw close the jade zither.
功名不早立，	Both merit and reputation I failed to establish early,
衰病謝知音。	And ailing, I bid farewell to those few who heard me, and hearing, understood.
哀世非王粲，	This one who mourns the age is no Wang Can—
終然學楚吟。	In the end, I've learned the sounds of Chu.

"The Western Pavilion" opens with a conventional but evocative image of autumnal decay atop Mt. Wu, a storied landmark downriver from Kuizhou, in the heart of the Gorges. The phrase *yaoluo* 搖落 describes the withering and decay of vegetal life and has its most famous early use in a work attributed to Song Yu, the "Nine Disputations 九辯" of the *Chu'ci* anthology:

悲哉秋之为气也！	How doleful this autumn air!
萧瑟兮草木摇落而变衰。	⁵³ Sere and severe, oh! The grasses and trees wither and decay.

With the tone set by *yaoluo*, the first six lines of "The Western Tower" evoke the natural setting of the poem's composition—during autumn, amidst natural, cyclical phenomena, looking down from on high. The final six lines, however, respond directly to Du's personal and professional situation. Though lodged in an official building and wearing the clothing (*shamao* 紗帽) and insignia (*zhufu* 朱紱) of office, Du is no bureaucrat, but a poet who keeps his instrument close by in case of inspiration (and for when asked to entertain).⁵⁴ This is no real position, but a disappointing sinecure, one that serves to confirm his failures and isolation. Not only has Du Fu failed to establish merit or reputation (*gongming* 功名) through deeds and service, he also lacks the sensitive ears of a poetic soul mate, a *zhiyin* 知音 (one who "understands his tone").

Geographic isolation and professional failure however, have never precluded friendship and affinity through poetry. Writers not only 'mailed' their poems across great distances, they also commonly forged bonds with ancient historical and literary figures who seemed to have anticipated their deepest feelings. In the final couplet Du provides a new and surprising reason for "bid[ding] farewell" (*xie* 謝) to one poet who once "knew his tone:"

哀世非王粲，	This one who mourns the age is no Wang Can—
終然學楚吟。	In the end, I've learned the sounds of Chu.

⁵² Though a conventional image, Du Fu seems to have self-consciously lifted this line from Wang Can's "Rhapsody on Climbing a Tower." See *Wen Xuan*, v.3, 1087.

⁵³ *Chu'ci jixiao jishi* 楚辭集校集釋 (Wuhan: Hubei jiaoyu chubanshe, 2002), v.1, p.2, 2039.

⁵⁴ Qiu Zhao'ao cites a commentary by Zhu Heling that suggests that *shamao*, though the standard headgear of Sui officials, had become associated with eremitic fashion by the Tang. This understanding of the term would totally change the meaning of the line, from a bemused description of pseudo-officialdom to a statement of contradictory roles: "Though purple-sashed, I retain my hermit's raven black cap." See *DSXZ*, 1474.

Though he so often speaks with and through Wang Can, a figure whose "tones" he knows well, Du ends this poem by explicitly disavowing Wang's status as his double and implicitly rejecting the famous exclamation made by the earlier poet when he climbed high to look out over the southern landscape: "though truly beautiful, this is not my land 雖信美而非吾土."⁵⁵ He rejects Wang as an avatar not because he has outgrown his homesickness, which he continues to proclaim untiringly, but because Wang was able to escape his exile, returning north to achieve political and literary renown during his lifetime. Du Fu, performatively resigned to his exile, distinguishes himself from Wang by stating that he has begun learning the Chu style of poetic composition and/or recitation (*xue chuyin* 學楚吟). (This might also be a reference to his self-identification with the poetry and personae of the great Chu poets, Qu Yuan and Song Yu.) This ironic assertion of accommodation, which appears as the poem and the poet's reference to their own Chu-ness, is based on both an inversion of a case of homesickness cited in Wang Can's famous "Rhapsody on Climbing a Tower" and a clever rhyme/pun.

There are few better indicators of geographical and cultural origins than the tone (*yin* 音) and grain of speech, the sonic traces of geographic origins. Chinese poets had long cited the story of a Warring States 戰國 (480-221 B.C.E.) figure to corroborate this belief. A commoner from the eastern state of Yue 越, Zhuang Xi 莊烏 served successfully as an official in the state of Chu.⁵⁶ When Zhuang fell ill, the ruler sent someone to listen to him speak, in the hopes of determining whether he still considered Yue his home. Though Zhuang had risen to prominence and acquired great wealth through his service to Chu, he reverted to the language of Yue 越 on his sickbed. As Wang Can writes in his rhapsody:

莊烏顯而越音。	Zhuang Xi became illustrious [in Chu] yet retained his Yue accent.
人情同於懷土兮，	Human feeling is universal when it comes to homesickness,
豈窮達而異心？	How could distinctions of success lead to differences of the heart?

Du, unwell like Zhuang and dislocated like Wang, reverses the pattern of homesickness they so famously set by claiming that he himself has, in fact, learned the "sounds" of Chu, a region that serves here as a metonym for the area of the Gorges (more often categorized as part of Shu or Ba). Though not material, musical tone (音) and the sound of chanting or sighing (吟) are meaningful traces of internal states and evidence of the spiritual maintenance of physical connections between people and places. Both Wang and Zhuang established their names by unintentionally exposing these traces, and as a result, became exemplars of a model of native yearning that pervades the poetic tradition.

For well over a thousand years, Du has been recognized as belonging to this elite group. Yet here, deprived of a sympathetic audience (*zhuiyin* 知音), he entertains himself with a rhyme that reinscribes the sonic trace (*yin* 音/吟) as a sign of his accommodation to the landscape of the southland. This is a bitter kind of humor, one that if read ironically could easily be folded

⁵⁵ *Wenxuan*, v.2, 489

⁵⁶ The most famous version of this story appears in the biography of Zhang Yi 張儀 in the *Shiji* 史記. See: Sima Qian 司馬遷, *Shiji* 史記 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), 2301. The phrase "Zhuang Xi and the sounds of Yue" (*Zhuang Xi Yue yin* 莊烏越吟) remains a common way to refer to native loyalty.

back into the valorized and homogenous narrative of Du as the eternally homesick, loyal official. What Du is describing, however is a trace of something foreign, a jarring and heterogeneous sound that cannot (and should not) be accommodated to familiar textual and moral criteria. In the penultimate couplet, Du measures himself against both the typical labels of social value—deeds of merit (*gong* 功) and reputation (*ming* 名)—and the typical means through which that value is determined—official service, display of loyalty, the bonds of closest friendship.⁵⁷

功名不早立，	Both merit and reputation I failed to establish early,
衰病謝知音。	And ailing, I bid farewell to those few who heard me, and hearing, understood.

He finds himself wanting in each category, unable to compare with Zhuang and Wang. Though he continues to write new poems, Du deems his active assimilation (*xue* 學) of the southern sounds the final (for this poem, at least) measure of the self. Sound remains a geographic trace, but now it betrays a reorientation, an association with the south and its culture that is no less meaningful for being undesired and grudgingly assumed.⁵⁸

The cultural power of such traces also pervades the five poems of Du Fu's "Yearning for the Traces of Antiquity 詠懷古跡五首," each of which centers on a different historical figure with connections to the area in and around the gorges (I discuss the first, second and fourth poems here). All but one of these figures appear with striking frequency in Du Fu's oeuvre, both as explicit poetic topoi and in the form of textual and historical allusions. Together with Wang Can, they are among the most important of Du Fu's Kuizhou-era topics, serving as both historical exemplars and as sympathetic doubles, human avatars that must be arrayed alongside the various anonymous and animal doubles (the gull, the horse, the fisherman, among others) that appear elsewhere in his work. Unlike Wang Can, who is identified solely through literary traces, however, these figures appear in this series through the material trace, which lends them a geographical specificity that more firmly anchors Du's own experience in the south.

In many ways, the first of the "Yearning" poems is the most important and difficult of the series. Its topic, Yu Xin 庾信 (513-581), is a figure of special significance to Du Fu. Descended from a northern family that fled south at the fall of the Western Jin Dynasty 西晉

⁵⁷ Though the first "Western Tower" poem does not draw directly on the eremitic tradition, its unexpected tone of accommodation and pragmatism is much closer to some of Du Fu's work in that vein. In the first of his roughly contemporary five poem series "Autumn Wastes, Five Poems 秋野五首" (Qiu dates it to 766), Du Fu presents a bucolic scene of local involvement à la Tao Yuanming 陶淵明 (365-427):

秋野日疏蕪，	The autumn wastes grow daily sparse and wild.
寒江動碧虛。	While the frigid Jiang tosses the jadeite sky.
繫舟蠻井絡，	I've moored my boat under barbarian constellations,
卜宅楚村墟。	And sited my house in a village of Chu.
棗熟從人打，	When the dates ripen, I allow the people to shake them down,
葵荒欲自鋤。	When the sunflowers wither I'm tempted to hoe them under myself.
盤飧老夫食，	A simple plate makes this man's food—
分減及溪魚。	I'll divvy it up and share it with the fish in the stream.

⁵⁸ In a number of poems Du Fu describes how his sons have learned the Chu dialect, a fact that seems to speak to their growing assimilation. The last couplet of the fifth of the "Autumn Wastes" is a prime example of this theme (DSXZ 1735).

(265-316), Yu was technically a northerner born in exile, though he considered himself a native of the Yangzi city of Jiangling 江陵. One of the most famous literary men of a famously literary age, Yu reached lofty professional heights towards the end of the Liang Dynasty. When that dynasty began to implode in the middle of the sixth century, the trusted Yu was sent north to sue for peace, never to return. From 554 to the end of his life, Yu remained a captive of first the Western Wei 西魏 (535-557) and then the Northern Zhou 北周 (557-581). These non-Han dynasties revered Yu's literary talents, bestowing on him a succession of rarefied titles and ranks, many symbolic, though some with real power and responsibility.⁵⁹ Du's lackluster professional record notwithstanding, there is an undeniable symmetry to the life stories of these two unlucky poets:

詠懷古跡，其一 **Yearning for the Traces of Antiquity, First Poem**⁶⁰

支離東北風塵際，	Adrift in the northeast, at the edge of wind and dust,
漂泊西南天地間。	Floating in the southwest, between heaven and earth.
三峽樓臺淹日月，	In towers and terraces of the Three Gorges I linger for days and
	months,
五溪衣服共雲山。	And with those who wear the clothing of the Five Streams share
	cloud and mountain.
羯胡事主終無賴，	The huns who served our lords in the end proved inconstant,
詞客哀時且未還。	The traveling poet who mourns the age has still yet to return
	home.
庾信平生最蕭瑟，	Yu Xin's life was of all the most tragically miserable:
暮年詩賦動江關。	His poems and rhapsodies of late years shake river and pass.

Commentators have noted that this poem (and to a certain extent, the other four in the series) is not really about physical traces, but about an historical figure.⁶¹ For Du Fu, however, there is no significant difference: the physical landscape had been indelibly inscribed with the history of its occupants. The immediate historical landscape is in turn part of a larger textual geography of exile that anchors the poet despite his peripatetic fate. In the first two couplets, Du uses the cardinal directions and familiar elemental descriptors—heaven and earth, wind and dust, sun and moon, clouds and mountains—to map the rough parameters of this exilic space. On their own, each of these cosmic and landscape elements constitute a space that Du Fu cannot fully inhabit, where he is always somewhere in between (*jian* 間), or at the boundary (*ji* 際) between spaces, as in "Ascending the Tower" and "From the Tallest Tower." When viewed

⁵⁹ For an overview of Yu's service under the Liang, Western Wei and Northern Zhou, as well as an introduction to the complex political and military history of the period, see William T. Graham's *The Lament for the South* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 4-20.

⁶⁰ *DSXZ*, 1499.

⁶¹ In this poem, Du Fu does not refer to any identifiable ancient ruin or trace, and though he mentions Yu Xin by name in the final couplet, the entire work seems to alternate between and conflate the two poets. Because of these discrepancies and ambiguities, commentators have sometimes debated whether this poem should even be counted as part of the "Yearning" series. There are, however, enough similarities between all five poems to undermine these suspicions. Strongest among them is how Du Fu uses the trace (*ji* 跡) throughout to establish a physical connection between specific historical figures and the southern regions that he inhabits and those to which he dreams of travelling.

as physical manifestations of Yu Xin's poetry and presence, however, these coordinates are traces of a meaningful system through which Du Fu orients himself.

The opening couplet establishes extreme, but well-defined spaces in the far northeast and in the isolated southwest:

支離東北風塵際， Adrift in the northeast, at the edge of wind and dust,
漂泊西南天地間。 Floating in the southwest, between heaven and earth.

These are paradoxical positions: the "northeast" and "southwest" can be named and roughly indicated on a map, but they retain the liminal and unstable status of the borderland. One may cross over the border, but only at the risk of being ungrounded, of wandering adrift (*zhili* 支離) or floating unmoored (*piaopo* 漂泊) in a space that is neither here nor there, neither fully fixed nor fully unstable. These pseudo places "at the edge of wind and dust" and "between heaven and earth" are familiar to readers of Du Fu's post-Chengdu work. In poems such as the frequently translated and anthologized "Writing my Feelings on a Night of Travel 旅夜書懷"⁶² or the seventh of the "Autumn Meditations," Du Fu places avatars, a gull and a fisherman, within these intermediary zones to create unsettling images of the miniscule individual within infinite expanses of space. Tellingly, these spaces are often defined not by the trace-bearing surface of the solid earth, but by physical media—air and water—that cannot be inscribed, at least not in Du Fu's time. (In chapters 3 and 4, we will see how the Three Gorges Dam project has finally extended the act of inscription to these otherwise amorphous elements.)

In this poem, however, spatial description disorients and orients in equal measure: though "the edge of wind and dust" and the space "between heaven and earth" are ultimately void-like anti-locations, the unusual parallel structure of the opening couplet creates a pair that anchors the drifting poets, however partially, in their relationship to one another. Yu Xin and the historical figures that Du treats in the other poems thus signify more complexly than the anonymous fisherman or lone bird; they are both personas that Du can briefly adopt and historical figures with whom he feels a connection through his current location and his experience of the space of exile. The structure of the poem reinforces this reading: though there is a great deal of overlap and ambiguity, the alternation of the opening couplets establishes a pattern of equivalence through alternation that plays out through the remainder of the poem. The opening couplet establishes the two poles of the poem—Yu Xin and Du Fu—each of whom (first Du and then Yu) serves as the focus of half of the remainder of the poem. Lines three, four and five seem to refer to Du Fu, while lines six, seven and eight turn to Yu Xin. It is common in regulated verse for the parallel middle couplets to return to and expand on the scenic description of the opening couplet. Within this model, the second couplet develops the first line and the third couplet develops the second line. Here, Du displaces the parallelism to the opening couplet and expands the response and expansion structure to include the concluding three couplets.

Recognizing the seeming balance of this altered structure does not necessarily allow for a more precise reading, however, as the middle couplets remain stubbornly ambiguous and multivalent. Though the second couplet, with its geographically specific language (*sanxia* 三峽, *wuxi* 五溪) can only refer to Du Fu and his residence in the south, the third couplet begins to blur the boundary between Yu and Du:

⁶² DSXZ, 1228.

羯胡事主終無賴， The huns who served our lords in the end proved inconstant,
詞客哀時且未還。 The traveling poet who mourns the age has still yet to return
home.

The disloyal foreigner in line five could easily refer to either the Tang rebel An Lushan or to Hou Jing 侯景 (d. 552), a traitorous general who caused the collapse of the Liang Dynasty in 549, precipitating Yu Xin's permanent exile in the north. If the referent in line five remains uncertain, line six seems at first glance less opaque. "The travelling poet who mourns the age and has yet to return home" clearly echoes the title and language of Yu Xin's magnum opus, the "Lament for the Southland Rhapsody 哀江南賦." Even here however, the autobiographical impulse muddies the water; Du Fu all too often describes himself as someone who mourns the age and who cannot return to his native land.

As if to resolve this confusion, and to establish Yu Xin as the most impressively melancholy of the series' five historical figures (and a more pitiable figure than even himself), Du ends the poem by proclaiming:

庾信平生最蕭瑟， Yu Xin's life was of all the most tragically miserable:
暮年詩賦動江關。 His poems and rhapsodies of late years shake river and pass.

Qiu Zhao'ao suggests that both of these lines borrow from Yu's poetry: the first echoes a line from the "Mourning for the Southland" ("The brave gentleman cannot return, the frigid wind blows desolate 壯士不還，寒風蕭瑟"); and the second seems to echo lines from both "Mourning for the Southland"⁶³ and Yu's "Broken Heart Rhapsody 傷心賦,"⁶⁴ the latter of which reads:

對玉關而羈旅， Facing Jade Pass I linger, a foreigner,
坐長河而暮年。 Occupying the long [Yellow] River my years draw to a close.

In this couplet, Yu Xin orients himself in relation to the famous landmarks of the north, Jade Pass in the far west and the Yellow River, which cuts a dramatic line through the cradle of Chinese civilization. Though he makes no reference to the south, Yu modifies the Yellow River (*he* 河) with an adjective, "long" (*chang* 長), that we now associate mostly with the Yangzi, or Long Jiang (*chang Jiang* 長江). Though there is precedent for describing the Yellow River in this way, in this context, it is possible that *chang* 長 functions as a shadow of Yu's homeland, a trace of the great southern river that flows through his memories whenever he encounters its northern counterpart. Just as Yu does not belong to the north, the adjective *chang* is an object of displacement, a trace of southern origins that cannot be fully effaced. Within Yu's attempt at mapping his northern surroundings, it appears unexpectedly beneath the surface of the landscape, a geographic palimpsest. In the second couplet of "Observing Objects Within the Gorges 峽中覽物," Du describes a similar, but more explicitly uncanny experience of his southern surroundings:

⁶³ Yu Xin 庾信, *Yu Zishan jizhu* 庾子山集注, ed. and annotated by Ni Fan 倪璠 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2000), 94.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 55.

巫峽忽如瞻華岳， The Wu Gorges—all of a sudden as though I'm gazing on Mt.
Hua,⁶⁵
蜀江猶似見黃河。 This river of Shu—it's just like seeing the Yellow River.⁶⁶

In the final line of the first "Yearning" poem, both Yu's palimpsest and the mirage-like transformations of the south are reduced to a figure of juxtaposition that makes explicit Yu's spatial superimposition:

暮年詩賦動江關。 His poems and rhapsodies of late years shake river and pass.

Though seemingly generic topographical terms, "river" and "pass" (*jiangguan* 江關) can also be used as proper names referring to the Yangzi River (*Jiang* 江) and the northern region known as "Within the Passes" (*Guanzhong* 關中), respectively. When Yu Xin wrote his "Lament for the Southland" (literally, "Lament for the Area South of the River Jiang") and "Broken Heart" Rhapsodies, he lived in the Western Wei and then Chou capital of Chang'an (not to be confused with the nearby Sui 隋 (581-618) and Tang capital of the same name), a city situated within the *Guanzhong* region, not far from the Yellow River. Just as Yu's use of the adjective *chang* seems to linguistically link this region with the south, Du Fu's line brings together the northern region (*guan*) from which he hailed, and to which Yu Xin was exiled, and the southern region (*Jiang*) from which Yu Xin hailed, and to which Du Fu was exiled.⁶⁷ As Hans Frankel notes, this linkage exemplifies a "pattern of complementary pairs," of which there are no fewer than five in this "Yearning" poem alone.⁶⁸ Perhaps inspired by the temporally and spatially transcendent qualities of the trace, Du uses this pattern of complementarity to reach across time and space, to emplace himself in the context of a geography of exile. The indeterminate coordinates of the opening couplet have been refined to reflect the precise location of each man's exile.

Exile is, of course, always a radical *displacement*, an unmooring that deprives the exile of all familiar and internalized reference points. Yu Xin responds to his displacement by turning to geographical specificity, a linguistic search for spatial orientation in an unfamiliar world. Du often does the same, though in the above poem he turns instead to a method of spatial and temporal orientation that is based on his affinity with an exemplary literary exile from the past. This method functions through the mediation of the trace writ large—the transformation of the entire empire into the mark of exile—which links the displaced Du Fu with his displaced historical counterparts, just as the 'long' Yellow River maintains the faintest of connections between Yu Xin and the south. Because Du's counterparts were all native southerners, these links have the additional and unexpected effect of emplacing him as much in the south as in the north. As we shall see in the next chapter, by the Northern Song Dynasty, Du's southern connections came to dominate literati interest, helping to define a certain moral and literary image of the poet that spoke to contemporary concerns. An important corollary to this shift was the establishment of Du Fu as a figure of "local" fame in many of the cities, towns

⁶⁵ Mt. Hua is the tallest of the so-called Five Massifs 五岳, and is located approximately 75 miles east of modern day Xian, in Shaanxi Province.

⁶⁶ DSXZ 1288-9.

⁶⁷ In the "Lament for the Southland" Yu does in fact refer to the *guanhe* 關河, or [Within the] Passes and [Yellow] River, as the site of his senescence (提挈老幼，關河累年).

⁶⁸ Hans Frankel, *The Flowering Plum and the Palace Lady* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 121.

and villages through which he passed during his time in the south. Though still viewed as a homesick northerner, Du Fu was posthumously embedded in multiple locales by officials and writers who rebuilt his "former residences" (*guju*), established shrines and systematically detailed his lingering traces. As the next poem in the "Yearning" series demonstrates, Du Fu was already familiar with (and dubious of) this process.

The second poem in the "Yearning" series centers on Song Yu, a third century B.C.E. figure whose status as an historical person is now considered obscure, but to whom a number of hugely influential works are commonly attributed. A native of the southern state of Chu, Song Yu is the only figure mentioned in the series to never have experienced any kind of exile, though he is the putative author of works that are often read as treatments of the earlier Chu poet and archetypal political exile, Qu Yuan 屈原 (4th Century B.C.E.). Du's poem focuses on Song Yu as a figure of local fame whose work enshrined nearby landmarks as sites of enduring literary and cultural meaning. He mentions two of these landmarks by name—Song Yu's former residence and the Yang Terrace (*Yangtai* 陽台) atop Mt. Wu—and describes another more generally, as the "palaces" of Chu. Du calls into question the historical reliability of these specific sites and reflects on a process of diffusion or atomization by which the formerly unilocal trace, in this case a house, comes to signify throughout the landscape:

詠懷古跡，其二 **Yearning for the Traces of Antiquity, Second Poem**⁶⁹

搖落深知宋玉悲，	Meeting autumn's decay I well understand Song Yu's sorrow,
風流儒雅亦吾師。	A dashing romantic, learned and elegant, he too was my master.
悵望千秋一灑淚，	Despairingly I gaze across a thousand autumns and all of a
	sudden scatter tears,
蕭條異代不同時。	Forlorn and isolated in different ages—no contemporaries we.
江山故宅空文藻，	Though tales of your former home midst river and mountain are
	naught but empty ornament,
雲雨荒台豈夢思。	How could the clouds and rain by the ruined terrace have been
	merely a dream?
最是楚宮俱泯滅，	Most of all, the palaces of Chu have been effaced—
舟人指點到今疑。	When boatmen point their fingers they now do so uncertainly.

Unlike the first of the "Yearning" poems, the second focuses as much on physical as on literary traces. The location of Song Yu's house, however, varies depending on one's sources: some said that it could be found downriver, past the Gorges in Jiangling 江陵, others, including Zhao Cigong, author of an influential Southern Song commentary on Du's poetry, claimed that it was further west in Guizhou 歸州, which was part of Tang Kuizhou.⁷⁰ Du Fu is less sanguine about such accounts of structural integrity; he declares, somewhat ambiguously, that the palaces of Chu, situated as they are in the humid south, are "most of all" (*zui* 最是) completely "effaced" (*minmie* 泯滅). More to the point, attempts to identify his house as still

⁶⁹ *DSXZ*, 1501.

⁷⁰ When Yu Xin moved to Jiangling he is supposed to have lived in Song Yu's house. Some critics believe that the first poem in this series implicitly adopts Song Yu's house as its trace. I see no reason to accept such a specific reading, though it is likely that Du would have been aware of the story and that the house helps to connect the first and second poems.

standing are nothing more than "empty ornament" (*wenzao* 空文藻), bits of nonsense fabricated by locals and writers who wished to embellish their accounts of the landscape by exploiting Song's aura. Of course, though the structures are themselves empty or false traces, they do function as markers of Song Yu's continued fame as someone who produced literary texts (another common meaning of the term *wenzao*). We can only assume that Du Fu, as student of Song Yu, yearns for exactly this type of literary fame.

In contrast to the improbable claims surrounding Song's home, in the third couplet Du Fu cites the more easily identifiable ruins of the Yang Terrace (*Yangtai* 陽台), a structure located atop Mt. Wu, a peak to the north of the Wu Gorge downriver from Kuizhou:

雲雨荒台豈夢思。 How could the clouds and rain by the ruined terrace have been
merely a dream?

For Du Fu, the Yang Terrace seems to have a claim to reality with which Song Yu's "former residence" cannot compete. Though most famously described in Song Yu's "Gaotang Rhapsody" as the location of a sensual dream assignation between the poet Yu and the Goddess of Mt. Wu, the terrace's materiality is confirmed by its desolation (*huang* 荒), which outlives the oneiric source of its fame. A handful of his other Kuizhou poems, including the above "At Qutang Yearning for Antiquity," describe the Terrace as an integral and familiar, if secluded, part of the local landscape. Of course, Du's Terrace was simply the most famous of the many Yang Terraces scattered throughout the region.⁷¹ Terraces were built throughout the ancient state of Chu (and as far east as modern Anhui Province) in order to commemorate and give tangible form to at least one aspect of the events described in Song Yu's poem. The irony of Du Fu's claim is that his Yang Terrace is probably not, strictly speaking, the trace of the 'original' structure described in the earlier poem. The many Yang Terraces, like the many former residences of Song Yu, are examples of a common cultural desire to seek, and if necessary, fabricate, physical origins for poetic locations. As we shall see in the next chapter, this search for physical traces of famous historical figures exemplifies how literary discourse (especially the belief that poetry documents actual experiences, places and times) can concretely shape and transform the landscape. The "lexical landscapes and textual mountains" that Paul Kroll has described in another context had a way of materializing long after the poems had been written and their poets buried.

However we retrospectively classify these structures, in Du Fu's work they provide us with evidence of the varied aspects of the trace. For example, the house, classed with the "palaces of Chu," is victim to the irresistible forces of decay. While it lingers, the house-as-trace bears testament to these forces; it is a partial survival of an ancient manmade world that has all but disappeared. Because the house is linked to a specific time or historical individual, it is also a fragment of time, an extension of the past into the present. There is no better example of the trace as a fragment of time than the ruin, which retains tantalizing hints of a former integrality. The more durable stones of the terrace fulfill this role here, though they are by no means the only traces that inspire Du. The poem opens with two types of abstracted traces that have survived into Du Fu's age:

搖落深知宋玉悲， Meeting autumn's decay I well understand Song Yu's sorrow,

⁷¹ See Song Kaiyu's 宋開玉 *Du shi shi di* 杜詩釋地 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji chubanshe, 2004), 395-6 for more detailed information.

風流儒雅亦吾師。 A dashing romantic, learned and elegant, he too was my master.

Du begins with the same quotation from the *Chu'ci's* "Nine Disputations," traditionally attributed to Song Yu, that he uses to open the second "Western Tower" poem. "Autumn's decay" is a loose rendering of *yaoluo* 搖落, a phrase that (as discussed above) evokes a rich tradition of autumnal poetry and meditations on mortality. In the second line, Du borrows a list of qualities—dashing romantic, learned, elegant—from Yu Xin's "Rhapsody on a Barren Tree" (*Kushu fu* 枯樹賦) to describe Song Yu.⁷² Of course the most recognizable link between Song Yu and Yu Xin comes from Yu's own "Mourning the Southland" Rhapsody, which takes its title from a line in the *Chu'ci's* "Summoning the Soul" (*Zhao hun* 招魂), also attributed to Song Yu. Du reinforces these textual links between the two earlier poets with the addition of *yi* 亦 (too, also), which, like *zui* 最 in the opening poem, emphasizes the network of comparisons and interrelations that exist between Du and his various historical counterparts.

Though Song Yu's physical house no longer exists, traces of the poet's famed words and upright character have found new homes, first in Yu Xin's poetry and then in both the person and the poetry of Du Fu, who has taken Song as his "master" (*shi* 師). These words and traits, formulated poetically and transmitted textually, have attained a corporeal materiality that stands in stark, if ironic, contrast to the "empty" or "frivolous" (*kong* 空) textual accounts of Song's home. In their search for this structure, the pointing fingers of this poem's final lines overlook their own status as a metamorphosis of the house-as-trace:

最是楚宮俱泯滅， Most of all, the palaces of Chu all been effaced;
舟人指點到今疑。 When boatmen point their fingers they now do so uncertainly.

The house, which has already succumbed to oblivion, is atomized into these pointing fingers. And though there might not be anything to point at, that is only a temporary condition, for, as we shall see, literary traces have a way of metamorphosing into stone and wood.

In the fourth of the "Yearning" poems Du Fu focuses on Liu Bei, ruler of the kingdom of Shu and direct descendant of the Han royal house. In 222 Liu Bei traveled down the Yangzi towards the state of Wu, where he intended to avenge the death of his sworn brother in arms, Guan Yu 關羽 (d. 219). Encountering stiff resistance, Liu fled back upriver to the Kuizhou area, where he died, according to tradition, from disappointment and anger the following year. By the mid-8th century, nothing of Liu's regal structures remained, the only reminder of his presence a forlorn temple:

詠懷古跡，其四 **Yearning for the Traces of Antiquity, Fourth Poem**⁷³

蜀主窺吳幸三峽， The ruler of Shu, eying Wu, graced The Three Gorges,
崩年亦在永安宮。 The year he passed he too was at the Palace of Eternal Peace.
翠華想像空山裏， I can imagine his kingfisher pennants in these empty mountains,
玉殿虛無野寺中。 Though his jade palaces are naught but illusions within this rustic temple.

⁷² *Yu Zishan jizhu*, 46. See also McCraw, *Du Fu's Lament from the South*, 187.

⁷³ *DSXZ*, 1505.

古廟杉松巢水鶴， In the ancient shrine's cypress and pine nest cranes,
 歲時伏臘走村翁。 Yearly at times of sacrifice come scurrying old village men.
 武侯祠屋常鄰近， The martial lord's ancestral temple will forever be nearby,
 一體君臣祭祀同。 One body—lord and servant—their temple offerings the same.

Du Fu treats Liu Bei with the respectful language due an emperor, a figure who does not simply visit, but "graces" (*xing* 幸), and who does not die, but "crumbles" or "topples" (*beng* 崩), as does a mountain. For Liu, as for Du Fu, The Three Gorges were to be a temporary stop on a longer journey, first east and then north. Unlike Du, however, Liu never managed to pass through Kuimen's gate; he died in more or less the very spot in which Du Fu wrote this poem. The opening couplet reflects on Liu's disappointment from an historical perspective, describing the topographical coordinates of an ancient struggle for power and using an archaic name for a place that Du also knew as Yufu 魚復, Kuizhou and Baidi. This perspective, along with his use of language normally reserved for an emperor, has the initial effect of distancing the poet from his topic. Yet just as the *zui* 最 (most) of the first poem sets up an explicit comparison and link between Du Fu and Yu Xin, and the *yi* 亦 of the second poem links Song Yu and Yu Xin, the *yi* 亦 (also, too; still) in the second line of this poem overcomes both hierarchy and historical distance to join Du and Liu. That it joins them in a place doubly marked by death (Kuizhou is where Liu died and was buried) foreshadows the closing couplet's reminder of the unbreakable bonds between ruler and minister.

Initial retrospection yields to imaginative projection in the second couplet:

翠華想像空山裏， I can imagine his kingfisher pennants in these empty mountains,
 玉殿虛無野寺中。 Though his jade palaces are naught but illusions within this rustic temple

Here, confronted by empty mountains and a secluded temple, Du Fu conjures mental images: first, of Liu Bei's "kingfisher pennants" (*cuihui* 翠華), brilliantly iridescent standards often used metonymically in poetry to refer to an emperor; and then, of his "jade palaces" (*yudian* 玉殿). These images flicker across the surface of the landscape, momentarily superimposing vivid traces of an ancient and ill-fated imperial presence onto the desolate spaces of Du Fu's exile. As in his other temple poems, Du Fu is explicit in combining the real (*shi* 實) landscape with imaginative (*xu* 虛) projections, a reflection perhaps of his belief in the ritual function of the temple as a space that perpetuates presence in the face of absence. Here, he fuses the present and the past by "imagining forms" (*xiangxiang* 想像) and conjuring the "empty and absent" (*xuwu* 虛無). This produces both a convincingly material and a definitively abstract experience of space as bearing a ritually constituted trace of Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang's relationship.

Though lonely, the temple and shrine are not actually empty, however: they are the site of symbiotic relationships between the local villagers who maintain the twice-yearly sacrifices and the cranes that nest in the pine and cypress trees that lend the setting its venerable atmosphere. More importantly, the shrine is not an isolated structure, but rather one part of an indivisible whole, a single "body" (*ti* 體) comprised of "lord and servant" (*junchen* 君臣):

武侯祠屋常鄰近， The martial lord's ancestral temple will forever be nearby,
 一體君臣祭祀同。 One body—lord and servant—their temple offerings the same.

The "servant" here is Zhuge Liang, the so-called Marshal Marquis (*wuhou* 武侯), a native of the region who served as Liu's illustrious but ultimately thwarted military strategist.⁷⁴ The "single body," a phrase that comes from Zhuge Liang's one claim to literary immortality, the "Memorial on Sending out the Troops" (*Chushi biao* 出師表),⁷⁵ represents the perfect union of the imperial and bureaucratic, an ideal of the ruler-minister bond that continued to shape Du Fu's sense of poetic self long after official service had become an impossible dream. The two temples, joined by the shared experiences of their dedicatees, stand as historical traces that vindicate Du Fu's dream of idealized service. Like all traces, the temples are both a presence that marks an absence and a material invitation to turn back one's head, to conjure up a mirage-like past where there are now only cranes and old men.

IV. Conclusion: Time's Traces

The trace allows Du Fu to transcend, if only temporarily, the erasure of time. Yet it does little to solve the poet's most pressing concern: his displacement. When Du Fu turns his head away from The Three Gorges, he longs not for those men and women who left their literary marks on the southern landscape, but for his former home in the north.⁷⁶ In the iconic "Autumn Meditations 秋興八首" series, this act of looking back forces Du Fu to confront both

⁷⁴ The shrines to Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang were favorite refuges of Du's during his tenure in Kuizhou. He refers to his frequent visits (*liuru* 屢入) to the latter's memorial structure in "Zhuge's Shrine 諸葛廟" (DSXZ 1674) and describes an autumnal visit to Liu's shrine in "Visiting the Former Ruler's Shrine 謁先主廟" (DSXZ 1353). See also, Chen, *Du Fu ping zhuan*, 881 for theories on the proximity of Du Fu's Rangxi 襄西 residence to Zhuge Liang's shrine.

⁷⁵ See *Wenxuan*, v.4, 1671.

⁷⁶ Du Fu did not just reflect idly on the past. From the moment he left the north he also looked to the future, to the possibility that he might return home. In "Upon Hearing that the Armies had Recovered Henan and Hebei 聞官軍收河南河北," written in 763, Du rejoices at news of an imperial victory over the rebels that might open the way for his return. Tragically, his frantic optimism proved futile:

劍外忽傳收薊北，	From beyond Swordgate Pass suddenly comes news that we've retaken Jibei,
初聞涕淚滿衣裳。	When I first hear this tears drench my robe.
卻看妻子愁何在，	But when I turn to look at my wife and child, where is there any sorrow?
漫捲詩書喜欲狂。	Slowly I roll up my poems and books, so happy I'm nearly crazed.
白日放歌須縱酒，	In broad daylight I let loose in song and must drink with abandon,
青春作伴好還鄉。	Greenest spring will be our companion—how right for a journey home.
即從巴峽穿巫峽，	Starting forthwith, following the Ba Gorges we'll pass through Wu Gorge,
便下襄陽向洛陽。	And then from Xiangyang we'll head toward Luoyang! (DSXZ 968)

Even after leaving Kuizhou he continued to harbor both the desire and the plan to return north, as in "Dreams of Returning Home 夢歸" (DSXZ, 1950), which is dated to 769. His fixation on the past by no means precluded thoughts of the future, however. More than almost any other poet in the tradition, Du Fu's work can be molded into a complete narrative, both as the poet's intentional construction and as a critical imposition on a body of individual works. This is a narrative of longing and journeying, of the past of Chang'an and the future exemplified by Du's post-Kuizhou "Southern Journey" (*nanzheng* 南征). In *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection*, a book on narrative that nonetheless offers many insights into the issues under discussion here, Susan Stewart has written that "the location of desire, or, more particularly, the direction of force in the desiring narrative, is always a future-past, a deferment of experience in the direction of origin and thus eschaton, the point where narrative begins/ends, both engendering and transcending the relation between materiality and meaning." See *On Longing* (1993), x.

his exile from Chang'an and the fragmentation of the glorious culture in which he came of age.⁷⁷ Hallucinatory visions of abandoned finery in imperial gardens and glimpses of the sovereign's impossibly bright person alternate with images of the chill Gorges, desolate and drained of all color. In the end, no matter how far Du's mind's eye wanders away from Kuizhou, his actual gaze falls always on the mountains, rivers and lakes of the south.

The poems above sometimes conceal this fact, underplaying the Gorges as a physical boundary in order to bring out their other guises: as a single, epic monument to (and product of) an historical deed; as the product of gradual natural forces; as the site of mythological lore and a rich historical legacy. In each case, however, the Gorges function for Du Fu as the site of an attempt to discern and give shape to patterns of order within chaos, to wrest meaning from the invisible, and to emplace through displacement. This is a project of orientation that relies on the Gorges as trace: both a powerfully empty and atmospherically nebulous landscape and a symbolically solid, and thus stable monument. As Du Fu looks out from Kuizhou at the hazy, cloud-cloaked mountains and river of the Gorges, he sends his gaze ever deeper: across those clouds and through the river's water into the depths of history and to the distant reaches of the empire.

In the poem that closes this chapter, the second of the "Autumn Meditations," Du Fu addresses his readers directly, asking them to join him on his journey. Though primarily centered in Kuizhou, this poem exposes the mental and visual processes whereby Chang'an creeps first into consciousness and then into view. As in the fourth "Yearning" poem, this occurs through a fleeting and hallucinatory superimposition of the past onto the present scene, though here, superimposition emerges out of habitual sickbed reverie and not the active conjuring of forms (*xiangxiang* 想像):

秋興，其二

Autumn Meditations, Poem Two

夔府孤城落日斜，	When on the lone city of Kuifu slants the setting sun,
每依北斗望京華。	I always follow the Northern Dipper to gaze towards the capital.
聽猿實下三聲淚，	Hearing gibbons I actually shed 'three cry' tears,
奉使虛隨八月槎。	Sent out to serve—in vain I follow the path of the eighth month raft.
畫省香爐違伏枕，	The painted ministry's fragrant censers depart from my invalid's pillow,
山樓粉堞隱悲笳。	The mountain hall's battlements conceal a mournful flute.
請看石上藤蘿月，	Please look—atop the rock, the vine and creeper moon
已映洲前蘆荻花。	Already illumes the reed flowers that stand before the islet.

This poem is defined by a subtle back-and-forth motion in which reverie temporarily draws Du Fu away from the south only to fade and return him, recumbent and ill, to Kuizhou. Du begins

⁷⁷ For a classic structural reading of this series, refer to Yu-Kung Kao and Tsu-Lin Mei's excellent article, "'Tu Fu's 'Autumn Meditations': An Exercise in Linguistic Criticism," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 28 (1968), 44-80. Kao and Mei provide a finely grained reading of the syntax, grammar and prosody of the series, with a focus on ambiguity, as well as a global reading of patterns and parallelism in the series. See also Ye Jiaying's 葉嘉瑩 compendium of commentary on the "Meditations," which includes frequent summaries and appraisals by the editor and runs to an impressive 575 pages: *Du Fu Qiuqing bashou jishuo* 杜甫秋興八首集說 (Shanghai: Shanghai guji, 1988).

by setting the time of day, dusk, and location, Kuizhou, on which the rays of the setting slant. By the second line, the sun has faded and been replaced by the pinpoint lights of the stars in the Big Dipper, which draw Du Fu's gaze and mind away from Kuizhou. This balance of light that moves towards and draws away from Kuizhou is no momentary observation: it is a pattern that marks the monotony of Du's exile. Indeed, he is careful to note that this outward gaze is a nightly pattern, something that he "always" (*mei* 每) does.⁷⁸

As the series progresses, especially in the final four poems, the reader is rewarded with ever more elaborate images of the Chang'an that resides at the end of Du Fu's gaze (*wang* 望). Here, however, his line of sight does not yet connect fully. In the second couplet, one of the more allusive of the series, Du Fu returns mournfully to The Three Gorges:

聽猿實下三聲淚， Hearing gibbons I actually shed 'three cry' tears,
奉使虛隨八月槎。 Sent out to serve—in vain I follow the path of the eighth month
raft.

The first line refers to one of a number of famous folk songs that are included in Li Daoyuan's 酈道元 (d. 527) influential annotation (*zhu* 注) to the *Shuijing* 水經, a 3rd Century record of the waterways of post-Han China. Alongside Du Fu and Song Yu's poetry, Li's text is the source of many of the most familiar images and citations found in poetry written on the Gorges.⁷⁹ In the above couplet, Du Fu puts a poignantly personal slant on a folk song recorded in Li's text:

每至晴初霜旦，林寒澗肅，常有高猿長嘯，屬引淒異，空谷傳響，哀轉久絕，故漁者歌曰：巴東三峽巫峽長，猿鳴三聲淚沾裳。

Whenever the weather clears or the day dawns with frost, within forests chill and by streams swift, one often hears the long cries of lofty gibbons. Unbroken and eerie, the sound echoes through the empty valleys, its mournfulness fading only after a long time. For this reason the

⁷⁸ When Du describes the daily experience of life in Kuizhou and its environs in the first half of the next "Meditation" (Qiu, 1489) he relies on repetitive language that creates a sense of stagnation and cyclical movement:

千家山郭靜朝暉， The mountain town of a thousand homes lies still in morning's shimmer,
日日江樓坐翠微。 Day after day in this river hall I sit midst the mountain's verdure.
信宿漁人還汎汎， Fisherman spending the night abroad still bob along,
清秋燕子故飛飛。 Swallows of purest autumn linger still, flying to and fro.
匡衡抗疏功名薄， As a Kuang Heng struggling to remonstrate—my deeds and merit are meager,
劉向傳經心事違。 As a Liu Xiang transmitting classics—so far from the affairs of my heart's
desire.

同學少年多不賤， As for the classmates of my youth, most are not lowly,
五陵衣馬自輕肥。 At Wuling their clothes and horses are respectively light and hearty.

⁷⁹ The *Shuijing zhu* has a complex textual history that is compounded by Li Daoyuan's tendency to borrow the language of earlier texts without indicating his source. Wang Liqun has argued convincingly that the *Shuijing zhu* passage that contains this folk song, one of the most famous in the whole text, actually originated in the earlier *Jingzhou ji* 荊州記, by the Liu Song 劉宋 Dynasty (420-479) scholar Zhao Shenghong 昭盛弘 (?). He also suggests that Zhao was himself deeply influenced by an Eastern Jin 東晉 Dynasty (317-420) text that describes the Gorges in similar terms, Yuan Shansong's 袁山松 (d.401) "*Yidu shanchuan ji* 宜都山川記." See Wang Liqun 王立群, *Zhongguo gudai shanshui youji yanjiu* 中國古代山水游記研究 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 2007), 41-56. For an excellent summary of the uncertainties surrounding the *Shuijing zhu*, see Michael Nylan, "Wandering in the Land of Ruins: the *Shuijing zhu* 水經注 (Water Classic Commentary) Revisited" *Interpretation and Literature in Early Medieval China*, ed. Alan K.C. Chan (Albany: SUNY Press, 2010).

fishermen [of the area] sing: "Of Badong's Three Gorges, Wu Gorges is longest; when the gibbon thrice cries, tears will drench your gown."

By 766 this song had been a poetic cliché for centuries—cited as an authentic bit of local flavor, it had become more an invocation of the *Shuijing zhu* than evidence of personal knowledge of the Gorges and their appearance. By contrast, Du's reference hinges on his authentic experience of the song, on his claim that when he hears the local gibbons' raucous cries he "really" (*shi* 實) does shed the tears described in the song.⁸⁰ To carefully look at and listen to the landscape is to discern the traces of a literary discourse that subtends and validates the physical and vice versa.

Naturally, the second component of the *shi/xu* pair appears in the next line, where the reality of Du Fu's tears (and the *shi*-ness of the Gorges) is paired with the emptiness of his dreams of service (and the *xu*-ness of a Chang'an that cannot yet quite materialize). In the fourth line Du Fu refers to a famous and famously confused Tang poetic reference, one that conflates two separate tales of celebrated journeys. The first records an actual historical expedition taken by a Han emissary, Zhang Qian 張騫 (d.114 B.C.E.), who was sent to the far west to search for the origins of the Yellow River, where he was captured by the Xiongnu. The second is the story of a man who lived along a coast, by which a mysterious raft passed every year during the eighth month. One year he decided to climb aboard the boat, and after a lengthy trip he reached a strange city, where he found first a girl busy at her weaving and then a young cowherd leading an ox. When he asked the latter where they were, the boy sent him in search of a resident of the state of Chu who eventually explained that the man had actually hitched a ride on the "traveler star," which passes through the Milky Way and the cowherd constellation at the same time every year.

Du's line clearly refers to both the Zhang Qian who was "sent out in service" (*fengshi* 奉使) and the man who traveled through space on an empty star-raft. In the first case, we are reminded of Du Fu's failed attempts to make his mark through the deeds of service. In the second, the "eighth month raft" builds on the celestial journey home that Du Fu "vainly traces" (*xusui* 虛隨) night after night, as well as the trope of referring to the capital and its palaces as celestial precincts. Though his dreams might transport him temporarily north, Du indulges his imagination in vain: Chang'an seems within reach, but the sound of the hidden mournful flute wakes him, causing the fragile image of the "painted ministry" to evaporate. Once awake, Du Fu finds that he is once again located somewhere in between—sleeping and waking, north and south, *shi* and *xu*, his sickbed and the imperial censorate, heaven and earth.

This realization intrudes on the final couplet, when Du Fu, like a man suffering from hallucinations, calls on his readers to witness a strange temporal collapse:

請看石上藤蘿月， Please look—atop the rock, the vine and creeper moon
已映洲前蘆荻花。 Already illumes the reed flowers that stand before the islet.

These lines are conventionally read as showing the passage of time (and that effect is certainly intended), but the disjunction of time, space and memory that pervades the couplet is far more

⁸⁰ Stephen Owen identifies a similar gesture of verification or personal confirmation in Xie Lingyun's "Entering Huazi Hill, the Third Valley of Hemp Stream 入華子崗是麻源第三谷," where Xie alludes to the *Chuci*'s "On Far Roaming" (*Yuanyou* 遠遊) in order to confirm "the claims of an old text in his own experience." See "Librarian in Exile," 206.

anguished than this reading lets on.⁸¹ Du Fu has lost, miss(lay)ed the time it took for the light of the moon to move from the vines atop the stones to the reed flowers before the islet, and he calls to his readers for confirmation of his loss. This gap, like the other intermediary positions that Du Fu so often inhabits, is a non-space, a realm of dreams and loss. The physical gesture and his request for the reader to look with him (*qingkan* 請看) is a pre-requisite of the emotional/mental journey that follows. To look at the world around him is to transcend that world and to journey elsewhere. The physical space into which he looks, and the undifferentiated atmospheric effects that he sees there, serve as media for the projection of the spatially and temporally distant world of Chang'an. Though his memories are ephemeral, the connection between Kuizhou and Chang'an is never arbitrary: it is made possible by Du Fu's conception of the Tang as an integral space, defined by a symbolic geography that registers even at the edges of empire. And yet, despite the continuing power of this symbolic geography, Chang'an as historically, mythologically and politically intact space is accessible to Du Fu only through a temporary state of reverie.

⁸¹ See Ye Jiaying's *Du Fu Qixing bashou jishuo*, 149-161; Kao and Mei's essay has been particularly helpful with my reading of these lines. See 52-3.

From Trace to Record: The Three Gorges in the Song Dynasty

'Our' space thus remains qualified (and qualifying) beneath the sediments left behind by history, by accumulation, by quantification. The qualities in question are qualities *of space*, not (as latter-day representation suggests) qualities embedded *in space*.

—Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 230

Introduction

On the 27th of June, 1177, the statesman, diarist and poet Fan Chengda set off from Chengdu on a four-month journey that would take him down the Min River, along the Yangzi and on to the city of Pingjiang, or modern day Suzhou. On August 8, 1177, about a month and a half after his departure, he entered what he calls the "road to the Gorges" (*xialu* 峽路):

Gengxu day. Set off from Nipei, traveled 60 *li* and reached Gong County. From here we entered the road to the Gorges. Generally speaking, moving from Western Chuan to Eastern Chuan the customs are already different. Once you reach the road to the Gorges, they become increasingly rough. When Gong was made a county, it was situated atop an enormous stone base. At the height of summer there is no water and the ground vapors are poisonous and torrid, like coal smoldering in an oven. On both land and water there are miasmas, though the air over water is especially poisonous. The people here tend to develop goiters, which are especially prevalent among women. From here to Zigui it is all like this. In the time of unbroken peace [i.e. the Northern Song] this area was called the Chuan Gorges, though of course this now refers to a different era altogether. When fighting arose, a Senior Command Inspectorate was established here and the region came to be known by the composite name Sichuan [literally, Four "Chuan," or Rivers]. Yet despite this, in laws and regulations it is still referred to as the Chuan Gorges. We moored the boat for a short rest at Bao'en Temple, but it was just impossible to escape the heat. Though I have never in my life been able to handle the summer heat, I have never experienced a day such as this one.

庚戌。發泥培。六十里，至恭州。自此入峽路。大抵自西川至東川，風土已不同，至峽路益陋矣。恭為州乃在一大磐石上，盛夏無水，土氣毒熱如爐炭燔灼，山水皆有瘴，而水氣尤毒。人喜生癭，婦人尤多。自此至秭歸皆然。承平時謂之川峽，自不同年而語。軍興，置大帥司，始總名四川。然法令科條，猶稱川峽。泊舟小憩報恩寺，熱亦不可逃。生平不堪暑，未有如此日者。¹

¹ *Fan Chengda biji liuzhong* 范成大筆記六種, ed. Kong Fanli 孔凡禮 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 214; abbreviated as *FCDBJ* hereafter. All translations are my own. For official and administrative titles, however, I have usually followed James Hargett's translation of the *Wu chuan lu*, *Riding the River Home* (Hong Kong: The

This overview of the middle portion of the Yangzi comes from Fan's account of his journey, the *Wu chuan lu* 吳船錄 (*Record of a Wu Boat*), one of the earliest and best known examples of the long-length travel diary (*youji* 遊記).² Detailing a journey of 122 days in 16,700 characters, 110 entries and two *juan* 卷 (or "books"), Fan's "record" is the prototypical Southern Song (1127-1279) travel diary: a lengthy affair, broken into dated entries and preoccupied—sometimes pedantically so—with the detailing of sites of political, historical, commercial, religious and cultural interest along the writer's route. By nature episodic and heterogeneous, the diary is considered a distinct genre more by bibliographic necessity than formal or topical continuity.³ Rather than the well-trod path of an established literary form, it offered writers a constantly shifting geographic frame for the display of a wide range of knowledge and literary skill. In the above excerpt, for example, Fan Chengda tells us almost nothing about his actual journey, focusing instead on the topography of the area, its insalubrious climate, its endemic health problems and the history of its official name in the context of the fall of the Northern Song.

Yet what little he does say about the journey is essential to our understanding of not only the *Wu chuan lu*, but also the larger culture of travel writing after the Tang Dynasty:⁴

We moored the boat for a short rest at Bao'en Temple, but it was just impossible to escape the heat. Though I have never in my life been able to handle the summer heat, I have never experienced a day such as this one.

Fan's final comments confirm the general information that he provides on the climate of Gong County, while also reminding us that his text is a record of personal action rather than a compendium of geographical knowledge. It is Fan's intolerance for the heat—simultaneously the most biographically vivid and seemingly insignificant aspect of this passage—that conveys this essential fact. Indeed, the accuracy and legitimacy of his earlier statements are contingent

Chinese University Press, 2008). Hargett's bibliography provides an excellent introduction to the main editions of *Wu chuan lu* as well as relevant commentaries and translations in Chinese, English and Japanese.

² Fan penned three diaries. This first, *Lan pei lu* 攬轡錄, is a semi-official account of the embassy from the Southern Song court to the Jurchen court at Yanshan 燕山 (present-day Beijing) that he led in 1170; the second, *Can luan lu* 駢鸞錄, details the journey he took in 1173 in order to assume office at Jingjiang fu 靜江府 (present-day Guilin); the third and most famous, *Wu chuan lu*, is the topic of this chapter. Fan found fame not only as a travel diarist however, but also (and primarily) as a poet, scholar of local and natural history and amateur botanist (he was the author of the first treatise on the Chinese apricot (*mei* 梅)). The above texts are all collected in *FCDBJ*.

³ In other words, the long-length travel diary is more a hodgepodge of other prose and poetic forms than a distinct generic form. The study of the generic development of travel and travel literature, especially in the Song Dynasty, is of increasing scholarly interest, both in English and Chinese. Useful works include: Wang Fuxin's *Song dai liyou yanjiu* 宋代旅遊研究 (Baoding: Hebei da xue chubanshe, 2007) and Cheng Minsheng's *Song dai di yu wen hua* 宋代地域文化 (Kaifeng: Henan daxue chubanshe, 1997) in Chinese; and James M. Hargett's growing catalog of annotated translations of Fan Chengda's travel diaries, in English (see bibliography). In addition, there have been two substantive Ph.D. dissertations on Fan Chengda's travel writings, neither of which have been published in book form: Beryl Chapman's *Travel Diaries of the Southern Sung Dynasty with Particular Reference to Fan Chengda's Wuchuan lu* (master's thesis, University of Sydney, 1985), which makes extensive use of Fan's poetry; and Deborah Marie Rudolph's *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition in Travel Writing of the Southern Song: A Study of Fan Cheng-ta's "Wu chuan lu"* (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996), which provides an excellent introduction to the history of travel writing. For a thorough published source on this same topic, see Richard E. Strassberg's introduction to his *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

⁴ Cong Ellen Zhang's *Transformative Journeys: Travel and Culture in Song China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2011), provides the best introduction to this broader topic, and is especially rich in information on the infrastructural, logistical and political developments that helped spur travel culture and writing during the Song.

on the author's corporeal experience, which demonstrates that his knowledge is actually firsthand. Fan's reference to his own suffering also unintentionally echoes another famous (and by now familiar) sojourner from Chinese history: Yu the Great. After tirelessly laboring to end the floods and traveling the post-diluvian realm, Yu is said have developed a limp, or what came to be called "Yu's step" (*Yubu* 禹步).⁵ Like the imprints of his feet (*Yuji* 禹跡), "Yu's step" is a reminder that this inaugural inscription of the realm was the product of a quasi-human body moving through space. Though Fan's goals, methods and ends differ from Yu's, his inscription of the landscape is equally contingent on physical presence and action.

Physical presence is also a precondition for a related activity in which Fan enthusiastically participates: the careful reinscription of the kind of indeterminate and fading traces (*ji* 跡) that Du Fu embraces in his Kuizhou poetry. In taking this on, Fan assumes a central position in the Song practice of "fixing" (in both senses of the word) culturally significant landscapes according to aesthetic and scholarly standards of reading, writing and looking. Based on immediate experience, this method of writing about space and place is usually traced to the development of the "travel essay" (also called *youji* 遊記) during the late Tang and early Song, especially Liu Zongyuan's (773-819) "Eight Accounts of Yongzhou" (*Yongzhou baji* 永州八記).⁶ The "Eight Accounts," which describe land Liu purchased and improved through intensive landscaping during his exile in Hunan, were written between 809 and 812 and are famous not only for their lyrical evocation of exilic experience, but also for Liu's near cartographic description of the landscape. Though Fan's diary and the works discussed below are similarly meticulous, they focus not on private spaces and experiences, but on famous places that were public (if only by virtue of their fame) and on experiences they knew would be repeated: excursions to landmarks mentioned in the poetry of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian, pilgrimages to the former homes of Du Fu and Bai Juyi, ascents of major mountains and journeys through the Three Gorges. Instead of textually mapping unfamiliar places (and possibly making them famous in the process), Fan and his peers judge the appearance of the landscape against well-known literary works and narratives, and in the case of Du Fu's former homes, lay out the coordinates of a route for cultural pilgrimage and worship.⁷ By actively contributing in this way to the production of landscapes for cultural tourism, their writings also changed how and why certain people moved through space.

When viewed from this perspective, even the qualities of objective observation and description often attributed to the general category of Song "travel writing" must be carefully reconsidered. Rather than convenient evidence of a proto-scientific manifestation of the Song intellectual embrace of *gewu* 格物 ("investigating things"), observation and description, along with reading and writing, were tools in the *production* of spaces of cultural devotion.⁸ It should

⁵ This phrase was later adopted to describe the dance movements used in shamanistic rituals

⁶ For more on Liu Zongyuan's influence on the development of the Song travel diary and essay see: James Hargett, *On the Road in Twelfth Century China: The Travel Diaries of Fan Chengda* (1126-1193) (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag Wiesbaden, 1989), 17-25. For information on anthologies of travel writing, see Richard E. Strassberg's *Inscribed Landscapes*, Introduction and throughout. On the specific lyrical qualities of Liu's famous works and the Tang essay in general, see: Rudolph, *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition*, 6-7.

⁷ This purposiveness also distinguishes their works from texts that inadvertently generated imitative and quasi-cultic traditions, such as Ouyang Xiu's "Account of the Drunk Codger's Pavillion" (*Zuizheng ting ji* 醉翁亭記) or Su Shi's two rhapsodies on Red Cliff (*Chibi* 赤壁).

⁸ I do not wish to suggest a break with previous examples of spatial writing or downplay the importance of philosophical currents on the travel writers of the Song. In the introduction to his *Inscribed Landscapes: Travel Writing from Imperial China*, Richard Strassberg frames Song travel writing (and Northern Song monumental landscape painting) as a manifestation of *gewu*, suggesting that "this philosophical outlet was reflected in a greater

come as no surprise then that many of Fan's most meticulous demonstrations of observational and textual skill take Du Fu as their object. Not only was much of the Tang poet's best-known work intimately associated with different parts of Sichuan, but Du Fu's name had just recently ascended to the heights of the poetic pantheon, during the Northern Song.⁹ There were, in short, still plenty of things to be said about the man, his work and their connections to the southern landscape, all of which cast a long but productive shadow on poets of the 11th and 12th centuries.¹⁰ In one of Fan's more narrowly focused reflections on Du, from his stay in Rongzhou (modern Yibin 宜賓, Sichuan Province), he writes:

Both banks are mostly covered in lychee groves. The former name for the commandery's wine is "layered azure," which is taken from the following line in Du Zimei's "Rongzhou"¹¹ poem: "Layered azure – I lift the spring wine / Delicate scarlet – I pluck from the lychee branch." I found the character for "layered" unsuitable for naming a wine, so I changed its name to "spring azure". In printed editions [of Du Fu's works] "lift" [*nian* 拈] is sometimes given as "buy/sell" [*gu* 沽], and in the commandery there is a stele that has the character for "sticky" [*nian* 粘].

兩岸多荔枝林。郡醞舊名「重碧」，取杜子美《戎州》詩「重碧拈春酒，輕紅擘荔枝」之句。余謂「重」字不宜名酒，為更名「春碧」。印本「拈」或作「沽」，郡有碑本，乃作「粘」字。¹²

Fan performs two complementary types of emendation here, one interpretive and the other textual. The first corrects the "unsuitable" (*buyi* 不宜) application of Du Fu's words by the natives of Rongzhou to the name of the local brew. Fan's judgment of what is proper or appropriate (*yi* 宜) in this spatially and culturally peripheral context depends on his elite cultural and political status and on his familiarity with canons of taste. What is also under investigation here is the proper functioning of the process of extraction (*qu* 取, translated above as "taken"), in which a phrase ("layered azure") is taken from a geographically specific original source (Du Fu's Rongzhou poem) and used to name a material object associated with that locale (Rongzhou's wine). Du Fu's initial poetic invention and descriptive evocation inspires a local act of making-real that serves as an enduring trace of Du Fu's former presence in Rongzhou. Fan, perfectly familiar with this process (it is a very old and common one in the Chinese tradition),

motivation to observe and record the world" (46). Strassberg also rightly notes that the investigation of the natural world was seen as an integral part of self-cultivation, a venerable idea that is present in the works discussed here. In the Song iteration of this idea, nature is comprised of cosmic "patterns" (*li* 理) that order both intellectual principles and normative political structures. One must be careful not to forget, however, the equally powerful tendency to alter and manipulate the natural world, to inscribe "patterns" and "principles" rather than simply observe and record them. I am focusing here primarily on this active and transformative approach to space. For more on Song philosophy and the complexities of *gewu*, see: Hoyt Tillman Cleveland, "The Idea and the Reality of the 'Thing' During the Song: Philosophical Attitudes Towards Wu," in *The Bulletin of Song and Yuan Studies* 14 (1978), 68-82.

⁹ There is a great deal of secondary scholarship on Du's posthumous literary trajectory. Perhaps the best book-length source in English is Eva Shan Chou's *Reconsidering Du Fu*, though David Palumbo-Liu's study of Huang Tingjian's literary theory, *The Poetics of Appropriation*, provides a more focused case study of how and why Du Fu rose to prominence in the Northern Song. In Chinese, Cai Zhennian provides a systematic account of Du Fu reception in the Tang and Song: *Du Fu Tang Song jieshou shi* 杜甫唐宋接受史 (Taipei: Wunan tushu chubanshe, 2001).

¹⁰ For example, the title of Fan's diary comes from a quatrain by Du Fu (*DSXZ* 1143).

¹¹ Fan is referring to Du Fu's "Banqueting Rongzhou's Governor Yang in the Eastern Tower 宴戎州楊使君東樓," *DSXZ* 1221.

¹² *FCDBJ* 212.

but dissatisfied with the local effort, draws on his own skills to rename the Rongzhou wine, thereby emending the relationship between poetic language, spatial context and material object.

The second (and less definitive) act of emendation refers to variants for the character *nian* 拈 (to pluck or lift), which is cited as part of Du Fu's poem. Though Fan explains that these alternatives—the homophonous *nian* 粘 (sticky) and the orthographically similar *gu* 沽 (to buy or sell wine)—are found in printed (*yinben* 印本) and carved editions (*beiben* 碑本) of Du's poem, he makes no effort to select the most "appropriate" of the options. This is strange because Fan's previous aesthetic judgment and his reference to multiple versions of the same line lead one to expect some manner of textual judgment. His focus on the media of print and stone carving is equally confusing: not only are these material forms that demand and produce "fixed" texts, they are sources that might be used to "fix" obviously erroneous or infelicitous phrasing in received texts. The stone inscription is particularly suggestive in this regard, both because of its material weight and durability and because it is found in close proximity to the spot where Du Fu wrote his original poem. Why, after presenting data that suggests that Du Fu's lines might be altered using information gathered "on site," does Fan do nothing? Perhaps the answer is as simple as this: the alternatives do not make as much sense, semantically and aesthetically, as the version that Fan cites.¹³

This fairly minor episode helps to illuminate both the ways in which texts and authors are fixed and emplaced, and also how the skills of the literary and textual scholar might be used to intervene in that emplacement. I introduced the concept of emplacement in the previous chapter, where it refers to Du Fu's attempts to counter his experience of displacement, and will return to it in greater detail in following two chapters, where I use it to analyze the endangered relationship between people and place in Jia Zhangke's and Yunfei Ji's depictions of the Three Gorges. Here, as in these other contexts, emplacement refers to an ideal relationship in which people or things and space exist in a state of mutual (and mutually constitutive) embrace. Grounded in a rejection of the Cartesian view of space as an empty container waiting to be filled, emplacement presupposes a view of space as an historically variable entity that is the product of social practices, especially those entailed by different economic, political and representational systems. This approach transforms not only our understanding of space, but of man-made objects and social practices, which, as Henri Lefebvre puts it, we must not consider "qualities embedded *in space*" but as "qualities *of space*."¹⁴ That is, as qualities that produce and make knowable what we call space, place and landscape.¹⁵ The key productive practices for

¹³ For a compelling biographically inspired reading of Du Fu's poem and its role in Fan's diary see: Rudolph, *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition*, 167-171.

¹⁴ *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), 230.

¹⁵ There are a great many difficulties and ambiguities involved in the language used to discuss space. What, for example is the distinction between space and place? Does landscape refer only to representations of space and/or place? How do we experience (intellectually, affectively, phenomenologically) all of these things? These questions are the concern of a large and varied scholarly literature. I have addressed some of them in the previous chapter and will turn to others in the next chapter. Here, I will make only a few clarifications: First, as the above quote from Lefebvre suggests, space should not be considered as something empty and ready to be filled. It is the product of the social practices, relations and ideologies that structure human life and the natural world. The space that fascinated Lefebvre was not ideal or abstract, but rather the historically contextualized space of capitalism as bodied forth in the artistic and architectural practice of scientific perspective that originated in the Italian Renaissance. For the Song Dynasty figures under discussion here, space is defined both by a rich and normative representational legacy as influential as perspective in European culture and also a system of imperial governance based on the constant movement of the officials through the realm. Second, the primary difference here between space and place is that the latter bears a proper name, while the former does not. This is, of course, an

Fan—reading, writing, printing, painting, epigraphy, travel—are equally crucial as tools that adjudicate and alter the terms of emplacement by fixing the proper balance among language, representation and place, as in his intervention in the naming of the Rongzhou wine.¹⁶

In an age when scholar-officials often spent their entire adult lives moving from official appointment to official appointment,¹⁷ the emplacement of texts and their authors must have represented a poignant kind of rootedness, a reminder of someone else's peripatetic existence that takes the form of an enduring "local" landmark. Here we discover also the great irony of the gazetteer (*di fang zhi* 地方誌), a genre that took its definitive form in the Song and which was dedicated to establishing a comprehensive account of different locales, often by recording famous outsiders who happened to pass through at one time or another. For Fan, as for his friend Lu You 陸游 (1125-1210), there is yet another dimension to this play of emplacement and displacement: the court they served was in the midst of an extended exile that had begun almost exactly when they were born. In 1127 (two years after Lu's birth and one after Fan's), the Song's erstwhile ally, the Jurchens, had completed their conquest of northern China by sacking the Song capital at Bianliang 汴梁 (modern Kaifeng) and capturing the Emperors Qinzong (r. 1126-1127) and Huizong (r. 1100-1126). Both Fan and Lu are famous for their sense of outrage at the injustice of this loss and their patriotic commitment to recovering the north.¹⁸ Is it any surprise then that faced with the fairly recent loss of the dynasty's original seat of power and many of its most important cultural landmarks, Southern Song writers focused keenly on what remained? This instinct must have been especially strong along the Yangzi River, which had always divided China into northern and southern halves, but which

oversimplification, not least because names and naming have a great deal of power in almost all cultures. For our purposes, however, the named place (which often coincides with a landscape) should be considered a delimitation of space, a fragment and microcosm of the larger system or network of space as it was constituted and produced in the Song. Third, landscape is similarly delimited, less through naming (though this is still important) than through a type of visuality that renders the physical world knowable and transmittable based on certain standards and conventions, such as pictorial styles, textual citation or imitation.

¹⁶ Of course, it was not uncommon for a traveler's experience of a specific place to conform nicely with an earlier textual account. For example, when climbing Mt. Lu in Jiagnxi, Lu You came across the thatched building in which Bai Juyi was supposed to have lived and about which he wrote in his "Record of a Thatched Hall 草堂記." Lu writes: "As for the thatched hall, I used Master Bai's own essay to carefully inspect it, and found that it is most likely the original spot. [There is a building of] three mats and two bays, which is much like that described in the essay. Other things, such as the waterfall and lotus pond are all there, and the lingering tones of a stiff wind can [easily] be imagined. Master Bai previously left a copy of his collected writings in the Thatched Hall, but they were later repeatedly lost. Emperor Zhenzong [r. 998-1022] once ordered the Bureau for the Glorification of Letters to produce a collated [edition], bound in a dappled bamboo case, to be presented to the temple [on Mt. Lu]. In the Jianyan reign period [1127-1131], the temple was once again destroyed by warfare, and now there is only a single section [preserved as the] Suzhou woodblock copy. I mention this only to fill out the story. 草堂，以白公記考之，略是故處。三間兩柱，亦如記所云，其他如瀑布，蓮池，亦皆在。高風逸韻尚可想見。白公嘗以文集留草堂，後屢亡逸。真宗皇帝嘗令崇文院寫校，包以斑竹帙，送寺，建炎中又壞於兵。今獨有姑蘇版本一帙，備故事耳。" *Ru Shu ji* 入蜀記, in *Songren Changjiang youji* 宋人長江游記, ed. Chen Xin 陳新 (Shenyang: Chunfeng wenji chubanshe), 96; hereafter *SRYJ*. In addition to showing how text and place can match perfectly, this passage also provides an example of the practice of embedding writing in the landscape. Not unlike the inscribed version of Du Fu's Rongzhou poem, or the many examples of Huang Tingjian's calligraphy that Fan Chengda encounters on his journey, the emplacement of Bai Juyi's collected works serves as surrogate for the poet himself, sustaining and deepening his link to this place. That his collection comes first from his own hand and then in the form of an imperially ordered project suggests both the cultural importance of this spot and Bai's own substantial fame.

¹⁷ Zhang, *Transformative Journeys*, 2 and throughout.

¹⁸ Hargett, *On the Road*, 56-57, 79; J. D. Schmidt, *Stone Lake: The Poetry of Fan Chengda (1126-1193)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 90-96.

during the Southern Song also served as both border and primary fortification against Jurchen incursions.

We have no way of knowing whether Fan succeeded in renaming the wine that bore Du Fu's words, though his reference to the "old name" surely suggests a degree of confidence. What the Rongzhou episode confirms, however, is much clearer: just as there are "appropriate" ways to read and write texts (i.e. ways that conform to one's intellectual, aesthetic and political orientations), there are also correct ways to read, and if necessary, rewrite the landscape.¹⁹ Fan is by no means alone in this approach to writing space: he shares it with a number of Northern Song predecessors and Southern Song contemporaries, including Su Shi 蘇軾 (1037-1101), Huang Tingjian 黃庭堅 (1045-1105), and Lu You, among others. What united these men is not their ability to read and write the landscape, but their desire to transform it from an evocative but ultimately indeterminate conglomeration of traces in various states of decay to a series of fixed and knowable point along a literary and historical itinerary. In other words, to reinscribe space and time according to the systematic logic of the record of personal action instead of the play of presence and absence embodied by the trace in the poetry of Du Fu.

Though Lu You preceded Fan Chengda in writing a famous river diary, *Ru Shu ji* 入蜀記 (Diary of Entering Shu), the ideal record of action was not generally the long, episodic diary, which was still new in the late 12th century, but shorter essays and poems.²⁰ Usually spatially and temporally focused on a single locale or outing, the classic essay and landscape poem are stand-alone works in which the author's encounter with the landscape and its history inevitably engenders personal reflection.²¹ For our purposes, perhaps the best way to approach these generically disparate but thematically related texts is to temporarily imagine *ji* 記 not as a genre, but as an observational and representational stance rooted in the generic specificity of the essay but transferable to other genres. For Fan Chengda and his peers, this stance encompassed a series of adjudicative and transformational practices (*bian* 辯, *xiang* 詳, *kao* 考, *geng* 更, *xiu* 修) that were necessary for transforming the trace from a perhaps accidental or incidental imprint or index to a figure that must be textually (and sometimes physically) reinscribed as part of a contemporary record of action. This movement from *ji* 跡 to *ji* 記 not only reinscribes the trace, it also makes it possible to personally verify the contours of the

¹⁹ Fan feels perfectly comfortable changing the names of some of the spots he visits. While traveling to the Qingcheng Mountains outside of Chengdu to celebrate his birthday, for example, he decides to change the name of a local village from "Aboriginal Marsh" (*laozhai* 獠澤) to "Elder's Village" (*laozhai* 老宅), *FCDBJ* 191.

²⁰ There is a long history of anthologies of prose writing on *you* 遊/游, a multivalent term that is often translated as "travel," but which is also used from the earliest periods to suggest the less purposive movement of wandering or roaming, as in the much-loved "Xiaoyao you 逍遙遊" (Free and Easy Roaming) chapter that opens the *Zhuangzi* 莊子. For more on both the larger literary tradition within which Fan's efforts are often placed and the history of travel writing anthologies, see Rudolph's *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition*, throughout, but especially Introduction and Chapter 5, and Strassberg's *Inscribed Landscapes*, 472n23

²¹ Rudolph's *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition* offers a sustained comparison between the Southern Song travel diary and the more famous late Northern Song travel essay (*youji*), from which she takes Su Shi's famous "Essay on Stone Bell Mountain" (*Shizhongshan ji* 石鐘山記) as a paradigmatic example. Rudolph describes the essay as embodying a "taste for rational discourse and moral-philosophical meditation" and thus "epitomiz[ing] the era that spawned it perhaps more completely than any other genre or subgenre of contemporaneous literature" (34). In her view, the diary eschews the metaphysical and rational, offering instead "the stream of observation and action that makes up the traveler's day" (64), from which the reader is free to draw his or her own message.

aesthetic landscape through travel, an activity that inevitably inspires the creation of new types of *ji* 記, whether in the form of diaries, essays or poetry.



For Fan Chengda, Su Shi, Huang Tingjian and Lu You, the writing of travel and landscape is both about how places are produced and inscribed and also a personal act of production and inscription. When focused on the Three Gorges, this spatial production builds on earlier geographical, historical and literary texts, but aims to add to them a new scholarly and moral rigor. Under the influence of this rigor, these writers come to treat the historical landmarks of the Gorges—along with their representations and associations—as things subject to adjudication and verification based on personal experience and scholarly learning. Through adjudicating and verifying, they inevitably wrote themselves into the complex relationships they hoped to illuminate, changing places, landscapes and things in enduring ways. This chapter focuses on how these men, all of whom had intimate connections to Sichuan, treated the Three Gorges as a textual object and an objectified text, transforming the landscape through the inscriptional tendencies of Song representations of landscape, travel and place in diaries, essays, poetry, painting and stone inscriptions.

I. Adjudicating Texts and Clarifying Traces

The act of adjudication usually hinges on the relationship between an earlier text or texts and a place. Sometimes what required clarification was the current name and location of a place mentioned in an earlier text. At other times, it was a previous claim about local conditions—weather, topography, customs. Fan Chengda is skilled at both types of adjudication, as is clear from this early passage from the *Wu chuan lu*:

Twenty *li* before you arrive at the town stands Xipu *zhen*, which used to be Xipu *xian*. Now it has been abandoned [as administrative seat] and is under the jurisdiction of Pi, though it remains a major market town. Du Zimei's poem reads:

Along the Southern Capital to Xipu road,
In the fourth month ripen the yellow apricots.
Deeply roiling, the Long River departs,
Faintly, darkly, a gossamer rain arrives.

There is no "apricot rain" in Shu. Du Zimei passed through this area when the apricots were ripening and simply happened to encounter rain. I fear that later men will point to this as referring to "apricot rain," so I am clarifying it [here]. [The poem also] refers to the fact that when Emperor Xuanzong of the Tang graced Shu, he temporarily took Chengdu as the "Southern Capital."

As for [how to produce the so-called] "Pi tube": cut a segment under two *chi* in length from a large piece of bamboo, leaving one joint as a base, and carve the outside into a floral pattern. On top there is a lid and iron is used as a handle. Some [tubes] are lacquered a deep vermilion, others black, while some are not lacquered. Generally speaking these are [now] only used as bamboo tubes for carrying wine. According to what is written in the *Huayang fengsu ji* [these tubes were formerly used for making wine]: "then scoop out the bamboo and pour in the brew, stopping it up with lotus-root fibers and plantain leaves till after two nights an enchanting fragrances comes out. Only after this do you open them up, removing the wine for serving. This

is called Pi tube wine." Looking at this [treatise], [it seems that locals must have gone] to the bamboo forests to make these. Nowadays, this method of making wine does not exist.

未至縣二十里，有犀浦鎮，故犀浦縣。今廢，屬郫，猶為壯鎮。杜子美詩：「南京犀浦道，四月熟黃梅。湛湛長江去，冥冥細雨來。」蜀無梅雨，子美梅熟時經行，偶值雨耳。恐後人便指為梅雨，故辯之。唐玄宗幸蜀，嘗以成都為南京云。郫筒。截大竹，長二尺一下，留一節為底，刻其外為花紋。上有蓋，以鐵為提梁，或朱或黑，或不漆，大率挈酒竹筒耳。華陽風俗記所載，乃剝竹傾釀，閉以藕絲蕉葉，信宿馨香達於外。然後斷取以獻，謂之郫筒酒。觀此，則是就竹林中為之，今無此酒法矣。²²

Here, Fan summarizes the changing administrative designations of Xipu, an active market town north of Chengdu and a place mentioned in a poem by Du Fu, now under the jurisdiction of Pi. As Deborah Rudolph explains, both the city of Pi (which had been the capital of an ancient and famously tragic ruler of Sichuan; see Chapter 1) and Du Fu's "Southern Capital" (Chengdu as it was briefly known after Xuanzong had resided there during the An Lushan Rebellion) offered Fan an excellent opportunity "to ruminate on the evanescence of worldly glory" or to theorize on the ideal model of rulership.²³ What he actually does, however, is far more in keeping with the tone of his record: he makes a "clarification," or distinction (*bian* 辯). The thing that gives him pause and inspires this clarification is not some past tragedy or eternal ideal, but the potential for a future misunderstanding of local meteorological conditions based on misguided reading practices. As Fan soberly informs his readers, there is no such thing as "apricot rain" in the area of Shu.²⁴ Having carefully explained to his readers what is not part of the local landscape, Fan then introduces something unique to Pi, elaborately decorated bamboo vessels originally used for fermenting wine, but now used exclusively for transporting wine.

This passage draws on two distinct types of texts—a poem and a treatise on local customs, (another type of *ji* 記)—to comment on the specific qualities of the Pi-Xipu area. The poem, though an important reference to this locale from the most famous of Tang poets, is susceptible to misreading and thus requires the author's "clarification." This potential confusion is in no way intrinsic to Du Fu's work; it is the result of a mode of reading that seeks and extrapolates facts from poetic texts. A prime source for poetic encyclopedias, gazeteers and local treatises of the sort Fan cites next, this mode of extraction transforms the poem as lyrical trace into a *ji* 記-like statement on local conditions. As a delicate evocation of a moment in time in which the Tang poet happened to encounter ripening apricots through a diaphanous veil of spring rain, Du's poem makes for a poor source for local facts. The second half of the octave, not cited above, is equally 'useless.' It hums with a natural kinetic energy but is devoid of purposive human movement. It describes no action, only flux; no transmittable facts, only images:

茅茨疏易濕，
雲霧密難開。
竟日蛟龍喜，

The thatch roof is sparse and easily grows wet,
Cloud and mist are dense, struggling to clear.
An entire day of bliss for the *jiao* and *long* dragons,

²² FCDBJ 188.

²³ Rudolph, *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition*, 62.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-63. Apricot Rains are native to Zhejiang and Jiangsu Province, both well east of the Sichuan basin. See also: Hargett, *Riding the River Home*, 79n32.

The local treatise, on the other hand, though a less familiar text, is presented by Fan without comment as a source of information, a step-by-step guide for two local practices (one defunct, the other still common). These sources could not be more different. In the first, place is evoked through the description of landscape as a site of subjective experience and a topography of the ephemeral and phenomenal. In the second, the landscape is represented as a place of action (a forest used for raw materials) and goal-oriented process. Genre is important: lyric poetry of the Tang is a form readymade for evoking momentary experience; while the function of the prose treatise on local customs is to present information organized according to a de facto itinerary. By juxtaposing these very different texts, Fan offers an implicit lesson on how function and form must be taken into consideration when reading and appropriating earlier texts, especially when searching for factual information. This is, however, by no means a difference of genre alone. As we shall see, Fan treated poetry and painting as equally capable of communicating essential moral and geographical facts, and there is a long tradition of lyrical travel essays (*ji* 記) that describe space in a highly subjective and manner. The crucial distinction is not formal, but between different ways of seeing, experiencing and communicating the world.

In Fan's Xipu entry we are given a thorough poetic and geographic commentary but left totally ignorant of what Fan did in Pi, let alone what the place looked like when he passed through it, whether it was hot or cold, wet or dry. In other passages, especially those describing his ascent of Mt. Emei or his passage through the Gorges, Fan tells us much more about the immediate sights and sounds of his surroundings. On August 14, 1177 he writes:

Bingchen day. Moored in Kuizhou. In the morning I sent a man to observe the water level in the Qutang Gorge. It was barely able to cover the crest of Yanyu Islet, with vortices scattering out from the top. This is what is known as "Yanyu casting its hair." If, as people say, when [Yanyu] resembles a horse one still cannot descend, then what about when it is "casting its hair" about! That very night, the water suddenly swelled, flooding to the level of the bamboo structures that make up the pavilion on the pier. Some workers were sent with great urgency to dismantle them, and made a racket all night long. When it grew light I hurried over to have a look, and Yanyu was already five *zhang* under water. Someone suggested that we should try our luck and take the opportunity to enter the Gorges, but the Kui locals still considered it too difficult. My fellow travelers [and I] all went to Qutang to sacrifice to the White Emperor and to climb to the Three Gorges Hall and visit the Lofty Retreat [*Gaozhai* 高齋], all atop the pass. Although the Lofty Retreat is not necessarily the one about which Du Fu wrote, it still overlooks Yanyu and affords a spectacular vista.

丙辰。泊夔州。早遣人視瞿唐水齊，僅能沒灩澦之頂，盤渦散出其上，謂之灩澦撒髮。人云如馬尚不可下，況撒髮耶！是夜，水忽驟漲，滄及排亭諸簷舍，亟遣人毀拆，終夜有聲，及明走視，灩澦則已在五丈水下。或謂可以僥幸乘此入峽，而夔人猶難之。同行皆往瞿唐祀白帝，登三峽堂及遊高齋，皆在關上。高齋雖未必是杜子美所賦，然下臨灩澦，亦奇觀也。²⁶

This passage details Fan's arrival at the Three Gorges proper, as marked by the city of Kuizhou and the paired mountains that form Kuimen, the entry to the Qutang Gorge. Fan and his companions are acutely aware of the water level at this spot, as would be anyone wishing to travel through the notoriously dangerous Gorges. Finding conditions not quite ideal, they take

²⁵ DSXZ 738

²⁶ FCHBJ 217.

the time to go sightseeing, visiting three tourist destinations conveniently located within what was known as Baidi City during the Tang: a shrine to the White Emperor, the Three Gorges Hall, which had been built near the end of the previous century by the official Song Zhao 宋肇 (fl. eleventh century), and a structure presented to the travelers as Du Fu's famous Lofty Retreat (Gaozhai 高齋). Fan is careful to note that this last stop "is not necessarily the one about which Du Fu wrote," though the fine view it affords is reward enough for the climb. Here we have perfect examples of both Fan's informed skepticism and the common practices of making historical claims for pre-existing structures and building new structures and identifying them as the "former residence" of a famous figure, in this case, Du Fu.

For literary men traveling through Sichuan during the Northern and Southern Song, Du Fu was never far from their minds.²⁷ Already in the writings of Su Shi and Huang Tingjian Du had reached a prominence that contrasted with his relatively meager reputation during his life and for 300 or so years following his death. Expounding on Du's moral and poetic excellence became a near universal pastime in the Song, one that continues unabated to this day. During the long period of comparative (but by no means total) neglect between Du's death and his resurrection, however, the physical landmarks associated with his life in Chengdu, Kuizhou and a host of sites in Shu and Chu were allowed to decay. Not yet the "former residences" of a figure of great fame, they were treated like normal buildings, and so, without a compelling claim to permanence, they disappeared. Some of them, such as Du's famous Chengdu thatched hut (*caotang* 草堂), which was repaired in the 11th century by Lü Dafang 吕大防 (1027-1097), or his "Lofty Retreat" in Kuizhou, were rebuilt as memorial structures, sites of pilgrimage for the devout reader.

While men like Lü Dafang sought to reestablish a lost material connection to Du Fu by building the "ancient" structures in which he lived, Fan Chengda and Lu You viewed the same structures with a sober-eyed sense of what constituted an original structure. Here we find a key distinction between the official *in situ* and the official on the road: the local official often took it upon himself to maintain and nurture the cultural associations of his posting, reinscribing (or fabricating) the traces of noteworthy past residents in order to boost the fame of the region.²⁸ We see in this local approach another clear connection to the *di fang zhi* 地方誌 tradition, in which the topography, mythology, history and literature associated with a specific region were carefully collected, separated and categorized into an encyclopedic epistemology of place. The traveler, though also intensely interested in categorizing the past and its traces, was far keener on establishing the ontological status of individual local traces so that they could be included in his overall itinerary.²⁹ At moments in Fan's diary, and more commonly in travel essays by other

²⁷ Eva Shan Chou identifies the Northern Song as the critical moment in the crystallization of Du Fu's reputation as both poet and Confucian moral exemplar in the Northern Song. This is a familiar narrative, though Chou works to contextualize his rise as a "by-product of a larger contemporary preoccupation with self-definition, in which Northern Song literati sought precedents in the figures of the past." Du Fu, Li Bai, Wang Wei and Tao Yuanming, among others, were reevaluated and categorized according to different values and worldviews, all of which reflected the specific concerns of the Song literati and their historical moment. See *Reconsidering Tu Fu*, 26. See also: Rudolph, *Literary Innovation and Aesthetic Tradition*, 56-57.

²⁸ This is not to say that "new" structures were necessarily considered fake. Their authenticity depended mostly on their status as sites of ritual and cultural practice, activities that created a powerful and legitimating connection to the deceased figure of fame.

²⁹ After visiting Su Shi's famous Huangzhou retreat at the East Slope, Lu You complains about modifications to the place as it was described in Su's poetry: "To the east of the [Snow] Hall there is a large willow, which according to tradition was personally planted by master [Su]. Directly to the south there is a bridge, a signboard for which reads 'little bridge,' taking its name from the line, 'Do not forget the little bridge's flowing water'... In the past there was simple a single stone laid across it [the ditch], but recently it has been enlarged into a wooden

writers, the act of establishing the status of the historical trace leads to moral or ethical reflection. In these cases, place and landscape served primarily as a medium for the performance and inscription of important values, as in Lu You's 1171 "Account of the Dongtun Lofty Retreat 東屯高齋記":

In his later years, the former master Shaoling [Du Fu] sojourned in Kuizhou. Loving its mountains and rivers, he could not bear to quit it. Thrice he moved his abode, calling each of them by the name of Lofty Retreat. This is verified by his poetry: the one "beside the water gate" is the Baidi City Lofty Retreat; the one [where he] "relied on medicines" is the Rangxi Retreat; the one [where he] "saw a single stream" is the Dongtun Retreat. Thus his poem even says: "The Lofty Retreat is not a single place." After I had been in Kui for a few months I [wished] to visit and mourn the former master's traces, but Baidi had already been left to degenerate into hills and hummocks for well over a hundred years. If old men do not know the location of even the inner and outer city walls, government offices and temples, then what about the so-called Lofty Retreat! Rangxi is now most likely an area that the Kuifu government seat has divided into fields and broken into markets and city wards. This Lofty Retreat is especially impossible to locate.

It's only at [Dong]tun, where a family surnamed Li has lived for several generations, separated from Du Fu's residence there by only three different owners, that ancient scrolls from the age of the Dali region period [766-780] remain. [This place] is so very reminiscent of the Lofty Retreat's atmosphere, its back to the hills, belted by a stream. [One] Mr. Li, who is named Xiang, studied to take the *jinshi* examination. Thus the county academician Mr. Yong Dachun assigned me make note of him (*ji zhi* 記之). I sighed heavily and said: Shaoling was a gentleman of the greater world and early in his life met with both the Minghuang Emperor and [his heir] Suzong. Though his rank and emoluments were never especially exalted, his experience and learning were truly profound. To put it broadly, early on he compared himself to Ji and Qi with great feeling, but when he fell on hard times in Ba and Shu he was moved by the events surrounding the Zhaolie Emperor of Han [Liu Bei] and Zhuge Liang, as can be seen numerous times in his poems.³⁰ His tone of pathetic verve and resolute melancholy never ceases to move one. His compass, aspirations and ideas—how could they be considered middling? And yet having quit his state for so long, among his lords and friends, who could see with their own eye his penury, there were none willing to expend the energy to assist him.

When he arrived in Kui he was a guest in the homes of Bo Zhongcheng and Yan Mingfu. Just like a man of nine *chi* who has to bow his head to live beneath a low roof, even if he wanted to exhale a single breath, he could not.³¹ When I read his poems and reach the line, "The thoughts and discourses of a young minister are over, Old and sick I am a wanderer in a distant land," not once have I not shed tears.³² Alas! That the melancholy of his words reaches such extremes! Neither Jing Ke's song [of departure] or Ruan Yu's sobbing can top this. Shaoling was not the type to toil over becoming a *jinshi*. He had a heart whose love of the sovereign and anxiety for the state could not be exhausted. He wanted only to exert a little of what he had learned to assist the Son of Heaven and to revive the rule of the Zhenguan and Kaiyuan Eras. And yet, the older his body grew the more troubled his fate became, until broken and thwarted, he died. That his misery reached this [nadir] is also not really cause for surprise.

Now, as for Mr. Li, he never even tripped the triggers of success and failure, glory and humiliation in the first place. Reading books and singing with stringed accompaniment, in an instant he forgot his old age. He lacked Shaoling's anxious concern but possessed his loftiness. Shaoling made a home at Dongtun for less than a full year, but this gentleman has resided here

bridge topped with a covered room, which rather destroys one's original conception. 堂東大柳，傳以為公手植。正南有橋，榜曰小橋，以「莫忘小橋流水」之句得名。舊止片石布其上，近輒增廣為木橋，覆以一屋，頗敗人意。" *SRYJ* 113. For a detailed study of both Lu and Fan Chengda's experience of East Slope see Zhang, *Transformative Journeys*, 188-206.

³⁰ See previous chapter for more on these figures.

³¹ A *chi* is equal to 12.6 inches, which makes a man of nine *chi* tall indeed!

³² These lines are from Du's famous "Travels of My Youth" (*Zhuang you* 壯遊), *DSXZ* 1438.

for several generations, transforming death into life. I have no idea what Shaoling himself would say about who had failed and who succeeded if he were to compare himself to this gentleman. As for myself, an official cannot [afford to] foster perfect righteousness if upon retiring he lacks a field to plow. For this alone it is worth admiring Mr. Li, and so with pleasure do I make this record of him.

少陵先生晚游夔州。愛其山川不忍去。三徙居，皆名高齋。質於其詩曰：次水門者白帝城之高齋也。曰依藥餌者灤西之高齋也。曰見一川者東屯之高齋也。故其詩又曰高齋非一處。余至夔數月弔先生之遺跡。則白帝已廢為邱墟百有餘年。自城郭府寺父老無知其處者。況所謂高齋乎？灤西蓋今夔府治所畫為阡陌裂為坊市。高齋尤不可識。

獨屯有李氏者，居已數世。上距少陵纔三易主。大曆中故卷猶在。而高齋負山帶溪氣象良是。李氏業進士。名襄。因郡博士雍君大椿屬余記之。予太息曰：少陵天下士也。早遇明皇肅宗。官爵雖不尊顯，而見知實深。蓋嘗慨然以稷契自許，及落魄巴蜀，感漢昭烈諸葛丞相之事屢見於詩。頓挫悲壯反覆動人。其規模志意豈小哉！然去國寢久。諸公故人熟睨其窮無肯出力。

比至夔客於栢中丞嚴明府之間。如九尺丈夫。俛首居小屋下。思一吐氣而不可得。余讀其詩至“小臣議論絕，老病客殊方”之句未嘗不流涕也。嗟夫。辭之悲乃至是乎。荊卿之歌，阮嗣宗之哭，不加於此矣。少陵非區區於進士者。不勝愛君憂國之心。思少出所學佐天子，興正觀開元之治，而身愈老，命愈大謬，坎壈且死。則其悲至此亦無足怪也。

今李氏君初不踐通塞榮辱之機。讀書絃歌忽焉忘老。無少陵之憂而有其高。少陵家東屯不浹歲而君數世居之。使死復生。予未知少陵自謂與君孰失得也。若予者，仕不能無媿於義。退又無地可耕。是直有慕於李君耳。故樂與為記。³³

The title of Lu You's essay announces itself in direct and unadorned fashion as being about the Lofty Retreat at Dongtun, which any educated reader would immediately recognize as Du Fu's former Kuizhou residence. The first section (as demarcated by my paragraph breaks) seems to answer the title's promise: first, by citing Du Fu's poetry to show that there were actually three so-called Lofty Retreats scattered around Tang Kuizhou; and second, by explaining why it is now impossible to accurately locate the exact position, let alone the ruins of two of those Lofty Retreats. This section also tells the reader that Lu You was familiar with Du Fu's poetry and that he carried out his investigation of Du Fu's former abodes while residing in Kuizhou and as part of a personal project of "visiting and mourning" (*diao* 弔) the poet's local "lingering traces" (*yiji* 遺跡).

Lu begins the next section predictably (by describing the site of Du's third Lofty Retreat, Dongtun) but takes an unexpected turn, explaining that his essay did not originate as a reflection on the life and works of Du Fu, but as an account of a local notable, a certain Li Xiang, which Lu has been asked (*shu* 屬) to write. His emotive response to this request turns immediately away from Li and back to Du Fu, for whom Lu provides a capsule history, detailing his meager triumphs and countless humiliations, his favored historical avatars, his poetic prowess and moral fortitude, his aspirations and, finally, his inevitable demise. Only in the last section do we return to Li, a learned man who, despite studying for the civil service examination, never sought office, preferring to stay at home and pass his days in scholarly pleasures. Unlike Du Fu, who lived in the Dongtun Lofty Retreat for less than a year, Li has

³³ Lu You, *Weinan wenji* 渭南文集, in *Lu You quanji jiaozhu* 陸游全集校注, ed. Qian Zhonglian 錢仲聯 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang jiaoyu chubanshe, 2011), *juan* 17.

lived in Dongtun for decades, backed by the same mountains and belted by the same stream described in Du's poems.

The "Essay on the Dongtun Lofty Retreat" begins as an exercise in locating and attempting to adjudicate the current status of Du Fu's three Kuizhou Lofty Retreats. Part of a larger class of "lingering traces," each of these structures is associated with a specific section of Tang Kuizhou, a complex spatial structure comprised of walls, temples and markets that no longer exists. Like all buildings, Du Fu's retreats were not only located *within* the city and its environs, they helped to constitute those now absent spaces. According to Lu You, at Baidi and Rangxi the physical substrate necessary for even the faintest of traces has been totally effaced, replaced either with ruins or a new, bustling city. The only spot where it is still possible to envision both the location and context of one of Du's Lofty Retreats is at Dongtun, though Lu says nothing of actual ruins and provides no real evidence for his conclusion.

The link that he does establish is through Li Xiang, whose family has lived in Dongtun for several generations, and who even possesses ancient scrolls from the Dali reign period. Despite Li's presence—Lu describes him as "turning death into life" (*shi si fu sheng* 使死復生; literally "causing the dead to live again") through his generations of residence—these scrolls are the only things actually "still there" (*youzai* 猶在) from Du Fu's time in Kuizhou. But what exactly do they have to do with the Tang poet? Are they manuscript copies of his work, perhaps in his own hand? Surely Lu You would have described such treasures in greater detail. Though Lu's laconic essay does not answer these questions (we will have to look elsewhere for that), it is clear that the emplacement of the scrolls plays an important role in confirming the spatial and temporal continuity of Dongtun. As the only surviving fragment from the Dali period (in contrast to the seemingly more durable walls of Baidi), the fragile texts differentiate Dongtun from Baidi and Rangxi as a place that still bears legible traces of the past, thus offering a site suitable for "visiting and mourning" (*diao* 弔). These temporally and spatially specific objects are paired in the next line with a description of the surrounding area, which is "very reminiscent" (*liangshi* 良是) of that found in Du Fu's poetry. Here, as in the opening section of the essay, text and landscape are correlated as a way of locating people in space and time. This includes placing Du Fu in relation to the remaining Tang landmarks, as well as linking Lu You and Li Xiang to Du Fu by way of Dongtun. Fan Chengda might be pointing to a similar correlation when he mentions the exemplary view available from the Baidi Lofty Retreat that he visits, suggesting that though that structure's status is suspect, it offers vistas reminiscent of those described in Du's Kuizhou poetry, including the famous "Lodging in the Riverside Pavilion 宿江邊閣," which Lu You cites in the first section of his essay:

暝色延山徑，	The color of night steals up the mountain path,
高齋次水門。	In this lofty retreat I lodge by the water gate.
薄雲岩際宿，	Wisped clouds on the cliff edge settle,
孤月浪中翻。	As the lone moon within the waves turns. ³⁴

Given the unique topography of a place like Baidi, it is hard to imagine that Lu would have struggled to connect Du's poetry with the landscape as it appeared in the late 12th century, even if the ancient city had long since been reduced to indistinct mounds and hillocks. Compared to Dongtun, which he describes in only the sketchiest of terms, Baidi would have offered any number of dramatic reference points for determining the site of that particular

³⁴ DSXZ 1469

Lofty Retreat. Of course, Lu's focus on Dongtun is largely a function of what he claims is the genesis and original subject of the essay—to "make note" (*ji zhi* 記之) of Li Xiang. In the final section, when Lu returns to this stated subject, we finally learn why he dedicated so much of his text to Du Fu, to set up a comparison between that famed figure and the humble Li. Unlike Du Fu, who was a peripatetic and ambitious "man of the world," Li Xiang never even set off on the road to glory, thus avoiding suffering and humiliation. Instead, despite his learning, he chose to stay in place, living as a recluse without having had to seek office and then retire from the world. In this, he continues his connection to Dongtun and maintains the agricultural base necessary for a life of thoughtful leisure. By comparison, Du Fu was unable to stay in Dongtun for the span of a single year. His mistake? In Lu You's opinion, though Du Fu "foster[ed] perfect righteousness" (*wu kui yu yi* 無媿於義), he did so without making certain of the material and economic base needed to sustain himself in the face of adversity. To put it literally, as Lu does, he "lacked land to plow" (*wu di ke geng* 無地可耕).

Lu You thus implicitly judges Du a failure (*shi* 失) and Li a success (*de* 得) in navigating the travails of life while maintaining righteousness and propagating a family line. There is, naturally, a clear irony to this: not only does the majority of the essay, which is ostensibly about Li, center on Du Fu as a figure worthy of both pity and admiration, but the text itself is proof positive of the immortality that literary fame offers. From a certain perspective, Lu's essay is in fact about the relative merits of different methods of "turning death into life," of maintaining some form of presence in the face of absence (i.e. death). Li has achieved this feat simply by staying in place, by becoming an integral, self-perpetuating component of the landscape of Dongtun as Lu You experienced it in 1171. In contrast, Lu's failure to find hard evidence of any of the other Lofty Retreats renders Du Fu's immortality almost totally immaterial. It is only at Dongtun, where the poet is evoked by the landscape and the "ancient scrolls" embedded there, that Lu finds something worthy not only of mourning, but of "expending the energy" (*chuli* 出力) to memorialize. Presented as proof of Li's roots in Dongtun, the scrolls, which reach back to the years of Du Fu's Kuizhou period, function vicariously as proof of the famed poet's connection to this place, the sole "lingering traces" (*yi ji* 遺跡) of Du Fu's Dongtun Lofty Retreat.

In the end, Lu You's essay, like the Li family's scrolls, is a textual surrogate for the poet, an offering of a *ji* 記 where *ji* 跡 are scarce. By imagining Li Xiang as a mirror image of Du Fu—possessing a similar loftiness but a reversed fate—Lu You goes as far as he possibly can with the tools at his disposal towards reinscribing and embedding Du Fu in the Dongtun landscape. Those tools—the essay, brush, paper, printing, communities of readers and writers—are powerful indeed, though they are also by nature ephemeral and unrooted in any one place. Mobility and reproducibility diffuse the written trace, often bringing fame to the relationship between individuals and specific locales in the process, but they are only one side of the inscriptional activities that fixed text and landscape in the Song. Another side is the practice of rebuilding structures intended to house ancient poets in places where they had once lived, to serve as material surrogates and sites of pilgrimage for those absent figures. Usually, such structures or complexes were based on a reconstructed "former residence" (*guju* 故居).

This brings us back to the vague figure of Li Xiang, about whom we learned so little in Lu You's essay. Some 26 years after Lu wrote about the Lofty Retreat, in the winter of 1197

(the third year of the Qingyuan 慶元 reign period (1195-1201)), Yu Xie (?) 于熹³⁵ (fl. early 13th century) wrote his "Account of the Renovation of Du Fu's Former Residence at Dongtun in Kuizhou 修夔州東屯少陵故居記," which explains not only the origins of the ancient scrolls that Lu mentions, but Li's personal connection to the Dongtun Lofty Tower:

After Shaoling left the Gorges, his land changed owners three times. In recent times it came into the possession of a certain Li family, and scrolls in Du Fu's hand were still there. Eventually, it came [into the hands of a] son [of the Li family], Li Xiang, who was quite fond of literature and assiduously sought out ancient traces. [Li Xiang] once again established a Lofty Retreat, imitating the old fellow of Fu Ling [Huang Tingjian], who in order to spread the reputation of Shaoling's poetic intent, built the Hall of the Great Odes. Overlooking a stream he also built a grass hut and painted his [Du Fu's] posthumous portrait. Many years having passed, the roof had fallen into disrepair and was left unattended, the scrolls too had been spirited away by someone wielding great power and this former refuge of a past worthy had been all but reduced to a mound of brambles and shrubs.

少陵既出峽，其地三易主，近世始屬李氏，少陵手書之卷猶在。至子襄，頗好事，講求古蹟，復置高齋，用涪翁名少陵詩意，創大雅堂；臨溪又建草堂，繪其遺像。歷歲滋久，屋且頽圯弗治，卷亦為有力者取去，而前賢舊隱幾為荆榛之墟。³⁶

In the spring of 1197, Yu and some friends (not unlike Fan Chengda and his traveling companions) found themselves with free time and decided to visit Li Xiang's reconstruction of the Dongtun Lofty Retreat. To their horror, they encountered a scene of ruins, a site totally "unable to bring about the intended effect of inspiring one to yearn for worthies and venerate moral virtue" (無以致思賢尚德之意). Conveniently, at this time Li Xiang was looking to sell his property, so one of Yu's friends donated the necessary funds and placed the property under the control of the local government. (We can only assume that this would have shocked Lu You, who put such great store in Li's unbroken tenure at Dongtun.) The men then set about restoring the property's buildings and grounds until it became one of the finest sites in all of Kuizhou. Later in the same essay, Yu complains that by allowing Du Fu's Dongtun Lofty Retreat to decay, Kuizhou had failed to maintain a sense of historical propriety (*quedian* 缺典).

By contrast, local governments in other spots made famous by Du Fu's post-rebellion residence—Tonggu 同谷 (in modern Gansu Province) and Chengdu, both of which had their own thatched huts—had sponsored the maintenance his former homes. As Yu proclaims, this was, of course, far more than a matter of promoting sites of local interest for the casual tourist: "As for this labor, how could it have been carried out simply for the sake of wandering and gazing [i.e. pleasure travel] 是役也豈徒為游觀設哉!"³⁷ Du Fu had long since come to surpass mere literary fame. He was first and foremost a moral exemplar, a man who embodied the values and intentions of the classics, "never forgetting his sovereign, even for the space of a meal."³⁸ Thus when Yu praises his friends' roles in the reconstruction of the Lofty Retreat he uses the language of revival and renaissance, rather than architectural repair, proclaiming that,

³⁵ 熹 is also sometimes pronounced *che*, and seems to be a more standard version of the character 熹, with which Yu's name is written in *Quan Shu yiwenzhi* 全蜀藝文志, ed. Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) (Beijing: Xianzhuang shuju, 2003) (hereafter *QSYWZ*).

³⁶ *QSYWZ* 1206.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 1207

³⁸ This famous line is Su Shi's, and appears in his preface to Wang Gong's 王巩 (1048-1117?) collected poems. See *Du Fu zhuan* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1964), 99.

"they alone were able to revive 400 year old ruins and make them new 獨能興四百年之遺趾而更新之."³⁹

If Du Fu was more than a poet, then the structures that were built to memorialize him were more than buildings and the images placed therein more than representations. They were sites for the "veneration of moral virtue" and objects of worship and sacrifice (*ci* 祠). In an essay commemorating the renovation of Du's Chengdu Thatched Hut, the Ming writer Yang Tinghe 楊廷和 (1459-1529), native of Sichuan and father of the Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488-1559) who compiled the *Quan Shu yixwenzhi* 全蜀藝文志, places Du Fu squarely within a lineage of Sichuanese figures who were not just famous, but the focus of unbroken ancestor worship:

In Shu, over the thousands of years from before the Qin and on there have only been handful of people who have been universally worshipped in antiquity as in the present, such as Li Bing of the Qin, Wenweng of the Han, Zhuge Liang and Zhang Yong of the Song. [The worship of] all of these men spread far and wide because of their great deeds and virtue...and yet Du Fu, who was merely an impoverished refugee, is arrayed loftily alongside them. This is truly not just because of his poetry.

蜀自前秦以來上下前年間，古今通祀者纔數人，若秦之李冰，漢之文翁，孔明，宋之張詠，皆以功德流遠。而子美徒以羈旅困窮之人，軒然與之并，是誠不獨以其詩也。⁴⁰

Du Fu is not simply a figure of worship in this passage; he is a figure of worship *in* Sichuan, arrayed alongside famous Sichuanese men of the ages, including Zhuge Liang, whose various Sichuan temples Du Fu visited many times. The perpetuation of this tradition, whether by Yang in the Ming or Yu in the Southern Song, ensured that Du Fu would always be 'at home' in the ancient state of Shu, despite the fact that during his lifetime he had so often ached to leave the south and return home. This collective act of textual and physical emplacement served in the Song as a means of both redressing the perceived historical neglect of Du Fu and also promulgating a new moral and literary orthodoxy from a specific point in time and space. Though it does not refer to Du's time in Kuizhou or the Three Gorges, Huang Tingjian's "Account of the Hall of the Great Odes" (*Daya tang ji* 大雅堂記) which Yu Xie mentions in his essay, clearly provided important inspiration for those who wanted to achieve these goals in and for Sichuan:

Yang Suweng of Danleng is a valiant and magnificent individual. In the alleys of the province and among his countrymen he [is known for] having a heroic air. He is quite lenient [with the people], but it is through ritual and righteousness, not by wielding lucre and force that he has achieved his reputation as a leader. Hearing that I wished to write out all of Du Fu's poems on the two Chuan and the Kui Gorges [in calligraphy] and have them inscribed on stone and kept within Shu in the home of one who is fond of literature and takes joy in things, Suwen was overjoyed, and directed towards me an invitation to join in this endeavor. He also wished to build a tall hall with massive columns to shelter these stones and so asked me to provide it with a name. I named it Hall of the Great Odes and explained it to him [this way]: In the more than 400 years since Du Zimei lived, this culture [of ours] has been reduced to dust. Even among those literary gentlemen who, following their worldly talents, have distinguished themselves from their peers, there has never been a man who could 'ascend his hall,' let alone one good enough to [enter] his 'room!'

Once, wanting to pursue those places where I joyfully comprehended his intention, I made a commentary of a few words, though in the end I became mired in the vulgar affairs of the world and had no time to proceed. Though I attempted this [project], the wonder of Du Fu's

³⁹ *QSYWZ* 1207.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 1204.

poetry really resides in the fact that there is no intention in his writing. As for [poems that] lack [obvious] intention and yet possess intention all along, if one does not expand on them with the "Airs of State," the "Odes" and the "Hymns," and deepen them with "Encountering Sorrow" and the "Nine Songs," then how can one possibly relish the flavor of their intentions and plunge through their gate!

Thus, if later born men seek this on their own, then they will grasp it profoundly; and if later born men who climb the Hall of the Great Odes are able to pursue it through my words, then my desires will be more than halfway met. As for those who delight in making far-fetched interpretations, discarding [a poem's] greater purpose and grasping after its inspiration, believing that each and every object with which they meet—forests and springs, men and things, grasses and trees, fish and insects—is imbued with allegorical significance, they are like those who guess at riddles and codes. In this way Du Fu's poetry will simply be reduced to dust...

丹稜楊素翁，英偉人也，其在州閭鄉黨有俠氣，不少假借人，然以禮義，不以財力稱長雄也。聞余欲盡書杜子美兩川夔峽諸詩，刻石藏蜀中好文喜事之家，素翁粲然，向余請從事焉，又欲作高屋廣楹庥此石，因請名焉。余名之曰：「大雅堂」，而告之曰：由杜子美以來四百餘年，斯文委地，文章之士隨世所能，傑出時輩，未有升杜子美之堂者，況室家之好邪！

余嘗欲隨欣然會意處，箋以數語，終日汨沒世俗，初不暇給。雖然，子眉詩妙處，乃在無意於文。夫無意於文而意已至，非廣之以《國風》《雅》《頌》，深之以《離騷》《九歌》，安能咀嚼其意味，闖然入其門邪！

故使後生輩自求之，則得之深矣。使後之登大雅堂者，能以余說而求之，則思過半矣。彼喜穿鑿者，棄其大旨，取其發興，於所遇林泉人物，草木魚蟲，以為物物皆有所託，如世間商度隱語者，則子美之詩委地矣。。。。⁴¹

To describe the decay of the moral and literary value embodied in "this culture" (*sirwen* 斯文), Huang relies on an organic metaphor, an image of matter disintegrating until it merges with the earth from which it originally came. In the rhetoric of efflorescence and decline, being "reduced to dust" (*weidi* 委地)—or more literally, "cast into the dirt," "crumbled into earth"—is not only a low point, but also a tipping point in a cyclical pattern. Just as Yu and his peers "resurrected" (*xing* 興; literally "to raise up") the Dongtun Lofty Retreat from a mound of thorns and shrubs (*jingzhen zhi xu* 荆榛之墟), Huang seeks to revive a certain type of culture by erecting engraved steles and a grand structure in which to house them. This is a multimedia project: First, the stones into which Du Fu's poetry is engraved bespeak a permanence and solid integrity diametrically opposed to the particulate soil. Embedded in the horizontal earth, they will "rise up" towards the sky, protected from the elements by a grand temple-like structure. Second, because one must recognize that Du Fu's poetry embodies the values and techniques of the tradition's foundational poetic texts in order to comprehend it, it serves as the perfect medium for the revival of the *Book of Odes* and the *Chu'ci*. Both comprehension and revival are figured as spatial practices of "ascending the hall" and "entering the room," phrases borrowed from the Confucian Analects, where they describe the stages of a student's assimilation of the master's teachings.⁴² This upward journey, from the dirt to the master's inner sanctum, is enabled by the construction of the Hall of the Great Odes (the name of which pairs Du Fu with the *Shijing*), but it is by no means assured: when subjected to pedantic reading techniques, even

⁴¹ *Yuzhang Huang wenji* 豫章黃文集, *Sibu congkan* 四部叢刊 ed., *juan* 17, 22b-23b.

⁴² *Analects* 11.15.

Du Fu's poetry risks being cast down into the dust.⁴³ The *ji* seeks to prevent this cultural disaster by both representing and rhetorically enacting the perfect balance between poet, place, structure and the embedded and fixed text. Of course, the *ji* is also a record of the hall, a structure that enacts this same balance through a quasi-religious spatial practice of ascending the hall in order to venerate the inscribed text.

II. "Having Merit, She Was Memorialized in Writing": Avoiding the Dangers of Lazy Reading

As Huang Tingjian makes perfectly clear, the power of the Hall of the Great Odes, and by extension the entire poetic tradition, relies on the promotion of the right kinds of reading and writing. The reader's skill in determining the author's "intention" (*yi* 意; this can also be translated as "conception," "concept," "idea")—by both paying meticulous attention to the original text and also looking beyond it, to its sources, influences, contexts—was an indispensable first step. In the course of writing, one had to seek evidence to support ideas and interpretations, ideally through a combination of scholarship and personal observation "on the ground." These practices, described variously as *bian* 辯 (adjudicate, clarify), *kao* 考 (investigate, research) and *xiang* 詳 (to know/explain in detail), functioned to reinscribe indelibly the historical or mythological trace *ji* 跡 as part of a record of action *ji* 記.⁴⁴ Given the otherworldly appearance of their cloud-shrouded landscapes and their evocatively ambiguous poetics, the Three Gorges were ripe for this type of adjudication. This entailed not only the demystification of the landscape through the collection of accurate topographic and ethnographic information, but also its re-textualization. By reviewing, revising, and in some cases replacing, older sources, re-textualization created a textual space for the promotion of important values and ideals.

In the above examples, this meant using poetic sources to reconstruct the physical traces associated with Du Fu in order to emplace him and the values with which he had been imbued within the newly sanctified (and easily visited) confines of his former homes. The authors were, of course, always eager to correct fallacious interpretations of Du's poetry; but for the most part, they adjudicated, investigated and explained in order to promote and sustain his already nearly universal reputation, while also using him to further their own intellectual agendas. Their contributions to the cult of Du Fu are among the most important ever written, but from a certain perspective, they are also cogs in a self-perpetuating cultural machine. What happens when responsible reading and informed writing are pitted *against* the flow of a powerful mainstream worldview? This is precisely the kind of contrary position that began to

⁴³ An alternate opening to this essay found in a "supplementary continuation" of a collection of literary texts on the ancient state of Shu envisions the hall "causing the residual tones of the great odes, which have long been buried, to once more fill the ears of the Three Ba" (使大雅遺音，久湮沒而復盈三巴之耳). This version further localizes the effect of Huang's project to the Three Ba, a poetic name for greater Sichuan.

⁴⁴ In some ways, these practices bear a striking similarity to those that underlie documentary film, painting and photography in contemporary China. As we shall see in the following chapters, contemporary artists have been drawn to documentary techniques—objective, on-the-ground observation, careful documentation of real life situations and problems—as a way of avoiding, exposing or exploring the penetration of ideology into everyday life. In the case of the Three Gorges, artists such as Zhang Ming, Jia Zhangke and Yunfei Ji find it necessary to investigate not only the legacy of the communist revolution and the impact of globalization but also the same early myths that so interest Fan Chengda and his peers—the goddess of Mt. Wu, the tragedies of Liu Bei and Zhuge Liang, the triumphs of Yu the Great.

develop in the Northern Song and which gained a measure of popularity by the Southern Song in texts written on yet another famous figure of Three Gorges's lore: the goddess of Mt. Wu (*Wushan shennü* 巫山神女). Based in part on aspects of the Tang poetic treatment of the goddess and in part by the circulation of the late-Tang Daoist Du Guangting's (850-933) collection of biographies of Daoist goddesses and saints—the *Yongcheng jixian lu* 壩城集仙錄 (*Record of the Assembled Immortals of the Round Citadel*)—a small group of Song writers, Fan Chengda chief among them, sought to extricate the goddess of Mt. Wu from the eroticism in which she had been entangled ever since the composition of the two goddess *fu* attributed to Song Yu.⁴⁵

Those rhapsodies, both collected in the influential and widely read *Wenxuan* 文選, depicted the goddess as a miraculously changeable figure of irresistible charms, who once offered to share her bed with a former king of Chu. This is how she is described in Song Yu's "Gaotang Rhapsody":

Once in the past, King Xiang of Chu and Song Yu were strolling the terrace at Yunmeng and gazed at the Gaotang tower, the top of which was covered by clouds and mists, which rose peak-like to the apex, when suddenly the appearance [of the vapors] changed and in the briefest span began to mutate and transform ceaselessly. The King asked Yu: "What manner of *qi* is this?" Yu responded: "These are the so-called morning clouds." The King said: "And what are morning clouds?" Yu said: "Once in the past, when the previous king was wandering around Gaotang, he grew fatigued and took a nap during the day. In a dream he saw a woman who said: "I am the lady of Mt. Wu; the sojourner of Gaotang. I heard that milord was wandering around Gaotang and wished to offer to you my pillow and mat." The King thereupon honored her with his company. Parting, she took her leave and said: "I reside on the sunny side of Mt. Wu and on the treacherous reaches of Gaoqiu. At daybreak I am the morning clouds, at dusk the driving rain. Morning after morning, evening after evening I am here beneath the Yang Terrace." The next morning he looked for this and it was as she had said. As a result, he established a shrine and called it "Morning Clouds."

昔者楚襄王與宋玉游於雲夢之臺，望高唐之觀，其上獨有雲氣，崢嶸直上，忽兮改容，須臾之間，變化無窮。王問玉曰：“此何氣也？”玉對曰：“所謂朝雲者也。”王曰：“何謂朝雲？”玉曰：“昔者先王嘗游高唐，怠而晝寢，夢見一婦人曰：‘妾巫山之女也。為高唐之客。聞君游高唐，願薦枕席。’王因幸之。去而辭曰：‘妾在巫山之陽，高丘之阻，旦為朝雲，暮為行雨。朝朝暮暮，陽臺之下。’旦朝視之，如言。故為立廟，號曰‘朝雲’。”

For some, the act of easy sensuality described in this excerpt, with its mingling of worlds and its suggestion of kingly negligence, offered a negative example through which to establish the literary bounds of sexual propriety. Far more writers, however, embraced the goddess and her lore as a rich source of erotic imagery, an approach that continues to this day, as evidenced by the pages and pages of semi-pornographic images of the goddess generated by a simple online search of the word *Wu shan shennü* 巫山神女. Though the erotic cachet of the goddess has long dominated, there has been a competing strain of skepticism since at least the Tang Dynasty that views Song Yu's texts as either woefully misleading or embarrassingly

⁴⁵ There is little to indicate that the Mt. Wu of Song Yu's rhapsody is the same Mt. Wu that forms part of the northern border of the Wu Gorge. The earliest identifiable source for this geographic designation seems to be Li Daoyuan's commentary to the *Shujing*. For foundational research on the goddess of Mt. Wu, with a special focus on the geography of Song Yu's poems, see Wen Yiduo's 聞一多 "Gaotang shennü chuanshuo zhi fenxi 高堂神女傳說之分析" in *Qinghua daxue xuebao* vol. 10, no. 4 (1935), 837-866. For more on the entirety of the tradition of goddess poetry, see Edward H. Schafer's *The Divine Woman: Dragon Ladies and Rain Maidens in T'ang Literature* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

misunderstood. A recent article links the full flowering of this interpretive approach to the influence of Song Dynasty *lixue* 理學, or Neo-Confucianism, which is supposed to have set up a strict distinction between humans, who experience desire and emotion, and spirits, which do not.⁴⁶ As an early example of this epistemological logic, the article's author cites a passage from the late 10th century *Taiping guangji* 太平廣記, which details the origins and special capacities of the goddess of Mt. Wu, whose name is Yaoji 瑤姬, and whose official title is Lady Cloudflower (*Yunhua furen* 雲華夫人): "Song Yu wrote his goddess *fu* to lodge his passions, [in the process] debauching and besmirching the most illustrious and perfected high immortal. How else could this slander have descended on her 宋玉作神仙賦以寓情，荒淫穢蕪高真上仙，豈可誣而降之?" The *Taiping guangji*'s focus on the violation and pollution of the goddess (quoted verbatim from Du Guangting's earlier text) is typical of the revisionary approach that takes Song Yu as its primary target.

This was, however, neither an exclusively post-Tang nor a solely *lixue* interpretive move. Li Bai, for example, writes:

感興八首，其一

瑤姬天帝女，
精彩化朝雲。
宛轉入夢宵，
無心向楚君。
錦衾抱秋月，
綺席空蘭芬。
茫昧竟誰測，
虛傳宋玉文。

Moved by Poetic Images, Poem One

Yaoji, daughter of the Heavenly Emperor,
In a flash of brilliance turns into morning clouds.
Wending her way, she enters the dream's evening,
And detachedly approaches the lord of Chu.
Under brocade covers he embraces the autumn moon;
Yet his silken mat bears no orchid scent.
Who will finally fathom this confusing muddle,
This fantasy transmitted by Song Yu's writing.⁴⁷

Devoid of the moralistic tone of the *Taiping guangji* passage, Li's poem describes the entire encounter between goddess and Chu king as a humorously empty fantasy transmitted as fact by Song Yu's writing. This strain of skepticism—often referred to in poems on Mt. Wu as *yi* 疑 (a semantically variable term that can also convey a sense of wonder or mystery), though here signaled by Li's use of *ce* 測 (fathom, guess)—usually hinges on the mystifying relationship between reality and illusion, waking and dreaming and the world objectively observed and the world seen through texts. It is a central, and arguably conventionalized, component of the Tang literature on Mt. Wu, but is modified in the Song by a more careful investigation of the language of the rhapsodies attributed to Song Yu. This expansion of the Tang approach is exemplified in a poem written by Fan Chengda some years before he had the opportunity to travel to the Gorges:

Editor Han Wujia showed me the poem that he composed on Minister Chen Jiling's painting of Mt. Wu. Gazing upon this masterwork, sighs of wonder engulfed my breast. Previously, when I investigated Song Yu's talk of "morning clouds," [and the common claim] that it slandered the kings of ancient times, I discovered it to have absolutely no basis in fact. As for King Xiang's dreaming [of the goddess] and his ordering Yu to compose a *fu*, [the text] only says: "Her

⁴⁶ See Liu Gang 劉剛, "宋玉關於巫山神女的辯誣與其對宋玉神女描寫的批評," in *Anshan shifan xueyuan xuebao* 12 (3), 23.

⁴⁷ *LTBJ* 1102.

flushed visage seethed and she held fast to herself, never could she be trifled with in such a manner." Later generations did not look into this carefully, uniformly besmirching [Song Yu and the goddess] with their slander. As for Cao Zhi's [fu on] Fufei, it too was only written after Cao was aroused by this [misreading]. Who will counter all of this baseless derision? Following this train of thought, I have matched [Han's] rhymes, and harmonizing with him, submit [this poem] to cheer him on.⁴⁸

韓無咎檢詳出示所賦陳季陵戶部巫山圖詩。仰窺高作，歎息彌襟。余嘗考宋玉談朝雲事，漫稱先王時，本無據依，及襄王夢之，命玉為賦，但云：“潁顏怒以自持，曾不可乎犯干。”後世弗察，一切溷以蝶語，曹子建宓妃，亦感此而作，此嘲誰當解者？輒用此意，次韻和呈，以資撫掌。

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| 1 | 瑤姬家山高插天
碧叢奇秀古未傳 | Yaoji's mountain home—so high it pierces the heavens,
Of its emerald groves, marvelous and fine, nothing has
been transmitted by the ancients. |
| | 向來題目經楚客
名字徑度岷峨前 | Without break, the standard theme has come down to us
through Chu travelers,
Whose names have spread straight past Mt. Min and
Mt. E. |
| 5 | 是邪非邪莽誰識
喬林古廟常秋色
暮去行雨朝行雲
翠帷瑤席知何人 | But does she exist? Or does she not? Who can
comprehend this muddle? ⁴⁹
Lofty forests and ancient shrine—forever the color of
autumn.
At dusk departs the driving rain, at dawn come scudding
clouds,
A verdant canopy and jasper mats—do you know to
whom they belong? |
| 9 | 峽船一息且千里
五兩竿頭見旛尾
仰窺仙館至今疑 | Gorge boats in a breath's span cross one thousand <i>li</i> ,
At the ends of paired poles one sees the pennants' tips.
Gazing up towards the immortal lodge, even now one
wonders uncertainly, |

⁴⁸ Fan's lengthy preface is usually given as the title of this poem.

⁴⁹ One of three rhetorical questions in this poem (the others are lines eight and twenty one), this line alludes to the story of Lady Li, consort of Emperor Wudi of the Han and a famous femme fatale. The best known version of her story comes from Ban Gu's 班固 (32-92) *History of the Han* (*Hanshu* 漢書), which describes the stunning Lady Li's dubious rise to favor and her deathbed manipulation of the emperor that led to the political ascent of her immoral brothers. Having refused the emperor a final glance (*yi jian* 一見) before her death, Lady Li comes to obsess the ruler, inspiring him to seek her through occult practices. When a wizard from the state of Qi promises to conjure her spirit, the emperor is only too eager to follow along. Seeing a woman who resembles Lady Li, Wudi composes a poem: "Was it her, or was it not her? I stand and gaze after her. Distantly she ambles; so slow, her coming! [是邪，非邪？立而望之，偏何姍姍其來遲！]。Han Wudi next composes a rhapsody on Lady Li that draws heavily on the mystical imagery of Song Yu's goddess rhapsodies and the language of the *Chu'ci* (*Han shu*, 3951-3955). As Stephen Owen has written, Ban Gu's story "brilliantly dissects the power of illusion," exposing not only Lady Li's skillful manipulation (based on the blocking of vision), but also the emperor's willingness to delude himself with the visual trickery of the wizard. In the context of this poem, Lady Li's story is a reminder of the "power of illusion," especially when inspired by sensual desire. See: "One Sight: The *Han Shu* Biography of Lady Li," in *Rhetoric and the Discourses of Power in Court Culture: China, Europe, and Japan*, ed. David R. Knechtges and Eugene Vance (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 246.

13	行人問訊居人指 千年遺恨何當申 陽臺愁絕如荒村 高唐賦裏人如畫 玉色頰顏元不嫁	The traveler makes his enquiries, the locals point the way. How to give vent to these thousand years of lingering resentment? Yang Terrace is doleful in the extreme, so like a ruined village, In the Gaotang Rhapsody the lady was just like a painting, With her jade complexion and flushed face, she never did consummate that affair.
17	後來飢客眼長寒 浪傳樂府吹復彈 此事牽連到溫洛 更憐塵襪有無間	And yet, later came those hungry travelers, their eyes ever cold, Who wrongly spread their <i>yuefu</i> —blowing and plucking, Till this story found its way to the tepid Luo. Even more do I pity the lady with "dusty stockings," lingering between being and nothingness. ⁵⁰
21	君不見天孫住在銀濤許 塵間猶作兒女語 公家春風錦瑟傍 莫為此圖虛斷腸	Milords, can you not see Heaven's granddaughter who lives midst the silvery billows! Of her men on earth still spread silly talk of boys and girls. In your home, sir, midst spring breezes and patterned lute, Take care not to be baselessly moved by this painting!

This playful work presents a capsule history and a symbolic geography for both the spread of a licentious interpretation of Song Yu's rhapsody and also for the influence of that licentiousness on poetic representations of other women. In the opening five lines, which serve as a kind of secondary verse preface, Fan anchors his poem in the monumental materiality of Mt. Wu, the home of the mythical goddess. This mountain, which "pierces the sky," is both impressive and totally generic: described in language borrowed almost verbatim from a poem by Li He 李賀 (790-816), it is the same soaring peak that has always been Yaoji's home.⁵¹ And yet, instead of simply describing the mountain's eternal mists and rains, supposed manifestations of the goddess, Fan does something strange, he tells us what has *not* been transmitted (*wei zhuan* 未傳) as a central focus of the Mt. Wu poetic tradition—the lush and wondrous greenery nurtured by the Gorge's damp climate. In place of this edifying landscape, the enduring theme (*timu* 題目), sustained and transmitted beyond the mountainous confines of the Sichuan basin by many a "Chu traveler" (*Chu ke* 楚客), has been Yaoji's offer of her "pillow and mat" to King Huai.

It is this universally familiar narrative, based on what is here pronounced to be a sloppy reading of Song Yu's poem that has been "wrongly spread" (*langchuan* 浪傳) by "hungry travelers, their eyes ever cold" (*jike yan chang han* 飢客眼長寒), through the music of the

⁵⁰ Fan is referring to Cao Zhi's 曹植 (192-232) *Rhapsody of the Goddess of the River Luo* (*Luo shen fu* 洛神賦), which describes an orgiastic encounter with Fufei 宓妃, the spirit of the Luo River. In the frame story to that highly erotic work, Cao cites Song Yu's poems on the goddess of Mt. Wu as his inspiration: "I was moved by Song Yu's response to the affair between the King of Chu and the goddess and so composed this rhapsody 感宋玉對楚王神女之事，遂作斯賦."

⁵¹ See next note.

Wushan gao 巫山高 subcategory of *yuefu* 樂府 poetry.⁵² This group of poems is highly intertextual, drawing on a shared lexicon and body of imagery to represent Mt. Wu as a vertiginous peak, shrouded always by clouds and mists that conceal discreetly the landmarks associated with King Xiang's oneiric assignation. This is a place that stands fixed and eternal, not so much outside of time as forever as it is described in Song Yu's rhapsody. Hovering between past and present and illusion and reality, Mt. Wu becomes a figure for the simultaneous inaccessibility and immanence of history itself. Like the "palaces of Chu" in Du Fu's second "Yearning for the Traces of Antiquity" poem (see Chapter 1), the mountain inspires travelers to seek and locals to point the way, though their shared object always eludes them.

This indeterminacy finds expression both in the lingering "wonder" (*yi* 疑) that surrounds the location of the always-cloaked physical landmarks of the ancient narrative and the sense of incredulity (another possible meaning of *yi*) that surrounds the story itself, not to mention the questionable nature of the goddess's reputation. In an early *Wushan gao* poem, by Emperor Yuan (r. 552-555) of the Liang (508-554), the play of light and dark in Mt. Wu's forests seems to render unreal the entire landscape:

樹雜山如畫，	The trees are varied, the mountain so like a painting,
林暗澗疑空。	The forest darkens and I wonder if the stream is empty.

Throughout the *Wushan gao* tradition the numinous qualities of the landscape heighten its atmosphere of erotic possibility and suspense. By the Tang Dynasty, however, a number of poets had begun to subvert the familiar clichés, demystifying the mountain's clouds and rains, proclaiming the stories surrounding the goddess to be pure invention and complaining that a thousand plus years of slander that had been heaped on King Huai and his son, King Xiang. As Yu Pen 于瀆 (9th century) reminds us, sometimes fog is just fog:

何山無朝雲，	What mountain is without morning clouds,
彼雲亦悠揚。	Clouds that also float and drift on end?
何山無暮雨，	What mountain is without evening rains,
彼雨亦蒼茫。	Rains that also loom and darken?
宋玉恃才者，	Song Yu was one who lived by his talents,
憑雲構高唐。	And so, drawing on the clouds, he fabricated "Gaotang."
自重文賦名，	Prizing above all the fame gained through rhapsodic writings,
荒淫歸楚襄。	He came to deliver on King Xiang of Chu a name for debauchery.
峨峨十二峰，	Towering and looming! These twelve peaks,
永作妖鬼鄉。	Will thus without end be the realm of succubae and demons. ⁵³

Yu is not alone in blaming Song Yu for slandering the ancient kings of Chu and making of the goddess of Mt. Wu a succubus. But is this shift from the sensuous to the moralizing indicative of changing cultural values or of the need to revive a poetic theme that had become bogged

⁵² The most familiar collection of *Wushan gao* poems is found in the seventeenth *juan* of Guo Maoqian's 郭茂倩 (b. 1094) *Yuefu shiji* 樂府詩集, or, *Anthology of Yuefu Poetry* (Beijing: *Zhonghua shuju*, 2003), 238-243; hereafter *YFSJ*. Guo's compendium contains 22 such poems by 20 writers from the Qi (550-577), Liang (502-557), Chen (557-589) and Tang Dynasties.

⁵³ *YFSJ* 242.

down in its own clichés? After all, what better way to make one's mark on a *yuefu* theme than by turning the topic on its head, by proclaiming, as the Tang monk Qiji 齊己 (863-937) did, not simply that "Mt Wu is tall 巫山高," but also that the "woman of Wu is a [sex] demon 巫女妖?"⁵⁴ Or, do we even need to choose a single option?

Fan Chengda's poem expands on Yu Pen and Qiji's critical stance, and is, in all but title, a clear addition to the *Wushan gao* theme. Unlike those earlier poems, but like some of its Song forebears however, Fan's work seeks to rehabilitate not just the kings of Chu and the goddess of Mt. Wu, but also Song Yu, whom he sees as merely a victim of the poor reading comprehension of others. In both Fan's preface and poem, he singles out those "cold-eyed travelers" (poem) of "later generations" (preface) who, neglecting to "investigate" fully (*cha* 察, preface) both the intent and the wording of Song Yu's rhapsodies, have spread "slandering language" (*xieyu* 蝶語, preface) and "silly talk of boys and girls" (*ernü yu* 兒女語, poem) in their own poems and rhapsodies. The implications of this failure to read the right way are by no means limited to Mt. Wu and its lore: Fan identifies it as the origin of a wantonness that spreads, through space and time, and from literary woman to literary woman, till it reaches even the milky way and its lonely weaving girl.

There is also throughout this poem a certain tongue in cheek quality. Fan's moralizing tone is subtly undermined by his thorough evocation of the sensual appearance of Mt. Wu and his use of poetic phrases that immediately conjure up erotic images in the reader's mind—the verdant canopy and jasper mats (*cuiwei yaoxi* 翠帷瑤席) that he imagines atop Mt. Wu, the "dusty stockings" (*chenwa* 塵襪) of the goddess of the Luo, the "spring breezes" (*chunfeng* 春風) and "patterned lute" (*jinse* 錦瑟; a phrase that evokes the sensuality of the late Tang poet Li Shangyin, while also referring to the convivial company of a wife or courtesan) of Chen Jiling's home. This ironic undertone is perhaps best explained by the social context and function of Fan's poem. Not only is it a light hearted "cheering on" of Han Wujiu's initial poem, it is also addressed to the painting (described in lines six through twelve), which seems to draw on the erotic associations on Mt. Wu, and to the painting's owner, Chen Jiling. In twenty-four lines Fan must praise and poetically animate an image, respond wittily and playfully to another poem (while also alluding to multiple other texts) and cheekily admonish the owner of the painting.

What Fan neglects to mention in his poem and preface are any texts that might support his assertion of Song Yu's and goddess of Mt. Wu's innocence. This changes when he is finally able to see the goddess's temple at Mt. Wu with his own eyes. His earlier poem (and the poem and painting that inspired it) remained fresh in his mind, though a new text has come to influence his thinking. This is Fan's preface to the *Wushan gao* poem that he wrote to commemorate his first encounter with Mt. Wu:

Long ago, I borrowed Han Wujiu's rhymes to write a poem on Chen Jiling's painting of Mt. Wu. Investigating the intent of Song Yu's *fu*, I judged the matter of Gaotang with extreme thoroughness. Now passing beneath the Yang Terrace, I have composed [on this topic again] in the form of a single *yuefu* poem. According to tradition, Yaoji, daughter of Queen Mother of the West, once helped Yu to tame the waters. This is recorded in stone inscriptions located within the temple.

余舊嘗用韓無咎韻題陳季陸巫山圖，考宋玉賦意，辨高唐之事甚詳。今過陽臺之下，復賦樂府一首。世傳瑤姬西王母女，嘗佐禹治水，廟中石刻在焉。⁵⁵

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁵⁵ *FSHJ* 215

As Fan himself states, he remains perfectly satisfied with his previous textual analysis. All that he chooses to add to this is information from an unnamed "tradition" (*shichuan* 世傳) independent of Song Yu's poem. Inscribed on stones in the goddess's temple, this tradition describes Yaoji's role in Yu's taming of the floods. We learn more about this in Fan's diary entry, written some years later, during his downstream journey:

The Goddess's Temple is located atop a small ridge on the bank opposite the peaks [that make up Mt. Wu]. People say that the so-called Yangyun Terrance and Gaotang Tower sit atop Laihe Peak, though this is not necessarily so. As for the story of the goddess, according to what Song Yu's rhapsodies say, it was intended to admonish King Xiang, and its language stops at what is proper and right. This includes phrases such as, "her jade visage blushed, her face grew red" and "she was not to be trifled with," which can be taken as general examples [of its propriety]. Later generations failed to look into all of this carefully, and belittled [the poem/story/author] with puerile insinuation. Previously, I composed both a former and later "Wushan gao" poem in order to set straight the record. A stone carving within the present-day temple cites the *Yongcheng ji*: "Yao Ji, daughter of the Queen Mother of the West, was called The Perfected One of Cloud and Flower (*Yunhua zhenren*). She assisted Yu in driving out the ghosts and demons [from the area of the Gorges] and in cutting through the stone to let flow the waters." Having merit, she was memorialized in writing and is now enfeoffed as the Perfected One of Miraculous Efficacy (*Miaoyong zhenren*). The temple's plaque reads: "Abbey of Congealed Perfection" (*Ningzhen guan* 凝真觀). For ancillary sacrifices, there is the White Horse General, which, according to tradition, is the spirit Yao Ji drove away.

神女廟乃在諸峰對岸小岡之上，所謂陽雲臺、高唐觀，人雲在來鶴峰上，亦未必是。神女之事，據宋玉賦云以諷襄王，其詞亦止乎禮義，如「玉色頰以頰顏」、「羌不可兮犯干」之語，可以概見。後世不督，一切以兒女子褻之。余嘗作前後《巫山高》以辯。今廟中石刻引《壩城記》：「瑤姬，西王母之女，稱雲華夫人，助禹驅鬼神，斬石疏波」有功見紀，今封妙用真人。廟額曰凝真觀，從祀有白馬將軍，俗傳所驅之神也。⁵⁶

As Fan reminds us, his two *Wushan gao* poems and their prefaces were written "in order to set straight the record" (*bian* 以辯) regarding Song Yu's rhapsodies on the goddess, which he claims "stop at what is proper and right" (*zhi hu liyi* 止乎禮義).⁵⁷ Fan supports this by once again citing different texts: first, following his poem on Chen Jiling's painting, he presents lines from Song Yu's poems on the goddess;⁵⁸ and second, finally describing the source of the "tradition" to which he referred in his first *Wushan gao* poem, he cites Du Guangting's collection of biographies (with the slightly abbreviated title *Yongcheng ji* 壩城記). This text, which identifies the goddess of Mt. Wu as Yaoji, 23rd daughter of the Queen of the West (*Xiwang mu* 西王母), is what provides Fan and other critics of the erotic tradition of Mt. Wu poetry with an alternative history, one based on deeds of action and merit inscribed clearly in

⁵⁶ FCDBJ 219.

⁵⁷ This phrase is borrowed from the "Great Preface" (*daxu* 大序) of the Mao Commentary to the *Shijing*.

⁵⁸ Fan's citations are not quite correct. The first line, "玉色頰以頰顏," is actually a variation on a line from the "Yuanyou 遠遊" of the *Chu'ci*, which usually reads "玉色頰以滿顏." It is possible that Fan (or the printers or copiers of his diary) had another line from the "Goddess Rhapsody" in mind, "薄怒以自持兮." This would make a great deal of sense, not only because this is the line that immediately precedes in the "Goddess Rhapsody" the next quote he gives (曾不可乎犯干), but also because he uses these two lines in the preface to his poem on Han Yuanji's poem and Chen Jiling's painting (see above). One also wonders whether the version of the goddess *fu* that Fan had on hand might have looked different from our received versions.

the landscape of the Gorges rather than on harlequin clouds gyiring sensually atop the mountain.⁵⁹

In the *Yongcheng jixian lu* Yaoji becomes a skilled practitioner of the Daoist arts of transformation (learned from a precious manual (*baojing* 寶經) bestowed on her by a major deity) who decides to reside on Mt. Wu after passing the mountain and becoming enamored of its spectacular scenery. Some time after settling there, she meets the familiar flood-queller, Yu the Great, who, in the midst of forming the Three Gorges, was beset by a mysterious wind and interfering demons near Mt. Wu. Unable to finish his work of dredging and boring, Yu requested Yaoji's help in stopping the wind and channeling the floodwaters:

After a while, Yu the Great, who was in the midst of taming the flood came to camp beneath her mountain. A great wind suddenly arose, shaking the cliffs till they toppled into the valleys. Lacking the strength to stop it, he met with the goddess, and paying obeisance, requested help. She thus ordered her serving girl to present Yu with a stratagem in the form of a text for summoning the hundred spirits and ordered her [attendant] spirits, Kuangzhang, Yuyu, Huangmo, Dayi, Gengchen and Tonglü, among others, to help Yu split stones and clear a way for the waves, to relieve blockages and carve a channel through obstructions in order to follow the water's flow. Yu thereupon made obeisance and took his leave.

時大禹理水駐其山下，大風卒至，振崖谷隕，力不可制，因與夫人相值，拜而求助，即敕侍女授禹策召百神之書，因命其神狂章虞余黃魔大翳庚辰童律等助禹斬石疏波，決塞導厄，以循其流，禹拜而謝焉。⁶⁰

Referring to both her assistance and Du Guangting's text, Fan writes: "having merit, she was memorialized in writing" (*yougongjianji* 有功見紀). This phrase is key; both to Fan's interest in Yaoji and to our understanding of the processes through which authors embed and inscribe/memorialize (*ji*) historical and mythical figures in the landscape through the correct types of reading and writing. In this case, Fan uses *ji* 紀, cognate with and often interchangeable with *ji* 記, to refer to the stone inscriptions (*shike* 石刻) of Du Guangting's text that fill the goddess's temple.⁶¹ The version of the goddess's life contained in those inscriptions differs dramatically from the salacious account found in the rhapsodies attributed to Song Yu and those who imitated them. Du *does* describe her famous capacity for transformation—into clouds and mists, rocks, dragons and countless other forms—but balances this unstable

⁵⁹ Ma Yongqing 馬永卿 of the Song (dates uncertain; lived around the North/South transition) makes explicit the importance of Du Guangting's text in a fascinating essay on the shrine to the goddess of Mt. Wu: "Beginning from an early age, whenever I, Yongqing, read [Song Yu's] Gaotang Rhapsody and his other works collected in the *Wenxuan* anthology I would feel a great resentment and unease, saying [to myself]: 'How could this be!' After all, the fact that a lofty and perfected [one] keeps far from humans, and has nothing whatsoever to do with [distinctions of] clean and dirty, pure and obscene, must surely quash this version of things [contained in Song Yu's rhapsody]. I had a mind to refute this, but fell ill and was unable. Later, I acquired two unusual books and did a comparison, and only then did I fully clarify this matter from root to branch. Now, according to *Yu xue ji yi* (A Record of Oddities of Yu's Cave) and Mister Du's *Yongcheng jixian lu*... 永卿自少時讀《文選·高堂》等三賦，輒痛憤不平，曰：寧有是哉！且高真去人遠矣，清濁淨穢，萬萬不侔，必亡是理。思有以闢之，病未能也。後得二異書參較之，然後詳其本末。今按《禹穴紀異》及杜先生《壩城集仙錄》。" Ma goes on to summarize the account provided by Du Guangting. See *QSYWZ*, 1059.

⁶⁰ The *Yongcheng jixian lu* is collected in the 60-volume edition of the *Daozang* 道藏 (Taipei, 1977) v.30, 24154-24207. For more on the complicated textual history of this work, see Suzanne E. Cahill's *Divine Traces of the Daoist Sisterhood* (Magdalena N.M.: Three Pines Press, 2006), 14-17.

⁶¹ *Ji* 紀 is also used in the contemporary words for "to document" (*jilu* 紀錄) and "documentary film" (*jilu pian* 紀錄片).

corporeality with the monumental permanence of Yu the Great's flood control project. In the previous chapter, I describe how that act and the landscape it produced are classified not only as traces of Yu, his literal footprints (*ji* 跡/蹟) and axe marks (*fuhen* 斧痕), but also as marks of his merit (*ji* 績, or, more generally, *gong* 功). And yet, though the surface of the earth is inscribed with Yu and Yaoji's merit, and though Du Guangting has described the true history of their connection, careless travelers and readers have preferred to cover their eyes with the swirling clouds and sultry mists of poetic lore. Fan responds to this situation by once again invoking types of writing and reading (and as we shall see in the next section, painting) that reflect the goals of his project.

Here, Fan focuses on the recording of merit for posterity and the carving of texts into stone. Both *ji* 紀 (recording, writing down) and *ke* 刻 (carving, inscribing) are inscriptional practices that function primarily to memorialize and preserve. In so far as they embody a past person, place or time, they resemble the trace (*ji* 跡), yet they are first and foremost physical media of preservation rather than random and fragmented survivals from the past: they are an *ex post facto* record of the mark/merit rather than its index. One could, of course, argue that all *ji* 紀 and *shike* 石刻 function as traces, *ji* 跡, of the past, but not that all *ji* 跡 were intentionally produced to counter the ravages of time. For Fan, both Du Guangting's record (*ji* 紀/記) and its inscription in the goddess's temple beneath Mt. Wu supply him with the textual evidence he needs to redeem the goddess and her mountain in his diary and poems. In so doing, he replaces the clouds and mists as mystical and immaterial traces of the goddess with the stony permanence of the Gorges, as in the first of his "Wushan gao" poems:

西真功高佐禹跡， How lofty the merit of the perfected one of the west, who helped
to make Yu's traces,
斧鑿鱗皴倚天壁。 Such that the scaly marks of ax and chisel could rest on these
heaven-soaring cliffs.⁶²

III. The Record Pictorialized and Perfected

Towards the end of "Written on a Painting of Mt. Wu Owned by Chen Jiling's Family 題陳季陵家巫山圖一首," the poem that inspired Fan Chengda's very first poem on Mt. Wu, Han Wujiu asks the owner of the painting that inspired *his* poem the following:

君家此畫來何許， Your family's painting—from where does it come?
照水煙鬟欲相語。 With its shining water and misty tendrils—as though
about to speak with us.

This rhetorical question, and the image that follows it, help to intensify the tone of wonder and praise necessary in a poem written on (literally and figuratively) a painting owned by a friend. Han is not asking, 'where did you get this picture,' but rather, 'where could you possibly have found this marvel on which I am so lucky to gaze?' The image here of shining water and curling mists seems to refer clearly to the painting's fine rendering of light and movement and

⁶² FSHJ 215.

to the common conflation of landscape and goddess, but for much of the poem it is difficult to determine when Han is describing the painting and when he is writing "around" his inspiration, describing what the landscape evokes, rather than what the painting depicts. Compared to the ekphrastic poems on painting made famous by Du Fu,⁶³ both Han Wujia and Fan's efforts are discursive and fragmented, skipping from topic to topic and place to place in order to make a point, rather than create an effect. Though the connection between text and image is often opaque, Han does make it clear that the interpretive errors that have rendered the goddess of Mt. Wu a figure of disrepute and "suspicion" in literature can all too easily carry over into the world of painting:

娥眉妙手不能畫，	An artist skilled in fine eyebrows cannot paint [the mountain],
枉學瑤姬夢中嫁。	For he'll inadvertently imitate [the story of] Yaoji offering herself in a dream.

In the hands of an artist skilled in depicting beautiful women, represented here synecdochically by their delicate eyebrows (*mei* 娥眉), the theme is likely to descend into the scurrilous fictions introduced by Song Yu's *fu*. By contrast, Chen's family's painting seems to present the true, but hitherto unrecognized, face of Mt. Wu:

巫山仙子世莫識，	Mt. Wu's immortal child—there are none who recognize her:
十二高峰作顏色。	Twelve high peaks serve as her visage,
暮去朝來雨復雲，	At dusk she departs and morning comes—rain followed by clouds,
卻將幽恨感行人。	But it's her hidden resentment that moves this traveler.

No longer the temptress of Song Yu's *fu*, the goddess is a figure of pity coterminous with the twelve peaks of Mt. Wu, fixed forever in the atmospheric patterns of the Three Gorges. This is not a picture of a mountain transmogrified into a sensual woman, but of a woman transmogrified into a mountain. It is, in other words, first and foremost a painting of a landscape.

In his response to Han's poem, Fan Chengda emphasizes this fact by focusing on the hitherto neglected (*gu weichuan* 古未傳) "emerald groves" (*bicong* 碧叢), a visual sign that this poem will not only unveil the topographic truths that lie beneath the shapeless mists of innuendo but also that Fan is responding not to the famous figures in Song Yu's *fu*, but to a painted image of a lushly green mountain.⁶⁴ Fan and Han's poems are relatively early examples

⁶³ Ronald Egan compares a typical example of Du Fu's style of painting poems with Northern Song examples by Su Shi and Huang Tingjian in his "Poems on Paintings: Su Shih and Huang T'ing-chien," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2 (Dec., 1983): 413-451.

⁶⁴ One wonders if Fan isn't signaling that Chen Jiling's family's painting is done in the archaic "green and blue" (*qinglü* 青綠) style often associated with painting of the Six Dynasties and Tang periods, as is seen in another famous image associated with the ancient state of Shu: "Emperor Ming-huang's Journey into Shu 明皇幸蜀圖" (Palace Museum Taipei; attributed to Li Daozhao 李昭道 (ca. 675-741), but probably an 11th century copy of an 8th century original).

of a small group of poems on such paintings of Mt. Wu.⁶⁵ Though the existence of these poems attests to a tradition of "Mt. Wu paintings" (*Wushan tu* 巫山圖), I have not been able to identify a single extant Song example of such a dedicated depiction of this mountain or the Wu Gorge. This is strange indeed, especially when one considers how common paintings of the Xiao and Xiang region, an area also connected from an early period with a handful of iconic poems and poets, are. Perhaps the lofty eremitic associations of the Xiao and Xiang tradition made such paintings a more justifiable focus of literati interest, and hence more likely to survive, than images related to the morally "dubious" Mt. Wu theme. Unfortunately, we must not only repeat Han's rhetorical question ("where does this painting come from"), but also ask a more basic one: what did this painting look like?

This is a thorny question, especially when our primary sources of information are textual.⁶⁶ Han suggests the potential for some kind of pictorialized eroticism based on the two goddess *fu* (or accidentally triggered by the stories associated with the mountain), though there is nothing in his poem to suggest that Chen Jiling's painting included a representation of the goddess in the form of a human woman, as in Gu Kaizhi's 顧愷之 (c.344–406) famous depiction of the goddess of the River Luo. What we learn from Fan's final extended discussion of Mt. Wu, from the *Wu chuan lu*, is that, in his avowedly critical opinion, painters of this landscape struggled (and failed) to capture its unique and changeable weather patterns:

At Mt. Wu's finest spots, no matter whether dark or bright, there are always clouds and mists belting the mountains with their shadows and scudding gently about—this [simply] cannot be painted! I have passed beneath it twice and what I have seen has always been like this. Could it be that it just happened to be so when I passed, or is this region really [perpetually] like this? Perhaps the phrase "scudding clouds" even has some basis in fact? As for the paintings of Mt. Wu that have come down to us, they are none of them like this; even those in the official lodge in Kuifu do not resemble [the landscape]. I ordered an official painter to take a small skiff out into the middle of the current in order to make a careful representation (*moxie* 摹寫), which for the first time achieved a formal likeness. Now, as for those images collected by men of catholic tastes, none of them compare to my painting's verisimilitude.

巫峽山最嘉處，不問陰晴，常多雲氣，映帶飄拂，不可繪畫，余兩過其下，所見皆然。豈余經過時偶如此，抑其地固然？「行雲」之語，亦有所據依耶？世傳巫山圖，皆非是；雖夔府官廨中所畫亦不類。余令畫史以小舸泛中流摹寫，始得形似。今好事者所藏，舉不若余圖之真也。⁶⁷

Often seen as a manifestation of the goddess of Mt. Wu herself, the "scudding clouds" of this passage are present not only in the literary tradition, but also each time Fan passes through the Gorges. Surprised by this correspondence between text and reality, Fan wonders if the atmospheric phenomenon might not have something to do with the climate and topography of the region. Having established and reestablished the general respectability of the goddess, Fan is excited by the possibility that even this most immaterial aspect of the old stories "has some

⁶⁵ Li Bai's "Observing Yuan Danqiu seated before a screen painting of Mt. Wu 觀元丹丘坐巫山屏風" (*LTBJ*, 1135) is a prime example of such a pre-Song poem. One of the main differences between Li's poem and those of Fan and Han, is that the earlier poet adopts the familiar High Tang theme of visual confusion as a way of praising the mimetic perfection of the painting. Du Fu is particularly famous for this type of painting poem. Li also seems to embrace the erotic theme that Fan condemns while drawing on a set of references that aligns his work more closely with the *Wushan gao yuefu* tradition.

⁶⁶ The possibility that woodblock images included in later gazeteers of the region might be based on paintings of Mt. Wu will be addressed in a future version of this work.

⁶⁷ *FCDBJ* 219.

basis in fact" (*you suo juyi* 有所據依). Again, it is only through actively engaging with the landscape that one can make such observations, a lesson missed by previous artists who have tried to capture this "un-paintable" scene. Even those images embedded in the landscape (collected in the local government office) "do not resemble" (*bu lei* 不類)—or, in an alternate rendering, "do not belong in the same category with"—what Fan sees with his own eyes.

In many ways, Fan's diary is built on the desire for such elusively accurate "resemblances." He is mostly comfortable achieving this textually, through the objective and thorough description that constitutes his record of action and his travel poems. There are, however, a few places in his journey where text alone does not suffice; where something visual and physical is required. The Tower of Myriad Vistas (*Wanjing lou* 萬景樓) in Hanjia 漢嘉 is one of those places. In the explanatory preface to a poem on the tower, Fan writes: "[The tower] is atop a hill within the walls of Hanjia, and the view from on high is exceedingly fine, just about the best in all of Western Chuan. I commissioned a professional painter to produce a picture to take back with me 在漢嘉城中山上，登覽勝絕，殆冠西川，予令畫工作圖以歸." In the poem itself Fan self-deprecatingly explains his decision to commission this painting:

詩無傑語慚風物，	My poetry, lacking superior lines, does shame to this scene,
賴有丹青傳小筆。	So I rely on cinnabar and verdigris to transmit a little sketch.

Fan's commission is thus a method for both capturing something that poetry cannot and producing a memento to take back with him (*yi gui* 以歸) on his journey east.⁶⁸

In the above *Wu chuan lu* passage, however, Fan seems less concerned with tchotchkes than with producing an image of Mt. Wu that approaches a "formal likeness" (*xingsi* 形似) and achieves an unprecedented measure of "verisimilitude" (*zhen* 真). Through this he hopes not only to surpass other collectors, but also to create (with the aid of a skilled intermediary) a picture with some "basis in fact" (*you suo juyi* 有所據依). This is the phrase that Fan uses earlier when introducing his theory about the local climate, but it is perhaps most apt here: after all, Fan's painting is not described as being based on other paintings or styles—as is often the case in established landscape traditions—but as the product of an act of dedicated copying (*moxie* 摹寫) that takes place *plein-air*, embedded in the landscape which it represents. We might never know what this painting looked like, but we can be sure that it was a perfect pictorial counterpart to Fan's diary—reaching for the objective and the accurate, a product of skilled actions executed on the ground (or water, as it were). Just as with Fan's comments on the "plum rains" of Xipu and the "scudding clouds" of Mt. Wu, the painting adjudicates place and produces an accurate landscape that is eminently knowable and easy to revisit, whether in person or through a poem, painting or diary.

The closest we can get to Fan's (and perhaps Chen Jiling's) image today are a small group of river paintings traditionally dated to the Song or Yuan Dynasty. On a purely formal level, one suspects that these paintings would have looked wildly different from Fan's: whereas Fan's picture must have depicted Mt. Wu from a low point (on the river) looking upwards, the

⁶⁸ This is also what Fan seems to have in mind in the poem, "Upon First Entering the Area of the Great Mt. E 初入大峨" (*FSHJ* 256):

贖作畫圖歸掛壁，	I shall simply make a painting and bring it home to hang upon the wall,
他年猶欲臥遊之。	For years from now I shall still want to wander here while abed.

riverscapes cover an enormous distance from a bird's eye view, offering a constantly shifting perspective. Formal differences notwithstanding, there is no doubt that all of these images would have shared a meticulous attention to topographic detail. The two best documented of the extant river paintings—*Changjiang wanli tu* 長江萬里圖 (Ten Thousand *Li* Along the Yangzi River), which has been variously attributed to a handful of the most important Song painters, but is now considered anonymous; and the *Shu chuan tu* 蜀川圖 (The Shu River), which is attributed to Li Gonglin 李公麟 (ca. 1049–1106)—both in the collection of the Freer Gallery in Washington D.C., will thus have to suffice in the absence of Fan's mimetic masterpiece.

Each of these spectacular panoramas of the Yangzi (including the Min River, which was traditionally thought to be the upper portion of the Yangzi) includes hundreds of small calligraphic labels marking place names, sites of interest and administrative designations.⁶⁹ In addition to these map-like markings, each painting has been used time and again as a surface for famous collectors to inscribe both poems from the past as well as original compositions, colophons, short histories and additional paintings. The list of names associated with these images (as possible creators, admirers or owners) reads like a catalogue of Chinese art luminaries from the Song through the Qing: Guo Xi 郭熙 (ca. 1001-ca. 1090), Xia Gui 夏圭 (active early 13th c.), Juran 巨然 (active ca. 960-985), Emperor Huizong 徽宗 (1082-1135, r. 1101-1125) of the Song, Dong Qichang 董其昌 (1555-1636), Emperor Qianlong 乾隆 (1711-1799, r. 1735-1796) of the Qing and Wang Hui 王翬 (1632-1717) for the Yangzi River scroll; Li Gonglin 李公麟 (ca. 1041-1106), Mi Fu 米芾 (1051-1107), Dong Qichang and Emperor Qianlong again and Ding Guanpeng 丁觀鵬 (active 1708-1771) for the Shu River scroll.

For one very special viewer, Emperor Qianlong, such paintings offered an unparalleled opportunity for correlating textual knowledge with imagination while inscribing the cartographic space of the painting. Qianlong alone wrote more than 1700 characters on the Shu River scroll, including a poem of approximately 400 characters that alludes to nearly every figure of literary and historical interest with connections to the places included in the image.⁷⁰ Du Fu figures prominently in this poem and in another of the emperor's long inscriptions, from June 19, 1746, when the Shu River scroll inspired him to copy out the 448 characters that comprise the Tang poet's famous "Autumn Meditations":

Duling's "Autumn Meditations, Eight Poems" were most likely written during his time in Shu. Recently we acquired this painting by Li Gonglin, on which the traces of the ancients can each be picked out one by one. This led me to envision old Du in his river hut wielding his brush. My inspiration being by no means shallow, I then recorded his poems on the scroll in order to mark them as paired treasures.

杜陵《秋興八首》，蓋在蜀中時作也。近得李龍眠是圖，古跡歷歷可數。想杜老江閣揮毫。興復不淺，因錄其詩於幅間，以志雙絕。

⁶⁹ Stephen Allee of the Freer has done invaluable research on each of these paintings, producing documents that transcribe, date and translate inscription and colophons, identify collectors' seals and list and categorize labels. These can be found at: <http://www.asia.si.edu/songyuan/F1911.168/F1911-168.Documentation.pdf>, for the *Changjian wanli tu*, and <http://www.asia.si.edu/SongYuan/F1916.539/F1916-539.Documentation.pdf>, for the *Shu chuan tu*. Each document also includes links to images of the paintings.

⁷⁰ The text of this poem is recorded in two sources: Zhang Zhao et al., comp., *Shiqu baoji* 石渠寶笈, vol. 2, 1201–02, and Qianlong, *Yuzhi shi chujì* 御製詩初集, 32:11b–13a, in *Qing Gaozong (Qianlong) yuzhi shiwen quanji* 清高宗 (乾隆) 御製詩文全集, vol. 1, 823–24.

In just six of the above characters—*guji lili ke shu* 古跡歷歷可數 ("the traces of the ancients can each be picked out one by one")—Qianlong perfectly articulates not only the method and effect of this painting-cum-map, but also the entire Song undertaking of reinscription embodied in the work of writers such as Fan Chengda, Huang Tingjian and Lu You: to identify and adjudicate the textual and physical traces of the ancients, making them legible in, and as, landscape as a site of personal mark-making. For Qianlong, the perfect legibility of this cartographic painting not only conjures up vibrant images of a living Du Fu, it also moves the emperor to act, to commemorate his experience and to "mark" (*zhi* 志) the painting and poems as "paired treasures" (*shuangjue* 雙絕).

The 83 columns of Qianlong's inscription of Du's "Autumn Meditations" are located not far from the beginning of the long painting, within a box lined carefully with green ink. About one fifth as wide as the 32.3 centimeter wide scroll, the box occupies an open space near the upper edge of the image, over the area of the city of Chengdu, which occupies the lower third of the painting. Facing each other across a stretch of mostly empty space, these two inscriptional registers present distinct but mutually constitutive modes of landscape. Even without Qianlong's addition, the painting is a mapping of the landscape as it is known through text, a fact echoed by the hundreds of labels that were added to the painting sometime after it was completed. Brought to life by texts that mediate and make famous the physical landscape of the river, the painting in turn reanimates those same texts as expressions of poetic and regional genius.⁷¹

IV. Mapping the Gorges Today: Google Earth and GPS

The Yangzi River and its environs are central to contemporary China as a political, environmental and economic entity. An engine of growth, mover of goods and people, source of water both near and far and producer of hydroelectric power on a massive scale, the river has never been so important, or imperiled, as it is today. Pollution, development, canalization, dredging and dams have transformed and will continue to transform the river, effacing many of the historical traces that happened to survive the ravages of time. Those that remain, such as the temple complex at Baidi, are now part of a totally altered physical landscape: once a narrow promontory reaching out into the river, Baidi has been transformed by the Three Gorges Dam and reservoir into an island, connected to the northern bank of the Yangzi by a bridge that gives tourists access to the former fortress that once contained one of Du Fu's Lofty Retreats. The low-lying Dongtun, the site of another Du Fu's Lofty Retreats, is now completely submerged beneath the waters of the reservoir. Yet despite these changes, the river is still there and it is still more or less possible to follow the itinerary presented by the Freer paintings, which is precisely what the Beijing-based photographer Michael Cherney (who also goes by the Chinese name Qiumai 秋麥) has done in his own *Changjiang wanli tu* project, a massive, 42-scroll photographic work printed and mounted on mica-flecked *xuan* paper.⁷²

⁷¹ The one strange thing about this otherwise elegant loop is that Qianlong pairs Du Fu's Chengdu thatched hut (*jiang ge* 江閣) with a set of poems that evokes the very different Shu landscape of Kuizhou and the Three Gorges. It seems likely that the text of the poems would not have fit very well in the much busier portion of the scroll that depicts that Gorges.

⁷² The entirety of the project can be seen online at: <http://www.qiumai.net/cjwlt/cjwlte.html>

Inspired by the general class of Yangzi River paintings and the Freer's *Changjiang wanli tu* in particular, Cherney selected 42 sites along the Yangzi and its source rivers, as well as along the Min River, traditionally thought to be the source of the Yangzi. Most of the sites on the Min and Yangzi correspond to sites marked on the Freer scroll, though Cherney has plotted them using modern technology—GPS, online maps, Google Earth, tourism photographs—in order to "determine the GPS coordinates of locations that would allow for photography of desired sites from the most ideal angle (rather than from the limited perspective of the river's surface)."⁷³ These techniques allow for a degree of precision unthinkable in the Song, though the goal for Cherney is not to fix the precise location of the Freer's markings, or to create a definitive copy of the landscape in the manner of Fan Chengda and his professional painter, but to find an "ideal angle" that allows for the most aesthetically compelling picture of the river. His image of Kuimen, entryway to the Qutang Gorge, exemplifies this approach.⁷⁴

As we saw in the previous chapter and shall see in the next, the two mountains that make up Kuimen are among the most recognizable topographical features of the entire Yangzi River. Captured in innumerable travel photographs and splashed across the back of the 10-*yuan* banknote, Kuimen is an always already virtual landscape, a surface that can be tinted with a different ideological color for every new occasion. Cherney, however, drains Kuimen of the lurid tones and heavy associations with which it is normally invested, presenting the river and its mountains in granular, almost pixilated black and white, beneath a veil of haze. Part of a panorama that encompasses the peaks on the southern bank leading up to the Gorge as well as the island of Baidi in the foreground at left, Kuimen is a distant and barely visible shadow in the upper left hand corner of the scroll.

The gauziness of the landscape suggests not only the omnipresent clouds and mists for which the Gorges have long been known, but also the thick mantle of caustic smog for which China is increasingly infamous. Present in much of Cherney's work, this atmospheric pall evokes the fragility of both the environment and the material traces of the past in contemporary China. Cloaked and threatened by an inescapable and omnipresent sign of development, the subjects of his photographs are often rendered spectral: faint traces (*ji* 跡) of the past captured by the camera, not in order to fix or revive them, but as part of an ongoing project to explore those places where China's past and the present converge. In this, Cherney's image of Kuimen bears a striking similarity to another recent depiction of this landscape, from Jia Zhangke's *Still Life* (2005), the topic of the next chapter.

⁷³ From text of a public talk provided by the artist.

⁷⁴ This image can be seen here: <http://www.qiumai.net/cjwlt/kuifudetail.html>

Specters of Realism and the Painter's Gaze in Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*

Introduction

At the end of the previous chapter, I described an image of Baidi and Kuimen by the photographer Michael Cherney. Mounted on a handscroll, Cherney's hauntingly blurred photograph is meant to be viewed from right to left, following the flow of the Yangzi downstream past Baidi and into the first of the Three Gorges. The perspective from which Cherney took his image is strikingly similar to that of Jia Zhangke's 賈樟柯 (b.1970) camera in a scene from his 2006 film *Still Life* (*Sanxia haoren* 三峽好人). In *Still Life* however, the camera does not scroll along the river, but instead faces a hazily silhouetted Kuimen head on (fig. 1). In the foreground below and to the left of the peak lies Baidi, thickly underlined by a light colored bar that runs up from the water level, probably a band of concrete added to the bank in order to prevent destabilization caused by the fluctuating levels of the reservoir. Both inundated and armored, Baidi is an emblem of a certain type of ancient trace (*guji* 古跡) in contemporary China—lucky enough to survive, it is nevertheless isolated and beset on all sides by forces that threaten its continued existence.¹ In Cherney's photograph, the level of the water has risen, concealing the concretized bank and rendering Baidi an island.

Like Cherney, Jia Zhangke draws deeply on both the aesthetic traditions of pre-modern China and also contemporary techniques from photography and cinema to document the patchwork of historical traces that comprise the Chinese landscape. Of even greater importance for Jia are the people who inhabit this space, human traces of recent historical moments and movement, local cultures and national developments. Their different foci notwithstanding, for both Jia and Cherney the act of documentation entails not simply capturing an external reality, but viewing and acknowledging how and why humans have imagined, produced and altered the Chinese landscape throughout history and up to the present day. The traces of aesthetic

¹ The artist Zhang Hui's photographic installation *Longitude 109.88° E and Latitude 31.09° N* (1995–2008) presents an enigmatic alternative to this type of trace. In 1995, one year after construction on the dam commenced, Zhang traveled to three sites along the Gorges—Zhongbao Island, where the dam is now located, Wu Gorge, and Baidi—to dig and photograph a series of 30–40 centimeter deep holes. In 2007, as the dam and reservoir neared completion, Zhang sent one of his assistants to photograph the coordinates of the same sites, now totally covered by water. This work combines two distinct types of traces: the holes as personal imprint of the artist, inscribed with full knowledge of both their ephemerality and the imminent disappearance of the earth in which they were made; the first photographs as traces of the original traces, documents of the act and product of inscription. If these images are already second order traces, then the photographs taken by Zhang's assistant 13 years later stand at an even further remove. Figures of loss, they remind us both that there is an unbridgeable gap between the past and present shape and appearance of the Gorges and also that the artist can never reestablish his original physical connection to this landscape. For more on Zhang Hui's project see: *Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art*, ed. by Wu Hung (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

tradition found through *Still Life* and the material reminders of millennia of Chinese painting that are encoded in Cherney's artwork are thus manifestations of a crucial trans-historical dialogue about how and why the Chinese landscape is formed and transformed.

As aesthetic dialogues in which the faint but unmistakable traces of the past constitute a singular voice, Jia and Cherney's documentary images bear a definite affinity with the various types of *ji* 記 (essay, record, account, diary) or records, discussed in the previous chapter. Indeed, *ji* 記 is interchangeable with the *ji* 紀 that is most commonly used to write "to document"—*jilu* 紀錄—and "documentary film"—*jilupian* 紀錄片. And yet, linguistic connections aside, there are also important differences: whereas most of those Song Dynasty texts directly record their authors' restoration of ancient traces, Jia and Cherney's works serve as records of the vulnerability of the historical trace and its human analogs. The former works record attempts to amend reality, to re-establish in the present the ideal values associated with someone like Du Fu by reconstructing his Dongtun Lofty Retreat or inscribing his Kuizhou oeuvre. The latter, especially Jia Zhangke's "realist" films, are seen as recording an unvarnished reality, an index of not only a disappearing material and social past but also the shortsighted actions that have led to their disappearance. Though these two modes of documentation handle the trace in different ways, they really diverge in their conceptions of "reality." Is it a state of affairs that can be changed through the reactivation of ancient traces and the values they symbolize? Or, is it an ontologically independent entity, an object that can be captured or indexed, but not altered? More importantly, what do we even mean by reality, and how can it be represented?

These are neither simple nor novel questions. For well over one hundred years, realism has defined many of the debates over the nature and function of modern Chinese literature and art—from the rumblings of the May 4th Movement, through the first blush of Chinese communism, to discussions of documentary cinema and contemporary art. In the early 20th century, cultural reformers such as Hu Shi 胡適 (1891-1962), Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1878-1942) and Mao Dun 茅盾 (1896-1981) saw in realism an all-powerful weapon in their struggle against a sycophantic, effete, and unscientific pre-modern classical literature.² For these men, the solution to China's representational (and political) woes lay in the "disinterested investigation of the external world," which brought with it the promise of an objective view of society's ills, as well as new transformative moral powers and an opportunity to "free the mind from its dependence on the received tradition."³ If earlier literature typically molded representations of landscape and human relations into allegorical or symbolic vehicles for communicating essential characteristics of the self, the state or the universe, realism was supposed to cut through those mediating layers, exposing a deeper, truer vision of the world. For its advocates, that this 'realism' was almost inevitably didactic and idealistic in no way attenuated its promised connection to reality.

Many of these same assumptions about realism's abilities and effects—albeit updated for a world defined more by globalization than waning colonialism—are frequently brought to bear on Jia Zhangke, and *Still Life*. Though its affinity with various modes of cinematic realism

² Some of the more famous articles outlining a realist or "naturalist" literary approach include Hu Shi's "Some Modest Proposals for the Reform of Literature 文學改良芻議;" Chen Duxiu's "Essay on Literary Revolution 文學革命論;" and Mao Dun's "Naturalism and Chinese Modern Fiction 自然主義與中國現代小說," all of which are contained in the *Collection on Establishing Theory* volume (建設理論) of Hu Shi and Cai Yuanpei's influential *Compendium on the New Chinese Literature* (Shanghai: Liangyou tushu yinshua gongsi, 1935).

³ Marston Anderson, *The Limits of Realism* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 1990), 11.

is undeniable, this film represents a far more nuanced absorption of not only different types of realism—socialist, Bazinian, documentary—but also Chinese aesthetic traditions that precede film and the realist paradigm. Set in the city of Fengjie 奉節 as it is dismantled to make way for the rising waters of the Three Gorges Dam reservoir, *Still Life* follows two protagonists, the peasant coal miner, Han Sanming 韓三明 (played by Jia Zhangke's actual coal miner cousin, Han Sanming), and the middle-class nurse, Shen Hong 沈紅 (Zhao Tao 趙濤), both of whom have traveled to the Gorges from the northern province of Shanxi 山西 in search of their estranged spouses. Split into four sections, each of which bears the name of a basic consumer object (cigarettes, liquor, tea and candy), the film traces the movements of these characters (and commodities) without recourse to a clear cause-effect narrative, watching as they are thwarted, delayed and frustrated in their objectives. Though they do both eventually find their spouses, this approximation of "life time"—with all its dead ends, ellipses, and banal moments—and the filmic techniques with which Jia represents it, seem at first to place *Still Life* comfortably within the art film subcategory of documentary-inflected cinematic realism. As they wander Fengjie's ruins however, Han and Shen encounter a string of surreal events—an orb-like UFO, a monument that blasts into space, a cast of Peking Opera singers engrossed in handheld video games, a tightrope walker suspended between the shells of two buildings—that puncture the film's realist temporality and destabilize the documentary style that colors its less fantastic moments.

As the film progresses, it becomes clear that these bewildering and disorienting interruptions are all the more salient because they are embedded within a formal structure that transforms and repurposes much of what the film borrows from modes of cinematic realism. Drawing partly on echoes of traditional Chinese aesthetics and partly on references to the imagery of the Cultural Revolution, Jia distills a variety of influences into a deeply hybrid style and form. When his sources are Tang Dynasty (618-907) poetry or Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) painting, he invokes a tradition that can be characterized as non-mimetic and non-realistic, far more concerned with essences than appearances, spirit than matter. When he borrows from Cultural Revolution propaganda posters, he restages and critiques the nakedly ideological and now-defunct forms of socialist and revolutionary realisms. By synthesizing these, and other visual, aural and textual references within digital video, Jia does more than evoke the past or turn his back on different iterations of realism: he productively confuses interpretive and representational categories, precluding the kind of ideological simplifications that underlie labels such as 'socialist,' 'realist,' 'traditional' or 'documentary.'

Though the argument that *Still Life* transcends a realist framework is only part of my exploration of Jia's aesthetic, it is a crucial part, since for most critics, realism remains the beating heart of his cinema.⁴ Given the enduring endeavor to define and promote a variety of different 'isms' for his work, it will be productive to begin with a short survey of influential contemporary attempts to elucidate Jia's particular brand of the realist mode. My purpose is not to negate these previous approaches, but to prepare for my own reading of Jia's style by locating his work within the larger contexts of Chinese and international writing on Chinese film, much of which still relies on realism as a powerful interpretive category.

⁴ The Chinese terms for realism are *xieshi zhuyi* 寫實主義 or *xianshi zhuyi* 現實主義, though in early 20th century texts a similar representational approach might be termed "naturalism," or *ziran zhuyi* 自然主義 (see note 2) and in contemporary English language criticism realism and indexicality are sometimes used interchangeably. For more information on this, see Yiman Wang, "The Amateur's Lightning Rod: DV Documentary in Postsocialist China," in *Film Quarterly* 58, no.4 (2005): 16.

Beyond these debates over the legacies of realism, I will demonstrate how Jia draws on and contributes to larger Chinese aesthetic traditions that deploy landscape in the creation of cultural and political identity. I am particularly interested in how Jia remediates his sources—traditional Chinese painting and poetry, Cultural Revolution imagery, canto-pop songs, 80s and 90s television and contemporary documentary cinema—piecing together visual and sonic traces of the past to create an aesthetic hybrid that dignifies Fengjie, the Three Gorges and the characters and actors that fill *Still Life*. Jia's influences, and the techniques that he uses to bring them together, allow him to depict the beauty and struggle of life in contemporary China where it unfolds—in the interstices of the real and the imagined, the past, present and future and the documentary and the aesthetic.

I. Does Realism Really Matter?

The "realism" and "naturalism" that early 20th century Chinese critics such as Chen Duxiu and Hu Shi promoted were closely based on 19th century European literary forms that evolved from the fiction of Balzac, Flaubert and Zola, among others. These writers were praised in China for eschewing excessive stylization and romanticization in order to emphasize the everyday, banal rhythms of life.⁵ Their emphasis on content—life as it is lived—over form went hand in hand with a faith in the mimetic capacity of realism as a disinterested representational mode, a belief "that language and literature reflect reality and never constitute it or act on it in a major way."⁶ What scholars of Chinese literary modernism (such as Lydia Liu and Marston Anderson), building on the work of Western critics such as Lukács, Auerbach, Watts and Booth, have carefully illustrated since the 80s however, is that the professed ontological independence of reality from its representations conceals the myriad ways in which realism acts on and transforms reality. In *Still Life*, Jia has created a film that explores precisely this transformative capacity of realism by pushing specific aspects of cinematic realism—the long take, deep focus, non-professional actors, 'real time' pacing—to their spatial, temporal and representational limits. In this state of aesthetic extremes, the very techniques that are meant to capture a preexisting reality or reproduce its effects generate a new form that is defined by its glaring unreality.

This experimental formalism notwithstanding, some of the critics that I discuss below still see Jia's work as uniquely equipped to document a contemporary reality objectively. That they make these claims about a film such as *Still Life* tells us more about realism as a still powerful "interpretive practice" than a representational mode.⁷ What this interpretive practice

⁵ Chinese vernacular literature beginning in the Song and Yuan Dynasties was also seen as an important native parallel to European models and was often represented as an embryonic realism that was violently quashed by reactionary cultural forces. See Chen Duxiu's "Essay on Literary Revolution."

⁶ Lydia Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900-1937* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 1995), 10.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 110. Even among scholars who are otherwise sensitive to the hybrid nature of Jia's aesthetic, there remains a tendency to view him as working within a fundamentally realist framework. Esther Cheung, for example, writes (with what seems to be a measure of relief) that "we can say that the subject matter of social concern and Jia's compassion for the ordinary people *place him safely* in the realist tradition of Chinese cinema" (20; emphasis mine). Jiwei Xiao, in an excellent account of the centrality of memory and memorialization to Jia's aesthetic, still claims that the filmmaker is "a die-hard realist." See: Esther Cheung, "Realisms with Conundrum: The Personal and Authentic Appeal in Jia Zhangke's Accented Films," in *China Perspectives* 1 (2010): 11-22; Jiwei Xiao, "The Quest for Memory: Documentary and Fiction in Jia Zhangke's Films," in *senses of cinema* 59. For a more balanced

and its continued faith in the direct realism of film too easily overlook is the importance of *Still Life's* stylistic hybridity and how this style generates an ethical mode of viewing the relationships between The Three Gorges region and the people who live and visit there. This visuality, which relies on deep focus to actively implace people, is never tied to a single reality or a single perspective; rather it looks towards the unstable nature of the category of reality, especially when it focuses on a place that is literally disappearing before the camera, as Fengjie does in *Still Life*. This is how Jia describes his first visit to that city:

When I went to look at Fengjie, the location where we shot the film, every county we saw had basically been reduced to rubble. Seeing this place, with its 2,000 years of history and dense neighborhoods left in ruins, my first impression was that human beings could not have done this. The changes had occurred so fast and on such a large scale, it was as if nuclear war or an extraterrestrial had done it.⁸

In light of such changes, realism not only loses its privileged status as *the* representational mode that defines *Still Life*, it also becomes a wholly insufficient interpretive paradigm for understanding the network of aesthetic influences and references that Jia builds up over the course of two hours, the most important of which are actually drawn from different types of painting.⁹ This is not to claim that realism plays no role in Jia's aesthetic—different modes and technologies of representation, realism among them, have always been explicit critical foci for Jia.¹⁰ In order to see with a similarly critical eye, however, we must work our way through some of the most influential discourses of realism that have been applied to his films.

For one of the most influential Chinese film critics, Li Tuo 李陀,¹¹ the arrival of *Still Life* marked not only the perfection of the director's experimental style that began with

approach to the problems with approaching recent independent fictional and documentary filmmaking through the analytic category of realism, see Sebastian Veg's "Introduction: Opening Public Spaces," in *China Perspectives* 1 (2010): 4–10.

⁸ See Andrew Chan's 2009 "Online Exclusive Interview with Jia Zhangke," in *Film Comment* (March–April), at <http://www.filmcomment.com/article/jia-zhangke-interview>

⁹ *Still Life* developed directly out of the documentary *Dong 东* (2006), about the contemporary oil painter Liu Xiaodong, which Jia filmed in Fengjie using more or less the same cast of local demolition laborers. The monumental paintings that Liu produced in the Three Gorges area resemble *Still Life* in their combination of group portraiture and landscape painting, though Jia's aesthetic is by no means derivative of Liu's. The latter's paintings are far more concerned with figure (and the sensual human body, in particular) than with landscape, which tends to remain more of a suggestive but lifeless backdrop. *Still Life* on the other hand brings figure and landscape together in a manner that enacts the processes whereby people inhabit and enliven spaces. Jia's interest in and knowledge of painting also goes beyond his experience filming Liu Xiaodong. As a young man Jia "studied painting a little" and attended art classes at Shanxi University (Jia Zhangke, *Jia Xiang 贾想* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 2009), 48). Though his own painting practice was limited to advertising and commercial mural painting, Jia's mature pictorial sense has deep foundations in his early years. Strangely, though some critics have noted the influence of traditional Chinese landscape painting on *Still Life* (see Chan, 2009), the default artistic analogy seems not to be visual but "poetic." The issue of Jia's lyricism or "poetic conception" (*shiyi* 诗意) comes up repeatedly in the Fenyang panel that I discuss at length later in this section and also in the essays of Jiwei Xiao and Jie Li. See Xiao, "The Quest for Memory," and Jie Li, "Home and Nation Amid the Rubble: Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* and Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*." *Modern Literature and Culture* 21, no. 2 (Fall): 86–125.

¹⁰ Jia was educated at the Beijing Film Academy as a film historian and theoretician, not as a director. In his 2009 collection of short essays and reflections, "Jia Thought" (*Jia xiang*), he displays a deep and sophisticated knowledge of film history and technique, and refers repeatedly to his admiration for the Italian neorealists, particularly Vittorio De Sica, director of the iconic *Bicycle Thieves* (1948). See: Jia, *Jia Xiang*, 67.

¹¹ Li Tuo and his interlocutors shared their views as part of a 2007 panel that followed one of the first screenings of *Still Life*, which was held in Jia Zhangke's hometown of Fenyang and transcribed in an article entitled "Sanxia

Pickpocket (*Xiaowu* 小武, 1997), but also "the beginning of a new cinematic development."¹² This is a cinema—rising from the ashes of the now-discredited Fifth Generation and standing apart from the growing commercial Chinese film industry—that above all else "uses film to focus on reality, to intervene in reality 以影片關注現實，介入現實."¹³ As its most prominent representative, Jia has, it is argued, created a new realist mode, one that Li calls "Hometown Realism" (*guli xianshi* 故里現實, or in Jie Li's translation "*Heimat* Realism"), that Ouyang Jianghe deems "more real [or, authentic/true] than reality 比真實更真實"¹⁴ and that Wang Hui suggests calling "Deep/Thick Description Realism 深厚描寫實主義."¹⁵ In each variant, the emphasis seems to lie on how things *really* are in the forgotten corners of provincial Chinese cities such as Jia's hometown Fenyang or *Still Life's* Fengjie. Far from the eastern showcases of capitalist-socialism with Chinese characteristics, these places and their inhabitants have a claim to reality that their upwardly mobile, consumerist peers in Beijing, Shanghai or Guangzhou lack. Realism is thus a mirror of this frequently obscured, but more accurately 'real' China, a status supported by these critics' tendency to equate realism (*xianshi zhuyi* 現實主義) with reality (*xianshi* 現實). Of course, neither an interest in the hometown nor a focus on reality through realism can be considered unique in the history of modern Chinese art—Lu Xun and Jia's Fifth Generation filmmaker forebears shared an interest in the rural homeland, and realism has been perhaps *the* central concern of Chinese art and literature since the May Fourth Movement.

What strikes a reader attuned to representational shifts in China over the last 20 years is the implication of a *return* to, or legitimation of, realism. As Yingjin Zhang notes, Jia is often grouped with a number of "underground" or "independent" filmmakers, including Wu Wenguang (b.1956), Zhang Yuan (b.1963), Lou Ye (b.1965) and Zhang Ming (b.1961), to name just a few, who "have always avoided the term 'realism' (either *xianshi zhuyi* or *xieshi zhuyi*)," because it smacks of the various realisms—socialist, romantic, revolutionary—and the truth claims that dominated artistic production in revolutionary China.¹⁶ He continues: "As an overloaded concept, realism has become formulaic and prescriptive, and symbolizes an authoritarian tradition."¹⁷ Even if filmmakers, unlike their more voluble critics, have come to avoid using the term "realism" (itself a questionable claim), they have by no means shrunk from proclaiming the truthfulness of their images. In Zhang's appraisal of Jia, this truthfulness is less concerned with objective reality than with "his subjective perception of the real 'condition of life' (*shenghuo zhuangkuang* 生活狀況) in his hometown."¹⁸

haoren: *guli, bianqian yu Jia Zhangke de xianshi zhuyi* 三峽好人: 故里, 變遷與賈章柯的現實主義" (*Sanxia haoren* hereafter) in *Dushu 2* (2007): 3-31.

¹² See "*Sanxia haoren*," 3.

¹³ "*Sanxia haoren*," 6.

¹⁴ In some ways, Ouyang Jianghe's comments best capture the complex role that realism plays in Jia's style. More than a documentary mode that captures or reflects reality, Jia's films create and craft a version/vision of reality. For Ouyang, this fictional version/vision transforms his own understanding of the world: "my understanding, observation and discussion of contemporary Chinese reality contains within it a vision of Jia Zhangke as a cineaste." *Ibid.*, 9.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

¹⁶ "My Camera Doesn't Lie? Truth, Subjectivity, and Audience in Chinese Independent Film and Video," in Paul Pickowicz and Zhang Yingjin, eds., *From Underground to Independent: Alternative Film Culture in Contemporary China* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 27.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

Where Li Tuo and his peers see *Still Life* as the triumph of a realism grounded in documentary aesthetics,¹⁹ and Yingjin Zhang explores Jia's generation's claims to "truth," Jason McGrath looks to Jia's pre-*Still Life* work for an important stylistic shift, from *Pickpocket* to the historical epic, *Platform* (*Zhantai* 站台, 2000). For McGrath, *Pickpocket* combines a mobile "on-the-spot" realism with a nascent "aestheticized realist style," the latter of which comes to define *Platform*, which is "characterized by long shots, exceptionally long takes, and a relatively immobile camera."²⁰ Working within this new aesthetic, Jia fills *Platform* with arresting images that effectively blur the line between his earlier documentary realist style and a new formal aestheticism.²¹ For McGrath, this shift is the product of a number of factors, most importantly, Jia's legitimate entry into a global art film market defined by "Bazinian-style realism," and "the changed priorities of trying to convey a decade of fictional time through a reflective poetics of nostalgia."²²

What McGrath contributes to this discussion, and what gets lost all too easily in pronouncements on Jia's realism, is a closer attentiveness to style and form. How do we reconcile Jia's shifting styles and forms with his attempt to represent different aspects of contemporary experience? When discussing Jia's work after *Platform*, especially *The World* (*Shijie* 世界, 2005) and *Still Life*, the greatest challenge comes from the ways in which Jia digitally manipulates his material. At those very moments that most seem to conform to the standard characteristics of Bazinian realism—during long takes, in deep focus, with a fixed camera—when we are asked to look long and hard, as though at the very heart of reality, we are met with the fantastic and the surreal: animated sequences and the talking dead (*The World*), a grotesque monument launching like a rocket in the gloaming, a glowing orb that darts across the sky (*Still Life*). These alterations transform the long take and its invitation to extended, meditative viewing, destroying the realistic or mimetic effects that it supposedly generates, disorienting the viewer, creating hallucinatory effects and opening a new space for the play of optical tricks and illusions.²³ How do we reconcile formally realistic traits with computer generated flying monuments? A recent attempt by the film scholar Daniel Morgan to rethink André Bazin's influential definitions of realism provides some invaluable tools for

¹⁹ In an article on DV Documentary Yiman Wang repeatedly refers to Jia Zhangke, though the article directly addresses neither his documentary, nor his far more famous fictional output. That Jia's work is materially influenced by the New Documentary movement and its obsession with immediacy and truth has become a truism that this chapter challenges. See "The Amateur's Lightning Rod," 19, 22 and 23.

²⁰ *Postsocialist Modernity*, 148. McGrath goes on to write: "close-ups are virtually eliminated, while long-shot compositions are used frequently, so that the feeling of the physical immanence of the camera is lost in favor of an evocative distance from the historical subject" (148). In an especially rich 2001 interview, Stephen Teo identifies a similar aesthetic shift from *Xiao Wu* to *Platform*, emphasizing the increased centrality of the long take as the primary tool of Jia's realism. See, "China with an Accent—Interview with Jia Zhangke, Director of *Platform*." *Senses of Cinema* 15.

²¹ *Postsocialist Modernity*, 155.

²² *Ibid.*, 153. McGrath cites the broad influence of international art film style while Wang Hui stresses the particular stylistic influence of only the Japanese director Yasujiro Ozu and the Taiwanese director Hou Xiaoxian (he is by no means alone in pointing out these two influences on Jia). See "*Sanxia haoren*," 20.

²³ It is not only these familiar techniques of cinematic realism that Jia uses to create uncanny effects. As Jiwei Xiao notes, Jia frequently combines montage (a technique that is typically associated with both the Soviet cinema of Eisenstein and classical Hollywood cinema) with deep focus and the long take to create what she describes as Jia's brand of "magical realism" (*mohuan xianshi zhuyi* 魔幻現實主義). See: "*Zhongguo dianying shifou xuyao Bazan? — lun Hou Xiaoxian he Jia Zhangke dianyingli de xieshizhuyi yu mengtaiqi* 中國電影是否需要巴贊 —— 論侯孝賢和賈樟柯電影里的寫實主義與蒙太奇," in *Dianying wenxue* 6 (2009): 67-69, 141.

answering these questions and for suggesting how we might salvage something useful from older discourses of realism in an age of digital manipulation.²⁴

Morgan rejects what he sees as the two standard readings of Bazin's realism: the first, direct realism, is based on a cinematic version of Peircean indexicality and posits film as a mechanical imprint of reality;²⁵ the second, "perceptual or psychological" realism, which has origins in Bazin's interest in the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, "holds that the relation of a film's world to our world has less to do with visual resemblance than with experience."²⁶ According to Morgan, both direct realism and perceptual realism miss the mark, in part because, for Bazin, "the correspondence of the world of a film to our world—the cornerstone of both versions of the standard reading—is simply *not* the criterion for realism."²⁷ Neither are the typical characteristics drawn from Italian Neo-realism—"location shooting, the use of nonprofessional actors, contemporary political and social themes, technical roughness, and an episodic narrative form"—significant criteria for realism, though they have become both descriptive and prescriptive criteria as a result of the standard readings of Bazin.²⁸

Relying on Stanley Cavell's philosophy of ethical consciousness, Morgan argues that realism for Bazin can include a great variety of aesthetic styles so long as those styles "acknowledge" reality, giving it meaning and "turning it into facts," which might relate to some specific "understanding of social reality" or existential condition.²⁹ As applied to artists, Cavell's concept of "acknowledging" implies not only knowledge or recognition of an external reality, condition or human presence, but an acceptance that such a reality, condition or person has some moral claim on the artist and by extension, the viewer.³⁰ Although Morgan avoids defining reality, his approach is instructive here for a number of reasons. First, he grapples with the particularly difficult relationship between reality as an object of representation and realism as a style, which I have been discussing in relation to *Still Life*. Second, he suggests a method, based in Bazin's writing, of approaching films that exceed the "film/reality correspondence."³¹ Finally, by adapting Cavell's sense of "acknowledging," Morgan convincingly excavates an aspect of Bazinian realism that is based primarily in an ethical commitment to the filmic subject, which is distilled into certain facts that a film presents through its style, and not in any promised fidelity to an "antecedent reality" or recreated perceptual world.³²

Drawing on both Morgan's reading of Bazinian realism and McGrath's analysis of Jia's stylistic shifts, my reading of *Still Life* acknowledges but moves beyond the interpretive category of realism, giving pride of place to Jia's hybrid style and to the mode of viewing that it generates. From this perspective, the embrace of formal aestheticism that McGrath identifies in Jia's work does not signal a retreat from realism any more than *Still Life* represents the apotheosis of an evolving realist mode, as some would have it. Changing styles in *Platform*, *Pickpocket*, *The World* and *Still Life* (and in Jia's more recent quasi-documentary works) represent an ongoing search for methods of observing and representing the world that

²⁴ "Rethinking Bazin: Ontology and Realist Aesthetics." *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 3 (2006): 443-481.

²⁵ Morgan, "Rethinking Bazin," 446-454. Morgan is referring at least partly to Peter Wollen's *Signs and Meaning in the Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1972), though he also cites Mary Ann Doane's more recent *The Emergence of Cinematic Time: Modernity, Contingency, the Archive* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2002).

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 456.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 458.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 462.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 472.

³⁰ Morgan draws primarily on Cavell's influential essay, "Knowing and Acknowledging," in *Must We Mean What We Say* (Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 238-266.

³¹ "Rethinking Bazin," 472.

³² *Ibid.*, 480.

acknowledge the aesthetic, narrative and ethical demands of individual artistic projects. If we bear in mind that Jia's stylistic choices in *Still Life* are rooted in aesthetically and ethically oriented modes of viewing and acknowledging what he filmed in Fengjie, then we can begin to trace the complex network of influences that make up the picture—from documentary film to computer generated imagery, Bazinian realism to Socialist realism, poetry to pop music, the real, the imagined and beyond.

II. Putting People in Place and Place in People

In a place so thoroughly mediated and visualized as the Three Gorges it is all but impossible to look around oneself and see a single 'real' landscape, a place that lacks the clouds of the goddess of Mt. Wu or the *Shuijing zhu's* shrieking gibbons. To be sure, if he had wanted, Jia could have tried to strip the Gorges of their representational burden, shooting them in a style that claimed to capture a final, elegiac imprint of the landscape in all its beauty on the brink of oblivion. Instead, he created a style that does the opposite: it makes simultaneously visible the many layers of representation and ideology that adhere to this famous landscape. Present throughout the film, these layers are perhaps most explicitly visible in the scene I mentioned briefly at the beginning of this chapter, in which the Shanxi coal miner Han Sanming stands on a precipice and looks out into the distance towards Kuimen, the narrow, mountainous gate that marks the downstream entry to the Gorges. He looks in order to compare his physical surroundings, the 'real' landscape, with their representation on the back of a 10-yuan banknote (see figure 1, 2, 3). Yet his earnest observation is not presented simply to expose the bill's picture as an ideologically motivated imitation that pales before the physical reality of stone and dirt.

Jia opens this scene with a medium shot that shows Han Sanming from the waist up, looking out across deep space to the Yangzi as it flows through Kuimen and into the Qutang gorge, the first of the Gorges going downriver (figure 1, 2, 3). In profile facing the viewer's left, Han holds a 10-yuan bill in his left hand as he looks to his right at the landscape. When he turns back to the bill, Han arches his eyebrows in surprise and the camera switches to a point of view shot of the bill in his hand. Instead of the drawing of Kuimen, Mao's Mona Lisa smile confronts Han from the bill's front, forcing him to flip it over in order to find the landscape on the reverse. This mistaken vision creates an ironic double picture that reinserts Mao's disembodied portrait into a national (and thus ideological) landscape. In the scene immediately following this one, Jia's camera tracks slowly from right to left, replacing deep focus and Han's point of view shot with a scrolling panorama that again shows Kuimen in the far distance but layers it with images of the ruins of Fengjie, where Han Sanming is about to begin work demolishing buildings.

We know from the previous scene that although Han arrived in Fengjie by traveling up river through Kuimen, he is totally ignorant of this famous landscape and its depiction on the banknote. He has made his way to this promontory not only to compare the Kuimen before his eyes with the Kuimen on the bill, but also to orient himself within a previously unfamiliar landscape. Though Han's surprise at seeing Mao seems to be a momentary distraction from the task at hand, the humorous mistake and moment of recognition momentarily resurrects Mao's forgotten influence and reconstructs the relationship between figure and background that occurs on the bill itself—Chairman Mao/Kuimen, recto/verso—so that the two sides are no longer mutually exclusive. Han's misrecognition is thus actually Jia's ironic recognition of the

still present (though partially concealed) relationship between political power and landscape that the banknote and the Cultural Revolution images that I discuss below create.³³

Unlike Mao and Kuimen, whose relationship must be pieced together dialogically by looking first at one, then another surface (as Jia suggests in the shift from deep focus to a point of view shot; or, in other words, through montage, the ideological cinematic technique *par excellence*), Han Sanming and Kuimen are simultaneously present, confronting one another through Han's vision and in depth of field. The juxtaposition of Han and Mao puts two different modes of viewing and being in the world—one purely ideological and the other founded on the individual and ad hoc process of emplacement (more on this below)—in a relationship of historical dialogue. This is a dialogue that Jia Zhangke has made possible again and again in his portrayal of those marginal figures who have been left behind by the much-vaunted economic miracles of China's last 30 years and omitted from its mythic narratives. These "good people" (the Chinese title of the movie translates literally as *The Good People of the Three Gorges*) survive through their own wiles and continue to create and inhabit informal communities in landscapes profoundly marked by the past. They are not in thrall to the *yuan*, the dollar or the euro, yet they are still driven by economic pressures, both local and global. In the face of displacement and ideology, they strive simply to *still live*.³⁴

This is all the more impressive when one considers the forces against which they contend. As my first two chapters have shown, the Three Gorges have long been a space of literary and visual interventions that accrete to form a communal imaginary and a sense of place. Under the influence of those promoting the Three Gorges Dam, however, this place-ness, once at least partially defined by the living bodies of its inhabitants, was cleared, and in the process, transformed into empty space. Having displaced nearly 1.5 million people and dismantled 13 major cities, the political engineers of the dam project could treat that newly empty space as a venue for the generation of power and the realization of national myths. As a place, the Gorges are defined by embodied experience and the mutual interaction between humans and their habitations; as a literary and artistic landscape, they are defined by the

³³ This scene powerfully evokes the triple logic of what media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin have called "immediacy," "hypermediacy" and "remediation." In their terms, immediacy demands a "transparent" medium *through* which a viewer looks onto a "presentation of the real" (Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999), 21); hypermediacy refers to representations that draw attention to their own, multi-media construction, *at* which a viewer is supposed to look (41); and remediation is the "representation of one medium in another" (45). Whereas the claims made by various critics about Jia's work emphasize the logic of immediacy, both in terms of style and content, what we actually find is a pervading logic of hypermediacy and remediation. This is not to say that Jia is not concerned with 'reality,' but rather that what we experience as reality is at least partially the product of various mediations and remediations. In his film *Pickpocket*, this gesture towards remediation does not go much beyond showing the hypermediated nature of urban experience, but his later movies, particularly *The World, Still Life*, and *24 City* (*Ershisi chengji* 二十四城記; 2008), Jia returns to the relationship between the real/documentary and the fake/fictional in order to ask a more fully fleshed out question: what is there to separate the real and the unreal, the subjective and the objective, the documentary and the fictive, the archival and the visionary?

³⁴ Taken together, Jia's corpus presents an extended meditation on the personal experience, both negative and positive, of China's recent history of economic and social transformation. From the dissolution of communal life and the weakening of the *danwei* 單位 system with the implementation of market reforms in the late 70s and early 80s; to the ascension of a class of capitalist entrepreneurs with incestuous ties to the political world and nearly unlimited power to seize land for private and state projects; to the formation of a massive and amorphous floating population of migrant laborers who have helped fuel China's industrial and construction boom; and perhaps most relevant to *Still Life*, the unprecedented demolition of buildings and the displacement of their residents to make way for new development projects. More positively, Jia's films, especially *Platform*, have shown how this process has materially improved the lives of many of China's poorest people, led to a return of privacy and allowed for the spread of popular culture. See Teo, 2001.

gradual accumulation of representational traces that communicate across time; as a space, they become merely the scenery that ornaments a concrete and steel monument to the state and its achievements. Han Sanming's tragicomic attempt to orient himself in relation to Kuimen using the ideological surfaces of the banknote is in fact an encounter between an instrumentalized space and landscape and a perceiving individual who, through an act of accidental resistance, makes of his surroundings a lived and living place.

This sequence, and the tracking shot that immediately follows it, foreground three crucial components of *Still Life's* style: first, the presence of the 10-yuan banknote and its familiar depiction of Mao Zedong tells us that Jia is responding to and drawing on the continued influence of historical representational modes such as socialist realism. Second, the use of deep focus and the point of view shot suggests a mode of viewing landscape specially equipped to comprehend the complex, and sometimes dubious connections between people, settings and their representations. Third, the scrolling that opens the next scene points to the importance of movement, both visual and physical, in forging those connections within Jia's landscape aesthetic. Each of these components is best understood as part of a cinematic form that Jia has based on categories drawn from painting, especially portraiture and landscape. I address the origins and functions of Jia's scrolling technique in the penultimate section of this chapter but focus in this and the next section on how Jia's fusion of cinema and portraiture creates a mode of viewing that acknowledges how the relationships between people and places are forged and broken.

Throughout *Still Life*, Jia stages carefully framed shots of individuals like the one described above—"portraits" that simultaneously echo and transform the semiotics of revolutionary visual culture and its influences.³⁵ These portraits vary in composition and significance, but they all share a somatic, social, and historical relationship that emerges from the composition of elements within the film's depth of field. I describe this compositional aesthetic as "portraitist" in order to avoid more familiar but overused terms such as painterly, pictorial or photographic, and to theorize the painting-influenced, but highly original dialogue that he stages between humans and landscapes. As such, "portraitist" suggests that Jia's aesthetic is in many ways portrait-like without limiting or subordinating it to the generic conventions of a different visual medium. As a mode of viewing and representing people, the portraitist style is based on a type of sustained empirical observation, made possible by the long take, which evokes but ultimately transcends what the critics I discuss above identify as realist. Jia does not observe his figures simply to capture their likeness: the key to his portraitist

³⁵ Wang Hui singles out the opening sequence of the film as presenting just such a "group portrait" (*qunxiang* 群像), or, as Esther Cheung translates it, a "collective image" ("Realisms with Conundrum," 18). In this scene Jia cobbles together a series of long, slow tracking shots that travel along the length of a boat, at the head of which sits Han Sanming. Though Han is in fact isolated at the bow, away from the tightly packed passengers inside the boat, Hui describes him as nearly indistinguishable from the crowd: "From beginning to end he's a figure within the group portrait, and if you happen to stop paying attention for even a moment, he might disappear within the portrait." (他始終是群像中的人物，稍不留神，就會消失在群像之中). Cheung rightly reads Wang's approach to the "collective image/portrait" as part of "an effort to assert that the historicity of this group portrait bears no heroic accomplishments and to portray ordinary people subject to the tides of change" (18). Wang's reading, which Cheung sees as standing in direct opposition to the "official celebratory discourse," does a degree of violence to Jia's vision of Han Sanming as assuming an ironically heroic role within the informal sphere of the "rivers and lakes" (*jianghu*), the seedy flipside of China's economic triumph (See Wang's 2007 reformulation of his Fenyang comments, "Jia Zhangke de shijie yu zhongguo de da zhuanbian 家樟柯的世界與中國的大轉變," in *Si yu wen: Zhongguo jindai sixiang wenhua yanjiu*: <http://www.chinesethought.org/whyj/003191.htm>)

aesthetic, and to the movie in general, lies in how his characters move through and look at the varied landscapes of the Gorges. For Jia, these simple actions are precisely what link painting and film, fusing their different approaches to depth into an aesthetic form that shows how the fundamental connections between places and the people who live there are formed.

Given the English language title of the film, it might seem more obvious to take a different genre of painting, the still life, as my theoretical jumping off point. Though there are surely reasons to adopt such an approach, Jia's adaptation of aspects of painting to cinema is in fact based on a fine balance between quietude and movement that a too literal use of the still life as metaphor would obscure. What anchors the larger aesthetic into which the still life fits is the body-portrait/setting-landscape pair, which focuses our attention primarily on the interaction between living, moving people and the spaces they occupy.³⁶ Jia does, however, invoke the still life genre in ways that support his landscape/portraitist foundations. First, by staging cinematic portraits in which his characters are carefully framed and move very little, he seems to remove whatever minor boundaries might separate portraiture, still life and digital video by creating a productive tension between the stillness of painting and the dynamism, or life, of the moving image. Indeed, both the English language title of the film and the Chinese word *jing* 靜 (still) suggest a lack, but not necessarily an absence, of movement. In Jia's use of the English word, "still" signifies as both an adjective and an adverb, reminding us that his characters "still" manage to live and move (physically and visually) despite external pressures. Second, drawing more directly on the genre of painting, *Still Life* does contain a number of assemblages of everyday objects (literal 'still lifes,' or *jingwu* 靜物), such as those that begin the 'cigarette' and 'tea' sections of the film.³⁷ If Jia fuses landscape and portraiture to show how people and places interact and inform one another, then these still life objects are the tools that his characters use to forge connections with other people. Though they tell us a great deal about the characters' environments, class associations and methods of social exchange, they do so not as immobile still life objects, but as commodities that circulate between individuals, creating links and strengthening the mutual embrace of landscape and figure within cinematic depth.³⁸

³⁶ In the Fenyang forum quoted above, the poet Xi-chuan asks Jia: "Why is the English title called Still Life?" Jia responds: "Because when I went to the Three Gorges I was able to once again develop a focus on material objects. Among the average residents of the Three Gorges, many of their homes consist of nothing more than four bare walls." This laconic response seems to suggest that Jia's interest in still life objects has less to do with the genre of painting than with the absence of the basic consumer goods that he expects to find in the homes of lower income people and the way that the absence or presence of such goods indicates the vulnerability of the impoverished residents of the region of the Gorges ("*Sanxia haoren*," 12).

³⁷ Jie Li goes so far as to call each of the four consumer goods that structure the film as "'still life' objects." Interpreting Jia's own remarks, she writes that these still life objects: "bear the traces and inscriptions of human life and hence may also be understood as extensions of human sentience." Though at least two of these objects are presented momentarily in still life-like compositions, Jie reminds us that they are most important to the narrative of the film as objects that move and circulate, creating connections between individuals outside of "capitalist rationality" ("Home and Nation Amid the Rubble," 111). Indeed, these objects show how the characters behave as active social agents, creating links with other characters. Unlike normal commodities, whose exchange value is determined monetarily, these goods are part of a separate economy of social goodwill and connection that persists and grows after they change hands. As such, they stand in stark contrast to the other commodities in the film, such as the so-called 'magic' show that mystifies and parodies the global monetary exchange market and for which Han Sanming is almost forced to pay a "school fee."

³⁸ In an interview in *Cahier du Cinéma* Jia gives the title more memorial weight: "it suggests the exposure of traces of a life that is no longer there, or rather of a way of life about which there remains only the most basic evidence." Thirion, A., Jérémy Segay and Jia Zhangke. "Festival de Hong-Kong par A. Thirion et Jérémy Segay + Entretien avec Jia Zhang-ke," in *Cahiers du Cinéma* 623 (May 2007), 59. In his own writing Jia describes the still life object as representing an almost alternate reality: "The still life represents a kind of reality that has been overlooked by us; though it retains in its depths the traces of time, it remains ever silent, protecting life's secrets" (*Jia xiang*, 167).

Of course, deep focus is only one of many techniques that filmmakers use to combine landscape and figure. What sets it apart is that other compositional forms, such as the medium or close-up shot, tend to emphasize the two-dimensionality of the screen, creating a visual hierarchy that reduces setting or landscape into mere backdrop. Such an effect is all but guaranteed when a close-up shot or selective focus blurs the background into soft focus oblivion. In contrast, the deep focus that Jia uses in *Still Life* serves to "open a third dimension," allowing the camera to focus on foreground, middle-ground and background simultaneously, creating the conditions for a more complex relationship between all elements within the visual field.³⁹ For Jia, working in a hybrid painting/digital video medium, depth of field becomes a profound method for figuring the endangered relationship between his characters and their social, economic and physical contexts. This is a method that, in the words of the philosopher Edward Casey, exemplifies the mutual embrace of "primal depth."⁴⁰

As Casey's guide for this concept, Merleau-Ponty writes: "This being simultaneously present in experiences which are nevertheless mutually exclusive, this implication of one in the other, this contraction into one perceptual act of a whole possible process, constitute the originality of depth. It is the dimension in which things or elements of things envelop each other."⁴¹ Primal depth moves us beyond the optical effects suggested by deep focus and perspective towards a better understanding of how Jia depicts and acknowledges the fragile, mutual envelopment of the person/landscape pair that we saw develop in the 10-*yuan* scene. Perhaps the most crucial aspect of this pair in *Still Life* is Jia's focus on human bodies in motion, transition and confrontation. (The human body's transformation from painted fixity to cinematic mobility is naturally far more dramatic than Jia's adaptation of pictorialized landscapes.) My conception of the body here is roughly equivalent to what Casey calls the "lived body," which is experienced through its actions and movements within a given place. For Casey, it is the position and movement of the body that defines specific places (as opposed to the general category of space) and enacts the process of "implacement"—namely through the deictic dyads of near-far and here-there and the perspectival dyads of up-down/top-bottom, front-back and right-left. It is only in the encounter between moving bodies and living landscapes that individuals become properly "implaced" and space properly 'placed.'

Cinema, unlike painting, cannot help but do much of the work of implacement for us, capturing the almost ceaseless motion of the human body through and within space, even when at rest. Though this would seem to make film an ideal medium for depicting both the active side of primal depth and the processes underlying implacement, we must remember that motion need not be *the* central quality of moving pictures. Jia frequently uses long-takes and shots in deep focus that foreground stillness, investing them with a contemplative importance that

³⁹ Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and its Charge* (Chichester, U.K.: Wiley Blackwell, 2010), 75. According to Bazin, this technique emerged partly from technical advances in film stock in the 1940s that allowed filmmakers to sustain deep focus (which requires a small aperture and a great deal of light) more easily and consistently, especially inside the studio. In Bazin's historical account, this technological refinement, coupled with the evolution of sound in cinema and spurred on by Orson Welles' paeon to deep focus, *Citizen Kane*, marked the definitive decline (though not the death) of techniques common to silent and early sound film, especially montage and soft focus. See: "The Evolution of the Language of Cinema," in Bazin, *What is Cinema? Volume I*. Tr. Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press) 32-35. David Bordwell singles out yet another technological shift occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, "filmmakers' growing reliance on long lenses," as facilitating the even greater extension of depth that allows for what he calls "planimetric composition." See: "Observations on Film Art: Shot Consciousness." URL (last accessed 9/29/12): <http://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2007/01/16/shot-consciousness/>

⁴⁰ *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 68.

⁴¹ *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (New York: Routledge, 2002), 308.

highlights *Still Life's* position between film and painting. That Jia often introduces surreal episodes into these moments of silence and stillness also suggests that the defining characteristics of Bazinian art film realism can be repurposed to invert conventional realist expectations. Once again, the key to this inversion is the way in which Jia organizes the space opened up by deep focus. By envisioning space as comprised of a series of fields, Jia transforms deep focus into what I call "multiplanar depth."

Simply put, "multiplanar depth" refers to the combination of multiple pictorial fields or planes within cinematic depth. In terms of basic composition, this is similar to what David Bordwell (borrowing from the art historian Heinrich Wölfflin) has described as "planimetric" composition, which he considers "well-suited to a 'painterly' or strongly pictorial approach to cinema."⁴² In my analysis of *Still Life* however, "multiplanar depth" does more than create a pictorial or painterly *effect*; it offers a space (natural and cinematic) for the repurposing and combination of both specific pictorial traditions and the insertion of surreal special effects unique to the digital age. These almost magical episodes both momentarily illuminate the composition of depth and its role in the process of impacement, and also show that impacement can be unexpectedly and profoundly disturbed. In the case of the Three Gorges and *Still Life*, impacement is the vulnerable and imperiled counterpart to the state ideology machine and its inevitable displacements precisely because the latter consumes and instrumentalizes *places*, transforming them into mere *sites* for the exercise of power.⁴³ Han Sanming's encounter with Kuimen demonstrates explicitly how this happens, though another scene, featuring Shen Hong, deploys the surreal to more subtly demonstrate the formal links between depth and impacement-displacement in Jia's aesthetic.

Here, in a section of the film dedicated to Shen Hong's search for her husband, we witness a rocket-like monument launch mysteriously into space (figure 4). Shen is staying at the apartment of an old army friend of her husband's after a long, fruitless day of searching both the old, partially demolished Fengjie, and the newly constructed replacement city. Visible from the balcony of the apartment, the monument appears firmly grounded in the distance at the right of the screen, exquisitely framed by a range of hills behind it, a concrete balustrade in front and beneath it (supporting a potted plant that sits in the middle of the frame) and a clothesline sloping above it. When Shen steps silently out onto the balcony to hang a small blue and white singlet on the line, we hear only the sounds of birds and a baby crying. For a brief moment after she hangs the shirt to dry, she, the monument and the shirt are aligned, rising from left to right, their collective shape softly contoured from above by the hanging clothesline. This lateral alignment is simultaneously echoed by the layering in receding depth of Shen, the balcony, the monument and the distantly silhouetted mountains. When Shen goes back inside, the camera remains fixed, and the viewer's focus naturally shifts to what had been the background. Suddenly, the structure begins to shake, a cloud of smoke and dust grows from its base and it blasts off into space, generating only a muted rumble as it leaves the frame.

⁴² Bordwell, 2007.

⁴³ The state, of course, does not have monopolies on myth-making and displacement, as *Still Life* makes evident in its depiction of how individuals, whether wealthy entrepreneurs or lowly demolition workers, participate in the physical and representational transformation of the landscape. Not only is Shen Hong's husband Guo Bin actively involved in the forced eviction of stubborn residents, but his boss and possible mistress, Ding Yaling, a businesswoman from coastal Xiamen seems to have become both rich and famous through her participation in the demolition of Three Gorges cities. When Shen Hong travels to an upscale club in search of Guo Bin she finds a lengthy biography of Ding next to a picture of a county building as it implodes.

This outrageously fake-looking, computer generated interpolation caps a moment of meticulous formalism and subtle poetry.⁴⁴ Like the banknote that literally mediates between Han Sanming and Kuimen, the flying monument launches itself *between* the balcony and the mountains, destabilizing the otherwise continuous space and its seamless fusion of multiple layers within depth. Both deep focus and the long take (and the illusion of real time that it generates according to conventional accounts of Bazinian realism) provide the very opening that allows the monument to alter both the aesthetic quietude and realistic effect of the scene. This disruption of modes of representation and vision points to something more fundamental however: unlike the glowing orb that appears earlier in the film, the monument is not a computer generated effect, but an actual, unfinished memorial to the displaced residents of the gorges. Constructed to resemble the character *hua* 華—a poetic reference to both the nation and the people of China—this curious looking shell reminds us that Jia's aesthetic hybrid functions to frame and draw attention to the epic spatial, temporal and social transformations caused by the Three Gorges dam and its reservoir. In *Still Life*, multiplanar depth shows not only how people and places and portraits and landscapes come together, but also how they are torn apart. The unfinished monument to the locals ends up a comically unsightly symbol of their displacement.

III. The Wanderer and Those Who Follow Him

Shen Hong's flying monument and Han Sanming's encounter with Kuimen not only exemplify the processes of implacement and displacement, they also suggests how fully Jia's manipulation of space and depth adapts and responds to visual models from outside film. Images of Mao, especially from the Cultural Revolution, are among the most important of these models, though even Mao's representations can be traced to earlier sources. A crucial influence on both Jia's depiction of Han and its Cultural Revolution sources comes from one of the most iconic paintings of European Romanticism, Caspar David Friedrich's (1774-1840) "The Wanderer" (1818; figure 5). My formal analysis of both this work, and the two Cultural Revolution images of Mao that follow, shows precisely how *Still Life* and its sources create and manipulate space in order to suggest specific relationships between figure and landscape.

§§§

Friedrich's "Wanderer" depicts a lone, windblown figure atop a small outcropping who gazes out at a cloud-streaked valley and distant mountains. Although the prominence of the central figure at first suggests a portrait-like composition, the viewer is presented with only the back of the wanderer. The literal back—a uniform, dark, near-void that draws the eye around and beyond the figure—minimizes the wanderer's importance, and draws into its own negative space all the utilitarian functions once left to the landscape as background. Having sequestered the background into this physical back, Friedrich compels the eye to wander out into the space beyond; once there however, an uncanny resemblance draws us once again to the figure—the jutting monoliths that emerge from the cloud cover clearly mirror the figure's erect form and blank posterior. Just as we are pulled out we are drawn back, the visual echo imbuing the

⁴⁴ This particular moment has attracted a great deal of attention, even finding its way onto the cover of Dudley Andrew's 2010 book, *What Cinema Is!*

painting with a kinetic energy in dramatic equilibrium. This conflation of human and natural forms reflects a kind of spiritual and mystical communion that comes with the confrontation between man and sublime nature in Romantic philosophy. Yet, its historical meaning notwithstanding, this balance of forces also serves to implace the wanderer within the depth of the landscape.

"The Wanderer" provides more than an example of primal depth and implacement, however; it is also a key visual source (and point of contrast) for the imagery in *Still Life* and its Chinese influences. The 'native' influences that I treat here are images from the Cultural Revolution, particularly images of Mao, in which the great helmsman often looms larger than life before a stylized or symbolic landscape. Without a doubt the most famous of these images, and at the height of its popularity one of the most reproduced,⁴⁵ is Liu Chunhua's 劉春華 (b.1944) 1968 painting "Chairman Mao goes to Anyuan 毛主席去安源" (figure 6).

If the darkened back of "The Wanderer" draws the viewer into the sublime landscape, the ethereal luminosity of Liu's painting definitively draws us back to the figure. Gently glowing, Mao is set against a cloud-streaked sky and mist-shrouded mountains that stretch out below him to the horizon. These mountains do not directly echo his physiognomy, but Mao does stand impressively mountain-like. The allegorical grammar of Song Dynasty monumental landscape painting, as expressed most famously in an essay attributed to the Northern Song master landscape artist Guo Xi 郭熙 (c.1020-c.1090) and his son Guo Si 郭思 (active c.1070-after 1123), provides a fitting analogy:

A great mountain is dominating as chief over the assembled hills, thereby ranking in an ordered arrangement the ridges and peaks, forests and valleys as suzerains of varying degrees and distances. The general appearance is of a great lord glorious on his throne and a hundred princes hastening to pay him court.⁴⁶

In a Song painting, the subsidiary, or "guest," mountains would have a dynamic verticality leading the eyes upward towards the central massif. In Liu's painting, the background mountains are well below Mao's level—barely reaching as high as his clenched left fist, they form a horizontal field that contrasts with and intensifies his verticality. Though the forms differ, the thrust of the allegory has been literalized in this picture: mountain as man becomes simply man, as Mao draws his power from the mountains while towering, god-like, over them.⁴⁷ Because this painting depicts an historical event that forms part of Mao's

⁴⁵ Estimates run to 900,000,000. See, Melissa Chiu and Zheng Shengtian, eds. *Art and China's Revolution* (New York: Asia Society, 2008), 12. This tendency towards excessive replication helped lodge the imagery and symbolism of the Cultural Revolution in the minds of those who lived through it. As Wu Hung notes, for many contemporary artists of a certain generation, their "strong interest in political symbolism had its direct origin in the Cultural Revolution itself, which over a decade produced innumerable copies of a few sets of images and texts—mainly Mao's portraits, his writings, and his sayings—in every written and visual form. The chief technologies of cultural and artistic production during that period were *repetition* and *duplication*." This particular aspect of Cultural Revolution fanaticism lent the movement one of the primary traits of traumatic experience, compulsive repetition, at the very height of the cult of Mao. Though these images could only officially return *traumatically* after 1976, they were primed to do so from a very early stage. That they began to proliferate in the form of consumer trinkets and good luck charms in the 1990s is indeed a curious new stage in a history of "repetition and duplication." See *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 2005), 28 and 51-52 (for more on the appropriation of Mao in Political Pop).

⁴⁶ Translation from Susan Bush and Hsiao-yen Shih, *Early Chinese Texts on Painting* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1983), 135.

⁴⁷ I am not, of course, suggesting a direct link between the landscape theory of Guo Si and Guo Xi and Liu Chunhua's image. Yet, despite the very different historical contexts, pictorial traditions, techniques and media of

hagiography, we need not read his dominating stance as a direct reference to the socialist faith in man's ability to triumph over nature. That teleological narrative, though not totally absent here, is certainly systematically visualized in other, contemporary images. What we see in Liu's painting is a generalized expression of Mao's supremacy and historical legitimacy.⁴⁸ In contrast, the mutual embrace of Friedrich's wanderer and the landscape suggests an ontological equivalence between figure and ground that approaches what we see when Han Sanming looks towards Kuimen or when Shen Hong is carefully aligned with the monument that lifts into space. While that equivalence is ultimately destabilized by the unknowability and terrifying power of nature in Friedrich's painting, and entirely discarded in Liu Chunhua's appropriation, it reemerges in Jia Zhangke's film as an articulation of the bonds between humans and their environments. Jia acknowledges that these bonds, though imperiled and temporary (we must not forget that Han and Shen are only passing through Fengjie before returning north), are not maintained by ideology, philosophy or discourses of power, as in "Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan," but by the quotidian practices of living bodies.

As we saw when Han gazed out at Kuimen, one of the most powerful of these practices is looking. Although Jia's use of deep focus opens up space to show how Han engages visually with the landscape that surrounds him, the surprising appearance of Chairman Mao and all that he entails in Han Sanming's point of view shot also establishes the filmmaker's vision as deeply historical and meta-pictorial—this is an image that tells us something about the recent history of Chinese image-making. It also tells us something about the gaze of the filmmaker in this particular landscape at this particular historical juncture. Like Han (who is distinguished from his fellow demolition workers by his experience in the northern coal mines), Jia Zhangke is an outsider from the arid north, a kind of traveling artisan who in coming south simultaneously bears witness and participates (through his characters) in the destruction of Fengjie. Jia is famous, after all, for embracing his status as "migrant-laborer filmmaker" (*mingong daoyan* 民工導源), a title that signals his sympathy with the floating population of migrant workers and his identification as a migrant-worker in his own right, albeit of an intellectual-artistic type.⁴⁹ As geographical, linguistic and professional outsiders, Jia and his cinematic alter egos look with

these two expressions of landscape, they present a similar symbolic structure in which the representation of geographical features is explicitly subordinated to an overarching ideological or symbolic structure. European landscape painting, which provides the model for Liu Chunhua's painting, has of course, always been an ideological and symbolic structure, though usually not so explicitly as certain types of Chinese landscape painting. Perhaps this is due at least in part to the fact that it originated in Renaissance Italy alongside linear perspective, which represented, as Denis E. Cosgrove puts it, "a new conception of space as a coherent visual structure" and was considered "a truth" and an objective property of "space." Though Liu Chunhua used linear perspective, his painting did not function in its historical and social context as a representation of "space as a coherent visual structure." The dominance of Mao breaks the link between figure and landscape and relegates the organization of space according to linear perspective to a minor role within a separate coherent symbolic and ideological structure. See *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1998), 21 and 21-22.

⁴⁸ Liu Chunhua painted the work in 1967 as one of seven paintings commissioned by a Beijing Red Guard group for an exhibition detailing Mao's seven visits to Anyuan in the early 1920s. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, Party history had emphasized only Liu Shaoqi's role in the Anyuan workers' movement. This background suggests another, more specific goal for this painting, though it by no means precludes the more general mythos-producing function I have described above. In any case, my concern with this picture is with its aesthetics, form and semiotics: literally how it works and communicates, rather than its specific historical aim. See Chiu and Zheng's *Art and China's Revolution*, 119.

⁴⁹ For more on this characterization of Jia's subject position, see Zhang Zhen's introductory essay to *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century* (Durham N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007), 16, 42n.24 and Xiao 2011.

fresh eyes in order to acknowledge how people become implaced in and displaced from this landscape.

The importance of vision becomes even clearer when we add yet another link to the chain that connects "The Wanderer," Mao on his way to Anyuan, Han and Shen: the large body of Cultural Revolution images in which Mao is depicted, usually from the waist up (what we might term a pictorial medium shot) and at one side of the picture, looking thoughtfully up and to the other side. The poster "Resolutely Follow the Great Leader Chairman Mao's Forward March 盡跟偉大毛主席領袖奮勇前進" (figure 7), produced collectively in 1969 by the Shanghai People's Art Press, gives an idea of the form, though Mao stands in 3/4 profile and instead of the *shanshui* 山水 (literally, "mountains and waters") of landscape, the background consists of the infinite, roiling revolutionary masses, a literal *renshan renhai* 人山人海 ("sea of humanity," or literally, "mountain of people, ocean of people"). Throughout *Still Life*, Han Sanming and Shen Hong take up stances that resemble the one that Mao strikes in this picture and in many others, including the 1968 "Man's Whole World is Mutable, Seas Become Mulberry Fields: Chairman Mao Inspects Areas South and North of the Yangtze 人間正道是滄桑：毛主席視察大江南北" (figure 8), designed by Zheng Shengtian 鄭勝天 (b.1938).⁵⁰

In this last work, Mao's faith in man's ability and ineluctable duty to master and transform the natural world—as embodied in the iconic phrase "*ren ding sheng tian* 人定勝天" (man will certainly triumph over nature)—is clearly spelled out.⁵¹ The Chairman stands in 3/4 profile from about mid-thigh up as he looks to the right, beyond the frame of the image. Behind and below him throng revolutionary masses, and stretching into the distance are the plains of the lower reaches of the Yangzi. Both of these images present two distinct planes or fields (not including the physical surface of the painting or poster that the viewer encounters): the plane occupied by Mao and the landscape/background, which functions as a surface onto which the painter superimposes Mao. That the ground in such images (not insignificantly in the form of people) was often reduced to a minimally meaningful surface can come as no surprise. The focus was always meant to be Chairman Mao, whose infinitely reproducible image could be inserted in front of nearly any politically suitable background.

As Zheng Shengtian, who conceived the idea and base sketch for the painting recalls: "When I was about to transfer [my sketch] onto canvas, I was told that Mao's head had to be painted by a young revolutionary Red Guard. Also, the body had to be drawn by a teacher with a stronger revolutionary awareness."⁵² His suspect class standing proved a blessing however: as a result, Zheng was allowed to paint the "romantic" landscape background free from intervention. This anecdote demonstrates the profound disconnect between the portrait and landscape components of these revolutionary images. This is not to say that there is no relationship between the two—as the painting articulates most clearly, Mao's vision exercises transformative power over the landscape. This landscape is both specific (the Yangzi as major waterway) and dramatically symbolic (the Yangzi forms a boundary that separates but also

⁵⁰ These images of the Mao, though clearly drawing on Soviet models, bear a surprising resemblance to another iconic Chinese cultural figure—the gazing literatus found in a subset of Southern Song landscape paintings. Unlike Mao (but like Han and Shen) however, this figure, as exemplified in the work of Ma Yuan (c.1160-1225), gazes *into* the landscape, *away* from the viewer. In a particularly famous example, "Spring Walk on a Mountain Path" (*Shanjing chunxing*; in the collection of the National Palace Museum, Taipei), Ma Yuan's literatus casts his gaze out to a distant point or into a misty void—the poet's internal depth and the natural world's external depth melding in empty space.

⁵¹ For more on this topic, see Judith Shapiro's *Mao's War Against Nature: Politics and the Environment in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

⁵² Chiu and Zheng, *Art and China's Revolution*, 32, 34.

links the nation into southern and northern halves, allowing it to function synecdochically here). Just as we see Mao and the masses, we also see the Yangzi and the nation.⁵³

Although Mao remains well within the pictorial foreground in both “Resolutely Follow” and “Man’s Whole World is Mutable,” his myriad proxies fan out to realize faithfully his vision of transforming the natural world in the deeper plane that stretches behind him to the horizon. Through its bald symbolism, these paintings’ portrait and landscape fields interact as mind and body or theory and praxis. The source of theory or ideology, Mao, stands as a deity above and beyond the landscape, though still capable of exerting maximum physical influence through the masses. Both of these works are exemplars of the national cult of Mao, one that telegraphs its reality directly through its very separation of, and implied relationship between, figure and ground (or, to put it in terms of *Still Life’s* aesthetic, portrait and landscape).

The 10-yuan banknote that Han Sanming inspects early in *Still Life* stealthily preserves this very relationship, simultaneously concealing and reinforcing it. It conceals it by isolating the portraitist and landscape components onto opposite sides of the bank note, thereby eliminating their ability to interact within pictorial depth and reinforces it, Janus-like, by making the images two sides of the same object. Han’s alternation between Kuimen, Mao and the drawing of Kuimen stages this very reading while simultaneously creating a composite image of a single figure and the landscape. Whether superimposed on the landscape in Zheng Shengtian’s painting or depicted as a floating head on one side of the 10-yuan note, Mao and his landscapes are fundamentally separate. Even in a painting such as “Man’s World is Mutable,” which gains its symbolic reach through the creation of the illusion of depth, the two pictorial planes function first and foremost as reflective surfaces, mirrors that show a clear political ideology. In *Still Life*, Jia echoes Mao and his iconic stance to show up such ideological flatness, juxtaposing it with a multiplanar depth in which Han Sanming and Kuimen are “simultaneously present” in one another.

The differences between Friedrich, Jia Zhangke and artists working in the 1960s and 70s will be clear to anyone with a passing understanding of the historical and aesthetic contexts of each work of art. What is important are not the differences, but the formal similarities: a central figure standing resolutely atop a peak or in the extreme foreground, and beyond him, a sea of clouds or people overlying expanses of space. This envelopment of man in nature and nature in man is calculated to inspire awe— for Friedrich, in nature; for Zheng, in Mao; and for Jia, in the relationship between people and place. Looking beyond these similarities, however, this comparison is less about issues of influence and filiation, than it is about how images travel and change. The specifics of “The Wanderer’s” route and its direct connection to Liu Chunhua are secondary here to how those images that follow it have transformed its system of signification. We cannot allow the newness of the first appropriation to blind us however: once an image is transformed, it begins to age anew; having once traveled, it will often set off again; and though it moves on, it leaves traces. Many (but not all) of the political myths fostered by ‘Mao-art’ have been debunked, but its images continually re-emerge as ghostly negatives in the psyches and the imagery of post-socialist China. In its most attenuated form, this art, much of which is generally grouped under the rubric of “Political Pop” (*zhengzhi popu* 政治波譜), produces clichéd simulacra that repurpose the artistic techniques, imagery and iconology of the

⁵³ This symbolizing impulse is by no means limited to socialist realism. In the Fenyang discussion, Ouyang Jianghe discusses the Three Gorges as a new symbol within the ‘Heimat Realism’ of Jia’s art, referring to them as “the Chinese people’s shared homeland” (*Zhongguoren gongtong de guli* 中國人共同的故里; “*Sanxia haoren*,” 2007, 11).

Cultural Revolution for the lucrative market in contemporary Chinese art.⁵⁴ If the shocking and effective first wave of such appropriations, which reached its peak in the mid-nineties, has lost some of its novelty and most of its punch, then the work of artists like Jia Zhangke points to a new aesthetic beyond realism and its alternatives in which artistic forms delve deeply into the nexus of historical trauma and visual culture to communicate a contemporary experience that has not yet relinquished the ghosts of the past.

IV. Frames, Framing and the Ethics of Viewing

If my readings up to this point have looked primarily towards the ideological implications of the integration or segregation of figure and natural landscape, the readings that follow delve deeper into the aesthetic and ethical possibilities of what might be termed Jia's "humanscape." This term refocuses attention on the man-made structures, residential in particular, that contain or frame humans. Conventionally conceived of as protective enclosures, buildings in *Still Life* are all too often gaping, empty hulks, open to the elements and unable to protect life. In the process of losing their original function however, they gain poetic resonance and a new aesthetic utility. Throughout the film, these porous structures provide apertures or windows that Jia uses to carefully frame images, enclosing and lingering on them as though they were paintings hanging on the walls of a gallery. In each of the examples that I cite (and in many others), either Shen Hong or Han Sanming (and sometimes their companions) stand before these openings, simultaneously enclosed by the camera's frame through which we look and the filmed frame through which they look. This *mise en abîme* quality partakes of both Jia's portraitist influences and his self-reflexive interest in the media that influence how we see the world.

The first and perhaps most striking of these framed sequences occurs approximately 31 minutes into *Still Life* (figure 9). Han Sanming is indoors with his fellow workers during the lunch break of his first day of demolition work. The structure they inhabit seems to be the same structure they have just been dismantling—empty, dirty, pierced with gaping holes in the exterior walls and surrounded by rubble. As Han wanders off to eat alone, a woman follows him to an empty room.⁵⁵ There, she asks if he's interested in a "girl" (*xiaojie* 小姐), but when he responds confusedly with "what girl?" (*shenme xiaojie* 甚麼小姐), she quickly corrects herself, saying, "young woman" (*shaofu* 少婦). Moving over to a large hole in the wall she yells in the direction of a battered balcony, out of which emerge four women (none of them particularly

⁵⁴ As Wu Hung writes, "the fate of political pop seems an irony. Hoping to respond critically to increasing consumerism in China, it was itself willingly commercialized.... In terms of style, its further fragmentation of Cultural Revolution images exhausted the source of its pictorial vocabulary and reduced itself to a number of preconceived compositional formulas.... The historical role of political pop was therefore to conclude post-Cultural Revolution Art and to usher in an important change in the Chinese art world beginning around the mid-nineties: many artists finally bid farewell to the Cultural Revolution and its visual and mental baggage." One wonders if the ghosts of trauma can be so easily banished. Jia's work, and to a much greater extent, the paintings of an artist such as Yun-fei Ji, suggest otherwise (Wu, *Transience*, 23).

⁵⁵ We learn later that she is the wife of the man who lost his hand and whom Shen Hong encounters at the factory, as well as the mother of a former classmate of Han's daughter. She is herself the subject of a strikingly framed shot later in the film (1:19:45): having come down with a cold she sits on the balcony of her building attached to an intravenous drip. Behind and to her right is Kuimen; to her left, is her decrepit home, which Han Sanming has come to tear down.

young and certainly none of them girls) who fan themselves with shoe inserts and strike awkwardly seductive poses. The first woman moonlights as a procuress.

Not only do the jagged bricks to the left and right of the shot frame the camera's view and the group of women, but within this frame the women are further framed—by the balcony on which they stand and those surrounding it, by a doorway, by windows and by the building itself and those in the background. Like the Albertian window of perspectival painting, it seems as though this brick window is meant to be looked *through*, to create a sense of an immediate space that draws the viewer's gaze, dissolving the frame as boundary. For Renaissance painting, this type of perspective was a tool of immediacy: by erasing the medium, the artist made "the space of the picture continuous with the viewer's space."⁵⁶ In this scene however, something is amiss. We are not dealing with one, or even two frames; we are met by a multiplicity of apertures, their repetition belying the first two frames' claims to immediacy and signaling that the medium and its functionality are just as important a component of the scene as is the tenuous, commodified status of these no longer young women. What strikes the viewer is how the window as frame intensifies both the sense of spatial depth created by the camera's deep focus and the portraitist effect of the grouping, generating an ethical depth that forces the viewer to acknowledge the poignancy of the women's plight. The scene is not simply a vision of a gritty, beneath-the-surface-reality or a glimpse of everyday life as it unfolds independently of the camera, but rather a visionary act that foregrounds the creative powers of both the medium and filmmaker while acknowledging their responsibility to their subjects.⁵⁷

Though we share here the perspective of Han Sanming (without the camera assuming an explicit point of view shot), a more common framing composition in *Still Life* depicts characters standing before or looking out through various openings—we watch them watching, as in the shot immediately preceding Han's discovery of his friend "little" Mage's (*xiao Ma ge* 小馬哥) dead body (figure 10). In a similar scene near the end of the movie, Han and his wife, who he has finally found, have wandered off into the ruins of Fengjie at dusk, threading skeletal buildings and ancient trees as they search for privacy. Having just committed to paying his wife's brother's debts in order to buy her out of indentured servitude, Han must now say goodbye so that he can return to Shanxi for a year to earn the promised money. The couple eventually wanders to an empty room, its walls streaked with burn marks and broken by yet another giant opening, even on the top, but jagged and blown out at the sides near the bottom. At first, they stand and then squat to the right of this window (figure 11), remaining almost totally silent except when Han's wife offers him a piece of candy (the same kind that Mage gives to Han when we last see him alive), the nostalgia inducing *Da bai tu* 大白兔, or Big White Rabbit brand of chewy milk candy. The two face each other in silence until a large crashing sound draws them to the giant window. Through this opening they look into the distance at a multistory building that implodes and swiftly disappears in a cloud of dust. After it is gone, Han draws closer to his wife and holds her from behind, the first physical connection between the two and a harbinger of reconciliation and revived sentiment (figure 12).

Within the economy of the narrative we could read the building as having various different implications: as the couple looks at the destruction of a building very much like the one they currently inhabit, their sense of mutual responsibility and affection is revived by their shared vulnerability; or, we could interpret the eerie collapse synecdochically, as a part of the larger menacing and transforming external world that is best navigated communally; or, to

⁵⁶ Bolter and Grusin, *Remediation*, 25.

⁵⁷ This scene is all the more poignant because we know that Han has already purchased a Fengjie bride—his long estranged wife—making him a central part of the commodification of women for which the region is known.

view it in formal terms, this building's earthly collapse in deep focus echoes the monument that rumbled skyward earlier in the film. Of course none of these readings are mutually exclusive. Ruins, rubble and demolition became an integral part of contemporary Chinese art starting in the mid-nineties, just as they became an unavoidable aspect of urban life in China.⁵⁸ For different artists, as for Jia, they serve multiple roles—personal and social, symbolic and realistic, historically specific and focused on contemporary experience. Regardless of whether this particular building and its surrounding ruins bring the pair together or simply coincide with their rapprochement, their careful framing, like the portrait-landscape fusion, engenders a mode of viewing that is dedicated to an ethical approach to the characters and actors that fill *Still Life*.

V. Multiplanar Depth, Scrolling Breadth and the Uncanny Irruption

Peering into *Still Life*'s depths and through its frames we discover that the seamlessness of the film hides a profoundly composite and hypermediated structure. In this penultimate section, I focus on a final extended reading of a sequence that unites all of the techniques previously analyzed—multiplanar depth, landscape, portraiture, the building as frame and the surreal—within Jia's technique of scrolling breadth. Jia ennobles the simple tracking shot by slowly, attentively scrolling across the landscape in a way that evokes the visual and temporal experience of scanning a painted handscroll, but animates it with the addition of sound and computer generated effects. It is in scrolling breadth that *Still Life* achieves the perfect fusion of film, painting and sound. This aesthetic is near its purest in the moments immediately proceeding and following Shen Hong's first appearance.

Han Sanming has just rescued Mage, who had been bound inside a large plastic bag and dumped among the rubble of the old city.⁵⁹ As the two talk, we are clued in to the distinct forms of nostalgia that underlie their contemporary selves—Mage, a young thug-for-hire who occasionally works for Shen Hong's shadowy husband, quotes one of Zhou Runfa's 周潤發 (Chow Yun-fat) characters, saying, "The world of today doesn't suit us because we're too nostalgic." This becomes all the more obvious when the two exchange mobile phone numbers: Han's ring tone is a midi-version of the 1990s hit "May the Good Live Forever in Peace" (*haoren yisheng pingan* 好人一生平安) to which Mage responds "What 'good people' are left in Fengjie now?" Without waiting for an answer, Mage proudly asks Han to call him and listen to his ring tone—Frances Yip's Cantopop theme song to *The Bund* (Shanghai tan 上海灘), the Hong Kong television series set in 1920s Shanghai and starring Mage's hero, Zhou. Released in 1980, the show was wildly popular throughout Asia and its theme song remains highly

⁵⁸ For more on ruins, see: Wu, *Transience*, 80-81 and "Ruins, Fragmentation, and the Chinese Modern/Postmodern," in Gao Minglu ed., *Inside Out: New Chinese Art* (San Francisco and New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and Asia Society Galleries 1998), 59-66, and Li 2009, throughout.

⁵⁹ Mage addresses Han as *laoxiang*, a basically untranslatable term that is used like the English 'buddy,' but which literally refers to someone from the same hometown as the speaker. Mage thus titles Han a resident of Fengjie, one of the "good people" of the film's title. More poignantly, the term suggests the untethering of notions of 'home' and origins that have resulted from the massive influx of rural workers into the cities and factories of eastern China. People like Han Sanming and Mage are 'of the same place' because of their class and vulnerability to the pressures of capitalism. Of course, the irony of this scene is in its setting—the old city of Fengjie, Mage's home, which lies in ruins or underwater, a "hometown" that is no more.

recognizable today.⁶⁰ Unlike Han Sanming's digitized, instrumental song, Mage's "Shanghai tan" is a recording of the actual song, a superior version that intensifies the technologically and theatrically mediated nature of his character. Both the song and the television show are 1980s iterations of nostalgia for 1920s Shanghai, and their sentimentality (the song) and stylized bravado (the show) provide the model for Mage's personal style. Han Sanming's tastes might be out of date, but Mage's have come to him already fictionalized and stylized.⁶¹

As the song plays, Jia's camera tracks right to a television showing images of, first, an elderly woman supported by officials as she climbs a flight of stairs, a crying woman, a boat with an English language sign reading "Yangzi River Tourism" and a man atop a hill waving (in greeting or farewell?) with his jacket. The camera then cuts to a shot of a 156.3-meter "Stage Three" reservoir marker taken from an actual boat on the Yangzi (figure 15). Simultaneously, the tinny, diegetic ring tone version of the song shifts to a clearer, louder extra-diegetic version, and the camera, which had been stationary throughout Mage and Han Sanming's encounter, begins more than a minute of an almost unbroken series of tracking shots. Starting on the river, the camera cuts to Han, who stands in his underwear on a rooftop (figure 13), then to a view of Kuimen at the left, towards which he walks and gazes and from which appears a glowing, silvery orb. As the UFO moves to the right the camera reverses direction to follow it and Frances Yip's song fades into the background, replaced by a series of deep, percussive rumbles.

When the orb leaves the frame that contains Han Sanming, the camera cuts to our first shot of Shen Hong (figure 14), who continues to follow the orb to the right until it disappears in the distance above a rusting factory, its ominous whirring replaced by atmospheric music and the sound of creaking metal in the abandoned factory. The stances of both Han and Shen in the first sequence described above immediately recall the stances and gazes of Mao in the Cultural Revolution images, "Resolutely Follow the Great Leader" (fig. 7) and "Man's Whole World is Mutable" (fig. 8). But where Mao would have seen a technologically miraculous factory symbolizing the achievements of the modern socialist state, Shen Hong sees the rusted hulk of a shuttered factory, a symbol both of the failure of the planned socialist economy and the tragic and enervating effect of that failure on workers. As she enters the structure, she walks in front of workers ineffectually trying to demolish the enormous structure with bars and sticks, and later, an injured man seeking compensation for the loss of his hand in a work-related accident. Unlike the demolition workers, whose ranks Han Sanming joins, and who are actually employed in dismantling the old Fengjie, these men beat away at the massive metal structure with wooden sticks, a Sisyphean effort that highlights their impotence. That the latter scene takes place under the gaze of faded portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao drives home the point that Jia's characters occupy a transitional world of coexisting and contradictory temporalities (figure 20). These images foreshadow the television clips of famous Chinese

⁶⁰ Edward L. Davis, ed. *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 138.

⁶¹ *The Bund*, like the songs of the Taiwanese chanteuse Deng Lijun, was part of a revolutionary wave of foreign and sinophone popular culture that began arriving in mainland China through various legal and illegal channels in the early 1980s. In addition to presenting new forms of nostalgia and sentiment, these works introduced a formerly forbidden type of individuality and subjectivity. This is how Jia describes his own experience of these works: "From this pop culture we learned about new social groups, like triads. Previously we would only sing revolutionary songs. As children, we would usually all begin by learning 'we are the heirs of socialism' (*women shi shehui zhuyi jieban ren* 我們是社會主義接班人), all these songs that were always in the plural, that were collective. But then Teresa Teng sang in the singular: 'The moon stands for my heart' (*yueliang daibiao wode xin* 月亮代表我的心); she was singing about the individual, the self." Sebastian Veg, "Building a Public Consciousness: A Conversation with Jia Zhangke," in *China Perspectives* 1: 59. See also Jason McGrath, "The Independent Cinema of Jia Zhangke: From Postsocialist Realism to a Transnational Aesthetic," in *The Urban Generation*: 97, 112 n.25.

leaders (figures 16-18), each of whom dreamed of or facilitated the dam's construction, that play on the boat that takes Shen Hong away from Fengjie later in the film. Though its media of dissemination have changed, propaganda remains a familiar presence.

This sequence is one of two in which Jia layers images from television sets with disembodied singing voices and shots of the riverscape taken from boats. Here, the sentimental tone and lyrics of Frances Yip's song provide a fatalistic pop philosophy that contrasts ironically with the melancholic and somewhat enigmatic images that play on the television screen immediately following Han Sanming and Mage's conversation, not to mention the shot of the high water mark that appears after the music shifts to extra-diegetic mode. The first few verses of the song run:

Waves rush, waves roll—for ten thousand *li* the river's waters never rest.
Washing away the affairs of this world—churning them together into a single,
pounding tide.
Was it joy or sorrow? from within the waves there's no distinguishing bliss from
misery.
Success or failure? from on the waves one cannot see which it was.

浪濤, 浪流, 萬里濤濤江水永不休。
淘盡了世間事, 混作滔滔一片潮流。
是喜是愁? 浪裡分不清歡笑悲憂。
成功失敗? 浪裡看不出有未有。

The unending flow of the song's river is not only a figure for the passage of time, a metaphor based on the nearly universal clichéd analogy between time linearly conceptualized and water's thrall to gravity, but also for the ineluctability of fate and the impossibility of definitively interpreting past events.⁶² Of course as the dam was being constructed, the Yangzi's power was no longer defined by its eastward flow, but by its steady upward creep, which obliterated as it rose. The mystery of fate and the ambiguity of the past have been replaced with the engineer's timeline and the ubiquitous water marker, a manifestation of the future that one sees best from "on the waves."

This scene shows how the painting-inspired adaptations of multiplanar depth and scrolling breadth function as part of an aesthetic framework on which Jia further layers music, sound, episodes of ideologically suggestive montage, and the juxtaposition of different forms of technology and levels of emotion. The interaction between these representational, communicatory, narrativizing and mediating modes (cell phones, music, television, film), all of which seek to present their own vision of the river, and the characters' experience of the landscape, culminates enigmatically in the arrival of the glowing UFO that first links Han Sanming and Shen Hong.

A closely related instance of this combination of multiplanar depth and scrolling breadth with the special additional of extra-diegetic sound occurs immediately after Shen Hong parts from her husband. The camera cuts from a long take of Shen and her husband Guo Bin after they have agreed to a divorce, to a slowly upward tilting shot of Chinese tourists standing at the prow of a ship as it travels downstream through the Gorges. Gone are the ruins of

⁶² Though we do not hear the lyrics to Han Sanming's ringtone, "May Good People Have Lives of Peace" is an exceedingly nostalgic song that focuses on the passage of the time and the distance of loved ones and the uncanny sensation of continued closeness.

Fengjie—the river now glows jadeite, its untouched banks cloaked in thick vegetation. Here are the Gorges enshrined as national landscape, as on the 10-*yuan* note and in the minds of Chinese and Western tourists alike. As the camera focuses on the river scenery we hear traditional Chinese vocal music, over which a guide's voice, amplified by invisible loudspeakers, recites the Tang poet Li Po's iconic heptasyllabic quatrain "Setting Out at Dawn from Baidi Fort 早發白帝城" (*Zao fa Baidi cheng*):

朝辭白帝彩雲間	At dawn I leave Baidi midst colored clouds
千里江陵一日還	And crossing 1,000 <i>li</i> to Jiangling in a single day return
兩岸猿聲啼不住	On both banks—the sounds of gibbons crying without rest
輕舟已過萬重山	My light skiff has already crossed myriad-fold mountains

As recognizable an artifact of traditional Chinese literary culture as Frances Yip's song is of contemporary Chinese pop culture, Li's poem also provides the perfect segue for the tour guide to describe the dam and reservoir project, which has "today, once again drawn the attention of the world" to the landscape of the Gorges. As the voice starts to describe the dam, the camera cuts to a shipboard television which shows a montage of images of Chinese leaders involved in the history of the dam—Sun Yat-sen, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping—as well as footage of its early construction (figures 16-18). When it states the projected water level, the camera cuts once again, from the television set to Shen Hong's water bottle. Gradually tilting upward it finally settles on her face (behind which we can see a ship full of Caucasian tourists), at which point the disembodied voice is drowned out by abstract, ambient, extra-diegetic music (figure 19).

In this sequence of shots, Li Bo's poem at first seems to enshrine an authentic reaction to a landscape that has been irrevocably changed by the dam and its reservoir. Ironically, in order to "once again draw the attention of the world" to the area, the man-made structures and natural shape of the Gorges must be forever transformed.⁶³ The way in which the poem is layered under, and in dialogue with, the propaganda however, suggests other possibilities: first, that the Tang Dynasty work is no more and no less mediated and historically situated than the television images with which it is paired; and second, that the cultural traditions surrounding the Gorges are subject to cooptation within both the cultural logic of a popular Chinese nationalism and the government's more ideologically focused engineering project. In the first case, the quatrain does not so much engage with the topography of the place as it avails itself of the conventionalized tradition of writing about the Gorges that we saw in the *Wushan gao yuefu* poems in Chapter 2. In the second case, the poem's authenticity and cultural context are negated by its dubious appropriation. Either way, Li Bo's poem serves as an aural and historical layer within the film's multiplanarity, becoming a parallel scrolling figure that cannot be separated from its counterpart, the *Shanghai tan* theme song. We could, of course, also read the entirety of *Still Life* as an echo of the kind of magic that Li claims in his work: just as the Tang poet "cross[es] 1,000 *li* in a single day," so too does Jia cross thousands of years and a

⁶³ In her article on Fei Mu's *Spring in a Small Town* and *Still Life*, Jie Li reads each line in Li Bai's poem as having "subtle cinematic correspondences in *Still Life*." In addition to the structural parallels that she finds between the poem and film, Jie Li also positions Li Bai's "transcendental," unmediated experience and representation against the "ideological landscape" presented by the televisual propaganda. Her reading illuminates part of Jia's "traditional" aesthetic, though I wonder if sets up too rigid a relationship between the poem and the film. See, "Home and Nation Amid the Rubble" (2009).

multitude of forms to create a vision of a place so complexly inscribed and reinscribed that it cannot be captured with any single preexisting representational form.

V. "All that is solid..."

In closing, I return to the UFO that first links Han Sanming and Shen Hong. Though the stances that Han and Shen take up while looking at the UFO bear a clear resemblance to that of Mao as he looks beyond the frame of his many pictures, in this sequence, we see not only that the characters are seeing, but also what they see. This supernatural object and possible illusion defies rational understanding, making light of the idea of progress and socialist utopian teleology implied by Mao's upward gaze. The object of observation has been given material form, but it is a form that reflects the unreal experience of Fengjie on the cusp of inundation. Could it be that all that is solid is finally, fully, melting into air:

Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his real condition of life and his relations with his kind.⁶⁴

These uncannily prescient words from the Communist Manifesto, along with countless Marxist concepts and Maoist slogans, were part of the intellectual milieu with which Jia's generation of Chinese artists grew up. Throughout *Still Life* we can hear an ironic echo of the famously haunting phrase "all that is solid melts into air"—a monument that lifts off into space like a rocket, Peking Opera performers engrossed in handheld computer games, a tightrope walker crossing the gulf between the shells of two buildings, the glowing orb. It would be easy to write off these scenes as nonsensical or 'postmodern' irruptions in an otherwise realist film. Yet, as part of the multiplanar, composite nature of Jia's technique, they help capture both his experience of history and the inherently surreal experience of inhabiting a place as it "melts into air," or disappears under water, as the case may be. Like the 10-*yuan* bank note, the UFO transforms the film screen into a space for the play of visual and material magic that generates a powerfully ethical mode of making films and viewing people in post-Socialist China.

⁶⁴ Karl Marx, "Manifesto of the Communist Party," in Eugene K. Kamenka, ed., *The Portable Karl Marx*. (New York: Penguin, 1983), 207.

Ink in the Wound: The Three Gorges Paintings of Yun-fei Ji

*The state is shattered, but mountains and streams remain,
The city walls are ruined, but grasses and trees grow thick.* 國破山河在，
城荒草木深。

—Opening couplet of Du Fu's "Spring Vista 春望"¹

Introduction

In 2003, the Pratt Manhattan Gallery at the Pratt Institute launched an exhibition of Yun-fei Ji's paintings entitled "The Old One Hundred Names."² The works included in this exhibition depicted a fictional Chinese "village that existed before the Cultural Revolution and disappeared after the Three Gorges Project." As Ji describes it in an interview with the art historian and critic Wu Hung:

There is a long process leading to the fading away of the village. [...] Before that [exhibition], I painted a piece about the Opium War, because I think the Opium War is a very important episode in modern Chinese history. Colonialism awakened a sense of crisis in our ancient culture. The pillars of our past—like Confucius and Laozi—collapsed because we had to confront the power of the West. The suspicion toward the past persisted through the revolutionary years and the Cultural Revolution. Everything from the past was bad and we had to smash it all to pieces. I feel that there is a connection from the Opium War to the Cultural Revolution, all the way to the Three Gorges Project.³

He continues later in the same interview: "I want to connect these subjects with trauma beginning with the traumatic experiences of the Opium War." In Ji's statements, a clear, if

¹ *DSXZ* 320.

² Yun-fei Ji was born in 1963, experienced the tumult of the Cultural Revolution as a child and came of age in the dynamic period following Mao's death in 1976. As a schoolboy, he studied various forms of western painting, and in 1978, at the precocious age of 15, joined the first class to enroll at the Central Academy of Art after instruction was suspended during the Cultural Revolution. By his graduation in 1982, Ji was already intensely engaged with calligraphy and Chinese painting, and by the mid 80s had begun working with the traditional materials—ink, brush, mulberry paper—that now define his artistic practice. In 1986, Ji moved to Arkansas to pursue an MFA at the Fulbright College of Art and Sciences, finally moving to New York City in the late 80s. Though he continued to experiment with various media and styles during his first years in America, by the early 1990s his idiosyncratic version of Chinese painting and his use of traditional media had crystallized in a series of paintings about the Cultural Revolution.

³ From "A Conversation Between Yun-fei Ji and Wu Hung" in *Displacement: The Three Gorges Dam and Contemporary Chinese Art* (Chicago: Smart Museum of Art, 2008), 103.

partial lineage emerges linking the Three Gorges Dam project with a few of the signal events of modern Chinese history. These historical moments are joined across time and space both by a shared claim to "traumatic experience" and by an anti-tradition, self-destructive impulse that developed out of China's first violent and humiliating confrontation with the militarized, colonizing western nation state. In Ji's scheme, the Chinese people's target at each moment is their own past: the varied traditions, icons, ideas and spaces that impede progress, whether towards nationhood, revolution or technological and economic mastery. And yet, time bears no wounds—the real victim (and perpetrators) of these traumas is not the past, but the people themselves, among whom Ji counts himself when he claims: "*we had* to confront the power of the West" and "everything from the past was bad and *we had* to smash it all to pieces" (emphasis added). The history of Ji's village is figured as a process of traumatization and compulsory self-effacement that reaches completion with the Three Gorges Dam.

We never learn the name of this fictional village. In its place, he offers "the old one hundred names," a literal translation of the Chinese *lao bai xing* 老百姓. This phrase refers to the mass of common Chinese people, undistinguished by power, money or learning—the average Joes of China, the "people" of the People's Republic. More often than not, it is the *lao bai xing* who suffer as the victims of the historical traumas that Ji describes. Within the condensed narrative of "The Old One Hundred Names," the dam threatens not a village or a landscape, but these common folk, the *lao bai xing* who occupy the village and the landscape. By replacing a specific place name with a term that suggests the very class of people in whose name the state rules, Ji has begun a process of mapping a human topography that imagines, in the starkest terms possible, the physical, mental and societal effects of the dam project on the people of the Gorges.

The earliest paintings in *The Old One Hundred Names* mark the beginning of Ji's fascination with the Three Gorges dam project and its social consequences. Nearly a decade after this exhibition first opened, he continues to add to an already massive body of work that envisions the complex and shifting relationships between the people of the Gorges, the places that they inhabit (and from which they are displaced) and the traumas of recent Chinese history. Ji pictures these relationships by wedding an aesthetic sensibility and technique adapted from traditional Chinese painting with human-focused techniques of on-the-ground observation and representation that have developed out of the recent explosion of documentary forms in Chinese film and the visual arts. From this particular marriage issues a hellish and chaotic spawn: a vision of the region of the Gorges at the moment of their transformation by the dam and its reservoir as a post-apocalyptic wasteland, constructed out of a violent jumble of conventional 'Chinese' landscape elements (trees, rocks, shrubs), historical figures (especially from the Cultural Revolution) and all manner of flotsam and jetsam, not to mention demonic figures, skeletal scavengers and ghostly shadows. This is a landscape simultaneously documentary and imaginary, contemporary and historical, mundane and fantastic; one that haunts and entrances in equal measure. In contrast to the opening epigraph's description of a world without political order in which nature begins to takeover, Ji depicts a world in which political power has encroached catastrophically on the landscape, leaving it shattered and desolate.

Yet the Three Gorges Dam, ostensibly the source of this chaos (as can be inferred from many of the paintings' titles and inscriptions), is totally absent from Ji's landscapes; it is an object of repression nowhere seen but everywhere felt. With a few exceptions, Ji also eschews the conventional, spatially grand associations of the Three Gorges region—there are no immediately recognizable famous vistas, no towering cliffs, no surging river and no massive reservoir. In the absence of both the region's famous natural and manmade monuments, Ji

constructs his landscapes out of generic natural forms borrowed from Chinese landscape painting and fills them with representations of migrants, historical ghosts and unidentifiable monsters to create a new, claustrophobic topography. This figural-landscape hybrid self-consciously keeps the dam, its political engineers and its association with both the size and might of the Chinese nation hidden from view in order to expose how they consume the landscape and the personal space of its inhabitants, aggrandizing themselves while steadily diminishing the scope of the migrants.

This chapter centers on how Ji imagines and images the landscape of the Three Gorges as a site of traumatic experience: both a raw fissure that opens onto past traumas, especially the Cultural Revolution, and a frame for the physical and psychic consequences of the dam project. I trace not only Ji's conception of traumatic experience, but also how he manifests it in images of temporal, spatial and corporeal chaos.⁴ In particular, I focus on what I call "collapsed time," the temporality of demolition and development, and by extension the temporality of a contemporary China that is defined by rapid change. I am especially interested here in looking across artistic forms in order to theorize the effects of the signs that are commonly used to indicate a future process of demolition and development. These simple visual markers bring the future undeniably into the present while transforming buildings, villages and even whole cities into traces of the past. Not only do they mimic the tortured temporality of trauma as psychological pathology, they also suggest a conceptual framework for adapting the category of trauma to the study of contemporary China. Rather than instantly and unproblematically scaling up from the level of the individual psyche to the collective or national (a common critique of trauma studies), Ji's focus on temporal and spatial collapse allows us to explore how conceptions of the national, regional and global coalesce in the individual's experience and representation of trauma.

Ji's interest in traumatic experience is indeed first and foremost focused on the individual—including, perhaps unsurprisingly, himself. By populating his paintings of displacement and collapse with images of both individual victims of the dam and of the Cultural Revolution, which began just three years after he was born, Ji uses the still raw traumas of the Cultural Revolution to imbue the events surrounding the dam with a traumatic content before their full psychological effect has had a chance register.⁵ The creation of temporal disorder is

⁴ Throughout this chapter I trace Ji's fascination with the experience of trauma (both on an individual and cultural level)—its temporal mechanisms, its distortions and its power. At various points I have found it useful to refer to key works from the voluminous fields of trauma studies and trauma theories to illuminate my reading of Ji. His personal approach to trauma replicates certain aspects of both mainstream trauma theory and what can be best understood as a kind of 'pop-trauma' psychology that has come to pervade popular discourse over the last two decades. My goal, however, is not to read Ji 'through the lens' of trauma, but to explore how his personal conception of trauma shapes his work. Much useful work has been done within Trauma Studies, both to address the nature of traumatic experience and to search for representational methods that do justice to the experiences of victims. For comprehensive reviews of the literature on this subject see especially: Michael S. Roth. *Memory, Trauma, and History: Essays on Living with the Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Ruth Leys. *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Cathy Caruth. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995) and, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Dominick LaCapra. *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

⁵ My analysis assumes that Ji was not only a partial victim of, and primary witness to, the Cultural Revolution, but also a secondary witness to the contemporary events that he depicts. He not only remembers and re-experiences but also imagines and represents new traumas as they happen. Understanding the nature of the secondary witness's empathy for, or identification with the victim has become a central concern of Trauma Studies, both in its capacity as an interpretive tool for judging and describing accounts of trauma and as a methodology for writing trauma on its own terms. Various types of empathy have been described and/or advocated, including Dominic

also an act of transference that allows Ji to use the dam project as an opportunity to work through his personal experience of the Cultural Revolution. More importantly, however, it offers a method of documenting the present that carries the full weight of historical hindsight and critique.⁶

In treating the Gorges as a surface for the projection of his particular viewpoint, Ji taps into a much older tradition of representing the Gorges. This tradition is based on the fundamental paradox of the gorge as topographical feature. Unlike a famous mountain or lake, a gorge is by definition an absence, a negative space that is defined only by its boundaries. Even the walls of the mountains that form the Three Gorges display a monumental blankness, an emptiness that attests to their size and inaccessible verticality. The Gorges are thus an absence that is powerfully present.⁷ For pre-modern writers, such as Du Fu and Fan Chengda (see Chapter One and Two), and contemporary artists, such as Jia Zhangke (see Chapter Three), this quality has made the Three Gorges an ideal venue for making visible and palpable a similarly immanent absence—the past. I continue here my exploration of this aspect of the representational culture of the gorges: not only the ways in which the absence/presence dialectic has inspired artists but also how it has fostered a particularly rich tradition of historical consciousness and social critique in an aesthetic mode. More than any other artist, Ji sustains and expands this tradition at a moment of profound anxiety and uncertainty about its survival.

I. There's More than Enough to Go Around: Sharing Traumas

Yun-fei Ji's 2003 painting, *The East Wind*, from the *Empty City* exhibition (2004; fig. 1), measures a modest 35.5 inches wide by 53.5 inches tall but presents an impressively hectic picture: Red guards (both human and dog-faced) carry a picture of Mao Zedong or bellow through a megaphone as they walk across a scene of wreckage (fig. 3); bird-faced and pig-headed monsters peer out from dark corners and edges (fig. 4); emaciated, half-naked humans, some wearing dunce caps, are crushed beneath collapsed buildings (fig. 5); a figure resembling Liu Shaoqi, a favorite enemy of Mao (and the people) from the early years of the Cultural Revolution, reclines near the bottom of the picture, his emaciated body oddly twisted as he looks directly out at the viewer (fig. 6);⁸ an upside-down horse plummets through space beside

LaCapra's "empathetic unsettlement," Kaja Silverman's "heteropathic identification" and Jill Bennett's "empathic vision." Though Ji's dedication to depicting the victims of the dam project is ample evidence of an empathic connection of some sort, his greatest achievement is not an artist-subject bond, but an aesthetic mode that fosters an affective bond and solidarity between historically separate events and groups of suffering subjects. See: LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*; Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); Kaja Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

⁶ Though the Cultural Revolution has less of a presence in Ji's recent Three Gorges paintings, its prominence in his early work is part of a continuing dedication to showing the importance of historical reflection. Also, though Ji links the Cultural Revolution and the dam project to the Opium Wars, the latter events are nearly totally absent from his Three Gorges paintings.

⁷ Of course, according to the early mythology that describes the origins of the Gorges, they are also a presence transformed into absence. When faced with massive floods, Yu the Great was said to have bored through the solid rock of the mountains, creating an opening that allowed the water to flow freely to the sea. See Introduction and Chapter 1.

⁸ I owe this possible identification to Tan Lin, who also suggests that one of the men just above Liu resembles Deng Xiaoping, another victim of Cultural Revolution purges and the leader of the People's Republic leading up to

a woman's severed head (fig. 7). All of these figures inhabit a narrow, gorge-like space, its original shape suggested by the upper edges of the painting, where detritus gives way to towering cliffs between which stretches a faint line of water. Situated below the water level, it seems that the figures in this painting are simultaneously victims of the dam, of the Cultural Revolution and of a Bosch-esque hell peopled by indistinct ghosts and goblins.

Like geological strata that have been subducted, thrust up or folded into one another, the roughly horizontal fields of *The East Wind* bear the mark of violent forces that seem to function within an allegory of the abuse of power. After all, Mao Zedong, whose image hovers over the chaos, waxed poetic on the possibility of the dam and was the primary architect of the Cultural Revolution. Yet why exactly would Ji so dramatically foreground the Cultural Revolution and its traumatic legacy in a painting that appears to depict the aftermath of a catastrophic flood?⁹ What exactly is the connection between the Cultural Revolution and its victims and those affected by the dam project? Are we meant to assume that Liu Shaoqi and the anonymous skeletal figures are the same kind of victim or that they are simply victims of a similar type of abuse of power? Should we identify the source of destruction with the water at the upper edge of the painting, or with the eponymous "east wind?" Though the bulk of the image lies below the waterline, the dog-faced Red Guard who stands his ground at the very center of the image, barking through a megaphone, does seem to generate a great gust of wind that lays waste to the landscape. Has he returned as a semi-human specter to wreak havoc as he once did at Mao's behest during the Cultural Revolution?¹⁰

The precise cause of all this chaos is purposely ambiguous. What is clear, is that Ji has chosen to focus on a moment before the dam and reservoir have fully swallowed up the Gorges—when the ruins of the contemporary landscape and the ghosts of the Cultural Revolution that it contains are briefly visible, before being hidden beneath the opaque surface of the reservoir. Paradoxically, in Ji's ink and water-based artistic practice, water is both an object and a medium of representation that strives against this opacity, making transparent what is otherwise hidden or secret. Joining forces with wind in *The East Wind*, water exposes a cross section of the landscape, revealing a befuddling mess, the wreckage of history rather than its narrative. The forces of destruction allow us to see the landscape for what it has become: a depository, or quite literally, a dump. The lower levels of the painting are so densely compressed with the ruins of present disasters and previous historical dramas, interspersed between trees and rocks, that there seems to be little hope of escape for the human and semi-human figures that fill the image. Is this horizontal jumble and its combination of the Cultural Revolution and the Three Gorges just a symbol of the violent and irrational accretion of history when unyoked from the linearity of Marxist teleology? Or can we trace a hidden logic that connects the Cultural Revolution and the dam project?

the official decision to construct the dam. See: "Yun-fei Ji and the Unchanging Structures of History" in *Yun-fei Ji: The Empty City* (St. Louis: Contemporary Art Museum of St. Louis, 2004), 25.

⁹ Ji's earliest Three Gorges related paintings were produced long before he first traveled to the region that was slated to be flooded. These paintings are typified by the catastrophic, flooded landscapes of *A Monk's Retreat*, *The Flooding of Ba Don* and *The Empty City—East Wind*. In contrast, the works that Ji produced after personally visiting the Three Gorges during the construction of the dam focus closely on the human toll of the project. The Three Gorges Migration Scroll, which I discuss in the following section, continues this documentary approach, depicting human figures and their assorted belongings instead of the wreckage of a massive inundation.

¹⁰ As Gregory Volk notes in his discussion of this painting, wind has its own set of culturally important connotations: "In Chinese history wind is a metaphor for the Emperor and all his whims and decisions, as well as being a metaphor for revolutionary force. When one 'listens to the wind', one attempts to divine where policy might be headed and what its effects might be." See: "The Empty City" in *Yun-fei Ji: The Empty City*, 57.

Particularly in his earliest Three Gorges works (those collected in the 2003 exhibition, *The Old One Hundred Names* and the 2004 exhibition, *The Empty City*), Ji embraces the Cultural Revolution as a widely acknowledged and still potent trauma that he can use to imbue the events surrounding the dam with traumatic content before their full social and psychological effect has had a chance register. According to both Freudian approaches to trauma as well as many contemporary definitions of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), traumatic experience is predicated on a temporal separation between the traumatic event and its psychological manifestations—it does not simply appear, it requires a period of latency (and amnesia or disassociation) after which it returns to haunt the victim. For Ji, however, the construction of the dam and the dislocation of the residents of the Gorges are immediately obvious as traumatic events, despite not having reached a stage of belatedness. The fully formed trauma of the Cultural Revolution offers Ji a solution to the difficulties of deeming traumatic an event that is still unfolding, that has had no opportunity to return.¹¹ A method of superimposing this event (the dam project and the displacements that it caused) and what he imagines its eventual psychological effects will be (the haunting return of the events as trauma) is necessary for Ji because he is keen both to document the immediate implications of the dam project and to suggest how it might affect the people that it has displaced in a way analogous to earlier, more familiar traumatic events.

Trauma is, of course, by no means a monolithic concept. Its precise definition, both as a diagnostic term and as an interpretive concept, remains a topic of debate, all the more as it has been absorbed by pop-psychology in print, film and the Internet. Described by various theorists as a "disorder of memory,"¹² a "pathology of history," "an unfinished relationship with the past" and a kind of "belated experience," trauma find its most universally recognizable expression in flashbacks, those "hauntingly possessive ghosts" that are supposed to bring the traumatic event vividly and painfully back to life in the present.¹³ Beginning in 1980, the psychiatric field has also sought to produce an acceptable clinical definition of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).¹⁴ This is how Cathy Caruth summarizes "most descriptions" of this condition:

(in PTSD) there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event.¹⁵

This and the above descriptions characterize the effects of trauma but provide no insights into the precise psychological mechanisms by which it makes itself felt. Caruth and her peers are certainly interested in those mechanisms, both from Freudian and neurobiological perspectives,

¹¹ The Cultural Revolution has long been recognized as one of the primary traumatic events of modern Chinese history, one that colors the work of many artists and writers, at least up until the generation born in the 1970s. For examples of the copious literature on trauma in modern China, see: Ban Wang, *Illuminations from the Past: Trauma, Memory, and History in Modern China* (Stanford: Stanford U. Press, 2004); Michael Berry, *A History of Pain: Trauma in Modern Chinese Literature and Film* (New York, NY: Columbia U. Press, 2008); Xiaobing Tang, *Chinese Modern: The Heroic and the Quotidian* (Durham N.C.: Duke U. Press, 2000), especially Chapter 1; and, although it mostly avoids explicitly dealing with trauma and trauma studies, David Der-wei Wang's *The Monster that is History: History, Violence, and Fictional Writing in Twentieth-Century China* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 2004).

¹² Both Richard McNally (*Remembering Trauma* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2003), 9) and Ruth Leys (*Trauma: A Genealogy*, 2) use this phrase.

¹³ See respectively: Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience" in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, 5; Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History*, 82; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 7; and Dominic Lacapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xi.

¹⁴ See McNally, *Remembering Trauma*, 8-13 and Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," 3-4.

¹⁵ Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," 4.

but their approaches consistently foreground the temporal (and by extension historical) qualities of trauma.¹⁶ As a result, what emerges from much of this humanistic literature is an overwhelming emphasis on the belatedness of trauma, its 'post-ness.'

In the context of psycho-sexual development, Freud describes this effect as *Nachträglichkeit*, a term that literally means 'afterwardsness,' though it is commonly translated as "deferred action." *Nachträglichkeit* locates trauma in neither the originary event nor in its return, but in the "dialectic between (the) two events, neither of which was intrinsically traumatic, and a temporal delay or latency through which the past was available only by a deferred act of understanding and interpretation."¹⁷ For both Caruth and Freud, belatedness is constitutive of trauma, which becomes "fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time."¹⁸ Taken in isolation, we could easily explain the appearance of figures from the Cultural Revolution in Ji's Three Gorges paintings as belated representatives of a past trauma appearing as if from "another place and in another time." From this perspective, it is only through their departure from the event and its temporal/spatial sites that they are now, finally, able to signify. In the end however, though the Freudian temporal model of trauma provides one possible approach to the Red Guards and dunce-capped victims of Ji's images, it tells us little about the contemporary, traumatic events that Ji depicts almost as they unfold. Is it possible to locate trauma not in a period of latency or return, but in the event itself, which has long been seen as solely an object of dissociation, repression and forgetting?

The idea that traumatic experience is an after-effect, the symptom of a disease that can be traced to a specific psychic wound in the past, has been fundamental to psychiatry since the origins of trauma (before Freud) as a clinical diagnosis in 19th century England and France.¹⁹ That it remains central to modern psychology and theory confirms the etiology of the disease but threatens to obscure the ways in which trauma has infused modern consciousness. Given the brutal legacy of the 20th century, not only are we likely to think of all of recent history as traumatic (however much of a cliché this has become),²⁰ we have also entered an era in which technology delivers instantaneous (and constant) images of trauma. More and more, it seems that our traumas are neither forgotten nor resurrected through *ex post facto* testimony or historiographical retrieval,²¹ but captured digitally, and simultaneously and obsessively re-

¹⁶ For a reading of both Freud's concept of *Nachträglichkeit* and Caruth's manipulation of it, see Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, 20-21 and 270-271 respectively.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁸ Caruth, "Trauma and Experience," 8.

¹⁹ See especially Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History*, Chapters 1-3 and Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Chapters 2 and 3.

²⁰ The retrospective pull of trauma has long been offered up as a metaphor for the work of writing history and vice versa: to try to make sense of the brutal history of the 20th century is to be drawn ineluctably into narratives of both personal and collective trauma. Whereas American and European historians and trauma scholars gravitate towards a handful of familiar limit events—the First and Second World Wars, the Holocaust, the bombing of Nagasaki and Hiroshima, the Vietnam War, the Armenian, Bosnian and Rwandan Genocides—those writing about China are far more likely to identify the Japanese invasion and partial occupation of China that preceded and coincided with the Second World War, the civil war that followed it, the Great Leap Forward or the Cultural Revolution as the founding traumas of communist China. As the proliferation of accounts about each of these events attests, "trauma appears to demand inclusion in any narrative of the development of the present yet makes any narrative seem painfully inadequate" (Roth, *Memory, Trauma, and History*, 82). The trauma will return to demand its right to a narrative account that will inevitably fail, thus requiring another attempt, and so on, *ad infinitum*.

²¹ Shoshana Felman notes the frequency with which our time has been characterized as "an era of testimony" in which testimony serves as a "discursive practice" that carefully and intentionally recalls traumatic events and experiences. Testimony becomes a right, or indeed a duty of the survivor, whose recollections are both cathartic and cautionary. ("Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," 17.) As Michael Roth writes, "testimony

broadcast from their inception. One need only think briefly of the televised destruction of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001—painful images and events that have never had the chance to return because they never stopped happening. This example suggests at least a partial shift from an age of latency and return to an age of documentation in which we are all too familiar with trauma and its manifestations, and seek to capture them as they happen. The flashback is instantaneous and can be found on Youtube. For Ji, who lived in Brooklyn until recently, the events surrounding the Three Gorges were immediately accessible from afar through technology and immediately identifiable as traumatic because trauma is already so familiar to him—it is, so to speak, already in the air, or in this case, the water.

The presence of so many traces of the Cultural Revolution in Ji's work is a reminder that for him, that particular trauma continues to adhere tenaciously to the soil and circulate freely through the air and water of his work.²² Though the dam and reservoir ultimately obscured the physical traces of this complex past (as in Ji's unnamed and disappearing village) their construction first precipitated a violent exposure and excavation (as in the *East Wind*), the simultaneous creation of a new wound and the re-opening of a familiar, older one. For Ji, these openings or wounds allow for the free exchange of traumatic affect across time and space, insuring that the events surrounding the dam project are recognized as being traumatic from the outset. Traces of this exchange appear throughout Ji's oeuvre, though it is perhaps most clearly delineated in the form of a ruined automobile that appears in at least three separate paintings from Ji's first two major exhibitions. This simple object sheds light not only on the formal, structural mechanisms that Ji uses to evoke traumatic experience, but also on his methods for connecting individual Three Gorges paintings as traumatic.

On the left-hand side of *The East Wind*, about midway down, is a crumpled car (fig. 8), ghostly white, outlined in black. An almost identical auto appears in two paintings from *The One Hundred Names* exhibition, *A Monk's Retreat* (2002) (figs. 9 and 10) and *The Flooding of Ba Don* (2002) (figs. 11 and 12).²³ Each of these images presents a dense scene of destruction: in *A Monk's Retreat* and *The Flood of Ba Don*, wild floods wreak havoc, while in *The East Wind*, it is unclear if water or wind (or some combination of the two) is the culprit. Ji repeatedly evokes this catastrophic destruction despite the fact that the flooding of the area was a gradual process

is given both to address a debt to the past, to witness the past for the purposes of the present, and for the therapeutic purposes for the person who gives the testimony." *Memory, Trauma, and History*, 95. Like Caruth's primary definition of trauma, Felman's model of testimony relies on a strict separation of event and recurrence.

²² One could of course argue that the traumas of the Cultural Revolution—omnipresent in Chinese art and literature from the 1980s and 1990s, and still prominent today—have been over-exposed within all fields of Chinese cultural production. One need only think about the critical and commercial success of artists such as Wang Guangyi, who drew extensively on the imagery and lore of the Cultural Revolution beginning in the late '80s. His 1988 oil painting, *Mao Zedong no. 1*, presents a familiar official portrait of the chairman in black in white, over which a red grid has been laid, with letter A's in the upper left and lower right corners and O's in the upper right and lower left. Wu Hung sees this mapping of Mao as an attempt to demystify him, bringing to the fore the actual grids used during the Cultural Revolution to accurately depict Mao in an officially sanctioned way, "thereby 'rationalizing' the image's historicity and artificiality." Wang's thoughtful early appropriations gave birth to what is usually termed "Political Pop," a satirical, critical style whose political punch gradually weakened through its commercial success. It is safe to say that for many of those outside of China who have passively followed contemporary art there, the Cultural Revolution-inspired image à la Wang is precisely what comes to mind when they think of recent Chinese art, though the situation has always been far more complex. See Wu Hung, *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: U. of Chicago, 2005), 51. In the case of Ji's work, however, I argue that the appearance of the Cultural Revolution is not a case of recycling but part of a vision of history in which the traumas of the Cultural Revolution are as relevant now as they ever were, if not more so, given the destructive nature of the Three Gorges dam project.

²³ "Ba Don" seems to be a transliteration of 巴東 *badong*, or, Eastern Dong, both an historical name for the area that includes the gorges and the name of a modern city in the eastern stretches of the Three Gorges.

that required the methodical disassembly of infrastructure and staggered relocation of residents (as seen in varied forms in the films *Still Life*, *In Expectation*, *Up The Yangze*, *Bing Ai*, and *Before The Flood*). The automobile's stubborn reappearance links each painting to the same destructive flood, the same ruined landscape. Located directly opposite the dog-faced Red Guard's megaphone in *East Wind*, the body of the car also bears the same traces of violence that mark the human figures in the painting, who are crushed beneath buildings, deformed by hunger and torn to pieces. Through its repetition, however, this displaced, ruined object becomes a symbol of violence and trauma, a "hauntingly possessive ghost" that marks each work as an expression of traumatic anxiety.²⁴

As a trans-oeuvre insignia of trauma that travels from painting to painting, the car appears and reappears to haunt the viewer, but it finds a home in Ji's work not simply through a psychological metaphor, but through the forces of destruction unleashed by the dam. Destruction and its resultant chaos create a traumatic opening that allows for the car, atop the crest of a wave, to move effortlessly between works. Whether a gash in the earth, a highway paved with rubble or a jagged hole torn through the wall of a house, the traumatic opening is also the mechanism that connects contemporary and historical events. The red guards that appear in many of Ji's early paintings are thus companions of the auto, symbols of a temporal collapse (figured by spatial collapse) that allows for the free circulation of traumatic elements within Ji's landscapes.

David L. Eng and David Kazanjian's work on how loss and melancholy function as productive temporal disturbances suggests a possible approach for understanding how these traumatic pathways come into existence.²⁵ Quoting Freud and invoking Benjamin in his "Theses on the Philosophy of History," they write: "by engaging in 'countless separate struggles' with loss, melancholia might be said to constitute, as Benjamin would describe it, an ongoing and open relationship with the past—bringing its ghosts and specters, its flaring and fleeting images, into the present."²⁶ Rather than focusing on what is irretrievably lost, the two scholars emphasize how the productive forces of melancholy retrieve and re-empower the "ghosts and specters" of the past within new "sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future."²⁷ The irony of Ji's project is that his site of "memory and history" sits on unstable ground—the human-occupied stretches of The Three Gorges on which Ji's focuses can accommodate the past only in the fleeting moments before they disappear beneath the waves. This ephemerality is precisely what draws our attention, forcing us to bear witness to the destruction of the landscape as a site of historical negotiation and a staging ground for visions of the future.

Hovering between presence and absence, the past and the future, the Gorges and its inhabitants are simultaneously the objects of loss and their melancholic specters. The new Three Gorges site that is generated by the productive melancholy of loss and the more violent force of trauma, disappears almost as soon as it forms. Thus, Ji envisions the Gorges not as a

²⁴ LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, xi.

²⁵ For Eng and Kazanjian, loss is "is a placeholder of sorts," a catchall that includes "both individual and collective encounters with twentieth-century historical traumas and legacies of, among others, revolution, war, genocide, slavery, decolonization, exile, migration, reunification, globalization, and AIDS." *Loss: The Politics of Mourning* (Berkeley: UC Berkeley Press, 2003), 2. To a certain extent, loss functions in their introduction to the collected essays in *Loss* as a productive and flexible substitute to the pathology inflected discourses of trauma.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Ibid.* In the specific context of modern Chinese history, Ban Wang writes: "A historical consciousness that critiques the engraved historical narrative via memory will keep alive unfinished possibilities and unfulfilled dreams anticipating difference lines of horizon—memories of the future." Wang, *Illuminations from the Past* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 3.

famous, ancient landscape, but as a mess of human-rubble, a convoluted, blurry space with indeterminate horizons, in which traces of the Cultural Revolution are jumbled with vulnerable and violated human bodies and ghostly, animal-human creatures.²⁸ To make sense of the relationship between the past and the present in a painting such as *The East Wind*, one begins by sifting through the unstable trash heaps that mark the Gorges as a demolition/construction site. In a socialist nation reconstituted as the pumping heart of global capital, the trash heap becomes the site for "memory and history" *par excellence*. In the context of such an ephemeral structure, Ji's focus on the Three Gorges takes on an urgency that encompasses both the immediate victims of the dam and the status of history in a time and place bent on transformation.

II. Collecting From History

The Empty City–East Wind is a prime example of how Ji uses spatial chaos to forge connections between the traumas of the Cultural Revolution and those of the Three Gorges Dam project. As perhaps the most radically apocalyptic expression of the Three Gorges theme, however, this painting does not clearly display what critics identify as the fundamental trait of Ji's artistic practice: his synthesis of traditional Chinese landscape painting styles, techniques and media.²⁹ This style is Ji's most consistent formal method for making connections between distant historical periods. By drawing on a variety of Chinese painting styles without imitating any single school or approach, Ji creates a hybrid style that marshals the aesthetic past in order to document the present. This is not simply a matter of formal resemblance, for Ji uses the tradition to create meaning: in particular, his evocation of the Northern Song (960–1127) monumental landscape style, taps into a highly developed allegorical system in which the structure of the landscape can represent the ideal ethical and political structures of the nation and its leadership. In his most recently exhibited paintings on the Three Gorges, from 2010, Ji has enhanced this critical capacity by framing his paintings with text that both closely mimics traditional painting formats and more explicitly voices his understanding of the dam and its place in the history of the Three Gorges. Traditional style both helps him to establish traumatic affinities between the past and the present, and also provides him with a readymade language of critique.

²⁸ Eng and Kazanjian explain this artistic tendency towards indeterminacy by arguing that the ego itself is the product of "the residues of its accumulated losses," that it emerges from melancholy and the preservation of "abandoned object-cathexes." Individual melancholic objects never exist in isolation because the ego is actually composed of the undifferentiated and accumulated traces of such objects. Hence, "the ability of the melancholic object to express multiple losses at once speaks to its flexibility as a signifier, endowing it with not only a multifaceted but also a certain palimpsest-like quality" (emphasis mine) (4–53). The Red Guards and the crumpled autos of "The Empty City–East Wind" attest to this palimpsest quality of the traumatic-melancholic object. This model of reconciling that which is lost and that which remains with the new spaces and multiple objects produced by the imaginative faculties unleashed by melancholy aptly conveys what Yun-fei Ji's project seeks to achieve.

²⁹ Tan Lin's analysis of Ji's hybrid style is perhaps the most sophisticated available, though he tends to take a negative approach: "Ji's handling of ink, reminiscent of the Chinese dynastic masters, is partly parodic since the subject of Ji's artisanal techniques is the failed revolutionary ideologies of China's recent past as they inundated—much like Ji's inks—the Chinese landscape, disrupted China's semi-rural geography, and eradicated a way of life. Looking at Ji's paintings is like looking at those distant landscapes that for centuries have preoccupied the meditative masters of Chinese painting but that now seem to be leached of their colors in a kind of visual and moral contamination and a dissipation of the vital *ch'i*." See "The Unchanging Structures of History," in *Yun-fei Ji: The Empty City*, 26–29.

In an interview with Melissa Chiu, the artist describes his preparatory process in historical terms:

My method can be categorized as a process of collecting. Shi Tao, a seventeenth-century painter, used a seal in his paintings that says "searching a thousand strange cliffs to make a sketch." This describes a method of collecting forms from nature. You might also say that I do the same, but in relation to history.³⁰

This comparison provides some insight into both Ji's conceptual process and into aspects of his appropriation of traditional landscape styles. If natural forms provided Shi Tao with the raw material for composing his own landscapes, then history, both as subject matter and aesthetic form, provide one set of building blocks for Ji's historical landscapes. Collecting from history, however, can only be a starting metaphor; the real creative work comes in the selecting and combining of what Ji finds in history, and in the relationship that develops between the historical and the contemporary content of his art. According to Ji, contemporary components enter the picture and join the historical through a related "process of recording, almost a documentary process" based on his own observations within the region of the Three Gorges.³¹ Ji thus combines two types of collecting: one basically historical and curatorial and the other contemporary and quasi-ethnographic. Together they form a multi-temporal style that transforms the landscape into a spatial structure of overlapping and communicating histories.

In some cases, this spatial structure bears a striking resemblance to Chinese landscape painting traditions, perhaps most famously (and frequently noted), monumental Song dynasty landscapes by such masters as Li Cheng (919-967) or Xia Gui (fl. ca. 1200-1240). Rather than turning directly to the landscape for inspiration, as he describes Shi Tao doing, Ji instead turns to these earlier models for his building blocks, creating composite landscapes that communicate very little about the actual appearance of the Gorges, but a great deal about both Ji's aesthetic influences and the real and imagined effects of the dam. Of course, on close inspection it proves impossible to insert Ji into any one school or lineage of traditional Chinese painting. This becomes clear from a quick survey of the artists that critics have identified as Ji's influences: Guanxiu 貫休 (832-912), Li Cheng 李成 (919-967), Li Tang 李唐 (ca. 1050-after 1130), Xia Gui 夏圭, Fan Kuan 范寬 (active ca. 1023-1031), Zhao Mengfu 趙孟頫 (1254-1322), Huang Gongwang 黃公望 (1269-1354), Sheng Mao 盛懋 (active 1320-1360), Luo Ping 羅聘 (1733-1799), Hieronymus Bosch (c.1450-1516), Francisco Goya (1746-1828), Otto Dix (1891-1969) and Georg Grosz (1893-1959), among others.³²

Though the results of Ji's reworking of these varied traditions are often idiosyncratic, his actions are very much in line with the conventions of Chinese painting. Painters often followed earlier models to depict landscapes they had never visited in order to capture poetic associations or vaguely philosophical ideas. As Valérie Malenfer Ortiz has shown in her study of Southern Song painting, the most famous landscape themes, such as the one that developed around the Xiao-Xiang region of modern Hunan, often bear little identifiable relationship to

³⁰ See: Melissa Chiu's interview with the artist, "Ghosts, Three Gorges, and Ink: An Interview with Yun-fei Ji", in Yun-fei Ji, and Shannon Fitzgerald, *Yun-Fei Ji: The Empty City*, 78-90.

³¹ Chiu, "Interview," 80.

³² What strikes me as strange is that Ji's debt to Republican era artists, including Xu Beihong (1859-1953) and Jiang Zhaohe (1904-1986), has gone unremarked. Jiang's very long (78.5 x 1063 inches) handscroll, *Refugees* (1943), which depicts the victims of the Japanese invasion, bears a particularly strong affinity to Ji's *Three Gorges Migration* scroll.

actual places and landmarks.³³ In most orthodox literati writing on painting, an artist's ability to achieve mimetic specificity was always considered secondary to their capacity for capturing the essence of a place, thing or theme. By participating in this particular tradition of essences and drawing on so wide an aesthetic palette, Ji forges an evocative but ultimately indeterminate style, one that suggests the presence of a multitude of influences without privileging any single forerunner. This style, established long before he created the paintings under discussion here, bears an unmistakable affinity with *The Three Gorges* themselves—both are defined by an indeterminacy or absence that is powerfully evocative. Just as this quality inspired earlier artists to use the Gorges to conjure the invisible and the forgotten, the evocative indeterminacy of Ji's paintings defers attention away from the specificity of the Three Gorges onto not only the complex interplay between the past and the present, but also the experiences of those dispossessed and disembodied by the dam.

At just under ten feet (118.5 X 56.15 inches) tall, the monumental *Below the 143 Meter Watermark* (fig. 13) exemplifies Ji's approach to tradition. A densely composed depiction of mountains and rivers, this image echoes the format of traditional hanging scroll landscapes of the Northern Song but exaggerates their scale and structure, creating a vertiginously vertical and oppressively claustrophobic painting.³⁴ *Below the 143 Meter Watermark* gives one the sensation of being submerged or buried beneath layers of mountains and/or fathoms of water, an effect achieved in part through dramatic foreshortening: the landscape recedes sharply into the distance from the bottom edge and foreground of the painting. The majority of the image is given over to a dense patchwork of trees, hills, waterways and structures in various states of abandon. All of this culminates in a massive, club-like peak that stands just left of center, dominating the upper quarter of the image, and, in the far distance, a handful of similarly shaped mountains. Presumably all of the abandoned, decrepit structures that fill the massive painting below this great peak lie below the 143-meter watermark and will be inundated. Although, as Francine Prose notes, the painting "appears from a distance to resemble a monumental classical scroll that draws on the tradition and symbolism of Confucian idiom," any attempt to 'read' the work according to such logic fails.³⁵

A traditional monumental mountain-scape from a 10th century master, such as Li Cheng, or a Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) synthesist, such as Wang Hui (1632-1717), would have relied on *qimo* 氣脈 (energy/breath arteries/paths), or *shanmo* 山脈 (mountain arteries) in order to structure their paintings according to a complex hierarchical system. These pathways allow for the flow of both energy and vision through the painting, generally beginning near the bottom and snaking their way upwards to the peaks at the top (the *long* 龍, or dragon, is often used to embody this pattern), which were conventionally associated with the seat of power, the emperor. As Jonathan Hay notes, the sovereign peak represented both the pinnacle of a hierarchical pattern and the regulating agent of that pattern.³⁶ This flow also allowed for entry,

³³ Valérie Malenfer Ortiz, *Dreaming the Southern Song Landscape: The Power of Illusion in Chinese Painting* (Boston: Brill, 1999).

³⁴ It is almost exactly double the height of Xia Gui's already enormous *Travelers Amid Streams and Mountains* (61.14 x 29.29 inches)

³⁵ See: "Water Colored: Demons and Detritus in Yun-fei Ji's Restive Landscape," in Jessica Lin Cox, Christopher Lawson and Leo Xu, eds. *Mistaking Each Other for Ghosts* (New York: James Cohen Gallery, 2010), 10.

³⁶ Discussing Huang Gongwang's famous *Dwelling in the Fuchun Mountains*, Hay writes: "The landscape thereby embodies a powerfully hierarchic image of pattern mapped onto practice." Hay expands on this idea through reference to the Song philosophical interest in *ti* 體, body/embodiment, and *yong* 用, use, and through his own exploration of the relationship between *li* 理 and *fa* 法. See, Jonathan Hay, "Values and History in Chinese Painting, II: The Hierarchic Evolution of Structure," RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics, No. 7/8 (Spring -

a route for the imaginative projection of the viewer *into* the painting, where he could travel at ease through various landscapes in various styles.³⁷

If we look very closely at Ji's painting, we can discern what looks like a similar zigzag pattern and an accompanying flow. Beginning at the bottom left-hand corner it moves diagonally to a small river midway up on the right and then continues diagonally upwards in the other direction before reaching another small empty space below and to the left of the uppermost peak. Though it is faint and occasionally occluded, Ji creates this pattern primarily through the application of darker washes and denser strokes in the triangular midsection (with the base of the triangle along the painting's left edge). The path *is* there, but does it allow for the flow of energy? Does the artery pump? The title gives a hint: *Below the 143 Meter Watermark* reminds us that the focus of the painting lies not among the lofty peaks or empty space at the top of the painting typically associated with the ruler as manifestation and source of cosmic order, but below, among the densely packed detritus that fills the landscape.³⁸ Rather than creating a sense of perspectival depth or movement, the barely perceptible *qimo* serves to intensify vertical depth. The flat, compacted quality of the image creates a sensation that this landscape is almost subterranean (or, submerged, as is now the case), pressed beneath the weight of the mountains and the sky.

In addition to its traumatic implications (more on this below), *Below the 143-Meter Watermark's* sense of flatness and submersion is at least partially comprehensible in relation to the disappointed expectations that come with what appears, at least at first, to be a classical model. These disappointed expectations function as a caution against applying traditional modes of visual analysis uncritically. For example, it would be unnecessary to claim that the structural blockage of the pattern in the painting signaled an allegory of misgovernment, or in other words, of the failure to properly manage the flow. In *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, Ji mimics but ultimately reverses the hierarchical signifying capacity of Northern Song monumental landscape painting in order to privilege the victims of trauma, rather than the perpetrators. In other words, the painting is not a call for those behind the dam to repent, it is a cry of sympathy for those whose homes and villages lay beneath the 143 watermark. This type of transformation is part of what makes Ji's work fundamentally humanitarian, rather than merely dissident or political. Ji achieves a similar effect in his more recent *Three Gorges Migration Scroll* 三峽庫區移民圖 (literally, the *Three Gorges Reservoir Zone Migrants Scroll*; *Migrants Scroll* hereafter) (fig. 2), which reproduces in painstaking detail the material and formal characteristics of the Chinese painting handscroll. Instead of an identifiable landscape, however, Ji fills this image with well-defined groups of migrants, constructing a panoramic human topography that confronts the rising waters of the reservoir. The traditional form is used as a vehicle for documentation and as a medium for what Ji calls an historical "record."

Landscape paintings in the handscroll format are often structured according to a panoramic temporality in which the gradual movement from one end of the painting to the other indicates passage through space and time. Because the viewer has control over the speed of this journey and can linger wherever he or she chooses, however, the physical medium also

Autumn, 1984), 112.

³⁷ For more on the tradition of "entering" and "journeying" through paintings, see James Cahill's *The Lyric Journey: Poetic Painting in China and Japan* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

³⁸ I agree here with Wu Hung's assessment and critique of the tendency among critics to link Ji's hanging scrolls with the Northern Song monumental landscape tradition: "If the Northern Song images manifest a set of visual logic devised to glorify great mountains, Yun-fei Ji twists and distorts such logic, since all landscape elements in these works—hills, gorges, trees, rocks, and mists—belong to a universe that seems to have been pollarded by a tempest. It is a broken-down utopia." Wu Hung, Jason McGrath, and Stephanie Smith, *Displacement*, 22.

encourages a less teleological movement, an ongoing dialogue between unfurling and furling. The *Migrant Scroll* relies on both types of movement, but especially on the latter. By using the building blocks of landscape—earth, rocks, trees, shrubs, water—to structure the image into five discrete pictorial cells, Ji forces us to pull back and linger repeatedly, even as we gradually move towards the painting's end.³⁹ What we discover within each of these landscape cells are human and semi-human figures whose bodies are positioned so as to further restrain our linear movement through the painting.

In the first field there are eleven human figures and one hairy wild board standing on its hind legs. All around them are miscellaneous objects—chairs, tables, a baby carriage, baskets, a bicycle, a laden tractor, a handcart, a large wooden basin and bundles fashioned from gaily colored cloth that echoes the similarly patterned clothing of the women throughout the image. In the second group there are seven figures, six of whom lie scattered in various states of repose around a mass of objects similar to those in the first field. The lone standing figure, an old man, looks left in the direction in which the handscroll is traditionally viewed. The posture and position of this man mirror those of a woman in the first group. Together, their focused gazes and somewhat anxious expressions force us incrementally leftwards even as the scattered arrangement and energies of the other figures hold us back temporarily.

The third group contains eight figures—six women and two strange fish-headed men wearing suits and ties. The women in this group have perhaps the most carefully depicted facial expressions in the whole print. With eyes closed or gazes deflected in every direction, except towards the viewer, they appear fatigued and resigned to their fate. The attention to detail in the faces of these women seems to lend them an impressive affective depth and individuality. Near the left edge of the group a woman wearing a brown shirt decorated with a pattern of red flowers bows her head and cranes her neck as she looks towards the next group and the water that lies beyond them. Yet the flood is not the only threat here: the right-most woman, her face creased with worry, is separated from the rest of the group by the disturbing fish-men. With gaping mouths and tiny, beady eyes, they stand facing one another, their long, feeler-like tongues extended hungrily. This image of rapaciousness is reinforced by their more formal clothing, which marks them as members of a wealthier class, possibly businessmen, possibly cadres (possibly both), but definitely corrupt and greedy. No wonder the women look away.

In the final land-based group there are eight figures in two rough groups of four. The first four are old and crowded against the landscape elements that separate this and the previous field. The final four, however, are heavily laden with large bags and look as though moving purposefully towards the left. These four men are immediately recognizable to anyone familiar with contemporary China—they are the young men who for the last few decades have left their rural homes to flood the industrial and urban centers of China. Despite the fact that they seem to be carrying their own possessions here, they are no longer residents, neighbors or friends, but migrants and laborers. The dam propels them forward, into an economy where their only assets are their bodies. Their own destination, however, is a mystery: at the far left of the painting the land ends, giving way to an open expanse of water on which a final group of five public security officers float in a pontoon boat, each of them staring directly out towards the viewer. At the end, there is no land, only a watery surface that serves as the medium of state power. If the scattered, immobile figures in the first three groups worked against the

³⁹ Wu Hung reads Ji's use of landscape elements as an example of his larger interest in displacement: "The displacement of Ji's landscape images can thus be understood both metaphorically and stylistically. The shredded hills and fields allegorize the region's social reality, in which villages and towns are torn to pieces before their disappearance, while these forms result from Ji's dismantling of a preexisting art representation, a deconstruction that gives birth to his painting style." Wu, *Displacements*, 22.

kinetic, leftward pull of the handscroll format, these migrants finally propel us forward, towards both the floating officials and the inscription that follows the painting.

In his 1948 tract, *Aspects of China's Anti-Japanese Struggle*, Mao famously proclaimed that "the people are like water and the army is like fish." This fantasy of harmonious integration resurfaces here through its polar opposite, profound alienation: the water from the fish, the power from the people, the worker from his body and the people from their land. Displacement and alienation are at the heart of Ji's conception of the construction of Three Gorges Dam as a traumatic event.⁴⁰ In this work, Ji distills this trauma into the form of the migrant laborer—displaced from his or her home and alienated from the products of his or her labor—even as he places them one last time within the tight embrace of the natural environment. As we learn in the inscription that ends the painting, this scrubby landscape is merely the last trace of the migrants' ancestral homes. The loss of home and homeland might be the primary source of trauma in Ji's Three Gorges paintings, but it is a loss that the migrants were forced to help realize. As Ji writes in the inscription that follows the painting:

Yu the Great's mastery of the waters is already something from deepest antiquity. Yet year after year the flooding waters of the Yangzi have continued to cause trouble, and the common folk along the river's banks have suffered great harm as a result. As early as the last century, Sun Yatsen suggested the solution of cutting off the river and constructing a dam in the Three Gorges. Some decades later, Mao Zedong also advocated this proposal. Construction on the reservoir finally began in 1994 and will be completed next year. The reservoir will be 190 meters deep and 500 miles in circumference. Stretching across the provinces of Hubei and Sichuan, it will even allow ocean-going vessels of upwards of 10,000 tons to reach Chongqing, spur the economic prosperity of the interior, solve electricity problems for a broad region, and serve as a major milestone among my country's engineering projects, as well as a symbol of progress and modernization. With their very own hands, the migrants of the reservoir zone demolished—brick by brick, tile by tile—thirteen cities, 140 towns and 1300 villages. Forced to leave their ancestral homes, neighbors, relatives and friends scattered to different places. I went to Zigui, Xiangxi and Fengjie, among other places, to personally witness the circumstances surrounding the displacement of the common people of Badong, and although this was already six years ago, it remains vividly before my eyes. That is why I have specially produced this Migrants Scroll to serve as a record. [Written in the] fourth month of the *wuzi* year, Ji Yunfei.

大禹治水已是遠古的事了。但長江仍年年洪水為患，兩岸百姓深受其害。早於上世紀孫文先生便提出在三峽截江建壩的說法。幾十年後毛澤東又推動這一主張。水庫終於於九四年動土將於明年完工。庫深一百九十余米，方圓五百公里。跨湖北四川兩省，上萬噸遠洋貨輪亦可直抵重慶促進內地經濟繁榮，解決廣大地區用電問題，成為我國建築工程里程碑是進步與現代化的象徵。庫區移民一百五十萬他們親手一磚一瓦地折遷了十三座城市一百四十個鄉鎮一千三百個村庄。不得不離開他們祖祖輩輩的家園鄰居親友離散異地。我曾去秭歸香溪奉節等地，目睹巴東地區百姓喬遷的情景，雖已六年之久却歷歷在目特做移民圖以為紀錄。戊子年四月季雲飛。

This long inscription is comprised of two distinct sections. The first places the nearly completed dam project within the context of an ancient and modern history of flood control and water management. For Sun Yatsen and Mao Zedong in the 20th century, the dam was a final,

⁴⁰ In his psychoanalytic analysis of New Chinese "ecocinema" Mi Jiayan poses this alienation in terms of the uncanny transformation of water from source of life to a threat to it: "When water becomes scarce or polluted, it suddenly becomes defamiliarized, denatured, or demonic, posing gruesome threats to the world and making life homeless, exilic, unhomey, and uncanny." See "Framing Ambient *Unheimlich*: Ecoggedon, Ecological Unconscious, and Water Pathology in New Chinese Cinema," in *Chinese Ecocinema* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong U. Press, 2009), 21.

technological "solution" (*shuofa* 說法) to a problem that the mythical Yu the Great failed to solve in antiquity. As Ji notes, there are significant benefits to the modern solution, not least of which is the symbolic capital that it generates for "my country" (*woguo* 我國). The second section shifts pointedly from the dam "as a symbol of progress and modernization" to the personally experienced scene of material demolition and displacement, of which this painting serves as a "record" (*jilu* 紀錄). Against the symbolic, mythical, historical and economic conceptions of the dam, all of which share a humanitarian justification, Ji presents a visual and textual record of the bodies and personal goods of the people in whose name the dam was actually constructed. Though Ji voices no direct attack on the dam, the structure has clearly failed to fulfill its function. By producing yet another flood, one far greater than anything that preceded it, the dam has not only not spared "the common folk along the river's banks" "suffering" (*huan* 患) and "harm" (*hai* 害), it has intensified their pain, definitively displacing and dispossessing them in the process. The bitter irony, and perhaps the greatest wrong, is that the migrants were enlisted in their own displacement, forced to disassemble their own lives, piece by piece.⁴¹ To the extent possible, this record speaks for them.

Both Ji's visual and textual "records" draw on the ethico-documentary function of traditional painting and historiography. Writing before the completion of the *Migrants Scroll*, Wu Hung already inserts Ji's Three Gorges work into a long tradition of paintings of refugees, or *liumin tu* 流民圖. Said to have emerged out of an act of loyal remonstrance during the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), the *liumin tu* directly documents the suffering of the common folk, whether from war, famine or unfair government policies.⁴² When presented to those in control of policy but isolated from its effects, such paintings were seen as having the potential to transform the government and its laws. Of course, though the *Migrants Scroll* echoes the *liumin tu* tradition, the context of its production, its intended audience and its effects are completely different.

Commissioned by the Museum of Modern Art's Library Council as an "artist's book," Ji's original painting was transformed into a technically masterful color print by one of China's most famous woodblock studios and sold as semi-mass-produced luxury art object in the United States. His audience was not the Chinese government or its technocratic officials, but a New York-focused, international art world in which Chinese contemporary art (especially if it has the aura of dissent) is increasingly the commodity of choice. This is not to imply a cynical profit motive on Ji's part, but simply to suggest how thoroughly Ji has adapted traditional media and style to his contemporary context.⁴³ In *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, Ji

⁴¹ Glimpses of this processes of "brick by brick" demolition can be glimpsed in Feng Yan's excellent 2007 documentary *Bing Ai*, which follows a female farmer, Zhang Bing'ai, as she stubbornly resists the mandate to relocate her home from the dam's flood zone.

⁴² Both Wu and Ronald Egan recount the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127) story of Zheng Xia (1041-1119), a judicial inspector who served under Shenzong (r. 1067-1085) during the implementation of Wang Anshi's (1021-1086) controversial New Policies. Zheng had first hand experience with the depredations that Wang's policies had caused in the provinces, and decided to remonstrate with the throne directly. In 1074 he submitted a memorial that detailed the effects of the policies and a painting that depicted the devastated peasantry. The painting moved the emperor deeply and might have contributed to Wang's brief retirement in 1074. Though Zheng was eventually arrested and exiled for his attack on Wang and his powerful supporters, his act of pictorial remonstrance helped launch a documentary genre of painting capable of both political critique and sophisticated cause and effect reasoning. See Wu, *Displacements*, 20 and Ronald Egan, *Word, Image, and Deed in the Life of Su Shi* (Cambridge: Harvard U. Press, 1994), 47-48.

⁴³ It is easy to see that Ji is in most ways an outsider to the events depicted in his Three Gorges paintings. Not only is he not poor and not a resident of any of the cities he visited in the region, he was not living in China when he painted the works under discussion here. Having resided in the United States starting in 1986 up until fairly

transformed the structural logic of Northern Song monumental landscape painting in order to critique the dam without legitimizing the political structures that made it possible. In the *Migrants Scroll*, Ji similarly transcends the hierarchical logic of the *liumin tu*, collaborating with the MoMA to reproduce a set of copies that will spread his concern for those displaced by the dam to a wider, though by no means universal audience of collectors, universities and museums.

III. From Collecting From History to Collapsing Time

"To ancient people, landscape paintings served as imagery where people imagined living and traveling. To me, the subject of the Three Gorges forms a sharp contrast to this ancient ideal."⁴⁴ In *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, Ji demonstrated this "sharp contrast" by replacing the welcoming point of entry and the well-trod path of the past with a nearly impenetrable landscape—compressed, ruined and scarred by demolition. The collapse of habitable space in this painting is the direct result of the dam, an invisible figure of destruction discernible only through the title's "143 meter watermark." Ostensibly a spatial marker, an indication of the future water level, this mark exerts its true force temporally, by bringing the flood unmistakably into the present, through the logic of what I call collapsed time, or simultaneity. Collapsed time represents a more precise formulation of what I have been calling temporal chaos, one that foregrounds the cause of chaos: those unrelenting processes of demolition and construction that have come to define Chinese urban space over the last two or three decades.

I expand my focus here to include both the larger processes of demolition and displacement that occur all over China as well as recent filmic representations of the Three Gorges under the impact of the dam. These additional examples provide a broader context for theorizing collapsed time as a visual representation of the traumatic mechanism in the absence of latency. Both Ji and his filmmaking peers spatialize and compress traumatic temporality in order to give form to the immediate psychological impact of demolition and development. Because film unfolds gradually over time, however, it offers special insights into the complex and changeable relationship between time and space in a society in transformation. By viewing Ji's painting practice through the lens of these cinematic insights we see not only how different artist working in different media respond to similar issues, but also how Ji manages to infuse his paintings with a sense of traumatic time that resonates with, but which is ultimately independent of narrative and documentary temporality.

As we have seen, the need to spatialize trauma issues from two overlapping sources: first, the unsettled status of historical traumas that exceed not only their temporal but also spatial bounds; and second, the rapid disappearance of the material remainders of the past, or, in the case of the gorges, the disappearance of the very earth needed to anchor one's material existence. Ji and his peers respond to a culture of traumatic return and contemporary

recently, Ji is widely seen as a Chinese artist, working in a Chinese medium, frequently depicting Chinese subjects, but living mostly in Brooklyn and showing and selling his works through a gallery based in Manhattan with a branch gallery in Shanghai. One wonders if the shared ethnic identification of the artist, his medium and the content of his work threatens to reduce Ji to a native informant for his prime commercial audience, or, more dubiously, to conflate the artist with the primary victims of the dam project, lending his work a traumatic authenticity that translates into market value. This is not to accuse Ji of co-opting the trauma of others for financial gain, simply to indicate the complexity and ethical ambiguity in representing such topics.

⁴⁴ "A Conversation Between Yun-fei Ji and Wu Hung," 103-4.

disappearance not by fabricating historical simulacra as traumatic monuments or attempting to merely preserve the present, but by resurrecting the past as heterogeneous fragments, figures and styles that are unapologetically and idiosyncratically combined and layered with the familiar, the contemporary and the documentary to create new matter and new spaces.

Though aspects of this layering often appear surreal or outrageous, life in the midst of a changing China presents equally surreal experiences. Of his first visit to the gorges Ji says:

At that time, I went to a village of displaced people. I showed them a map and asked them which villages they had come from. They told me the names of their hometowns, but I couldn't find them on the map. I don't know if it was because I was using a new map. Anyway, some place names had already disappeared. It was very strange.⁴⁵

This meeting between Ji with his map and the displaced villagers is a "strange" confrontation between conflicting spatial and temporal realities. The migrants are not merely displaced, they are also *un*-placed, confronted by a scientifically generated record (the map) that no longer recognizes their former homelands. Imagine for a moment two alternative expressions of this clash of spatial and temporal realities from outside of Ji's artistic practice. Both of these take the form of markers that convey superficially basic information through writing. The first is an omnipresent sign that indicates a future demolition—the hand painted character *chai*, 拆, which means 'demolish,' or 'to be torn down' (fig. 14). The second is specific to the now-flooded areas of the gorges and comes in various forms—hand written signs, carved markers, posters, carefully detailed schedules—all of which served to show either the eventual water level of the Three Gorges reservoir or to convey information about the relocation program (fig. 15).

Over the last few decades, the character 拆 has become one of the most omnipresent and iconic images in contemporary, urban China.⁴⁶ Hastily painted on exterior walls in districts slated for redevelopment, the *chai* character is an avatar of the future, a silently performative utterance that says unequivocally: this building will be destroyed. In this context, the linguistic and phonetic content of the character have been evacuated, leaving behind an endlessly reproducible and proliferating symbol that does not *signify* so much as *embody* and *realize* demolition. In the process, the building upon which the character is written (and often encircled by a line that makes it look like a sort of stamp) is transformed from a shelter or functional space into a surface for the projection of the national drama of 'progress;' or, depending on your perspective, the national 'trauma' of unbridled development. The certainty of the sign's pronouncement also collapses time, bringing the future—both the planned skyscraper, highway or mall development and the traumatic experience of displacement—immediately and

⁴⁵ "A Conversation Between Yun-fei Ji and Wu Hung," 103-4.

⁴⁶ It has in fact become a symbol of China itself: when combined with the sentence ending particle *na* 哪 to form *Chai-na* 拆哪, it becomes a pun on 'China.' This play on words suggests a disconnect between the Euro-American obsession with Chinese growth and the native consciousness of loss and destruction that has resulted from economic success and development. Many scholars have written specifically about the *chai(-na)* phenomenon (and many about demolition in general), including: Sheldon Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007) and "Tear Down the City: Reconstructing Urban Space in Contemporary Chinese Popular Cinema and Avant-Garde Art," in *The Urban Generation*, 137-160; Yomi Braester, "Tracing the City's Scars: Demolition and the Limits of the Documentary Impulse in the New Urban Cinema," in *The Urban Generation*, 161-180; and, most recently, Wu Hung, *A Story of Ruins: Presence and Absence in Chinese Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 2012).

unmistakably into the present, while simultaneously transforming the present in all its materiality into a ghostly remainder, a bit of a 'future past.'⁴⁷

Before the completion of the dam and its reservoir, the areas along the river slated to be flooded were similarly marked with signs indicating the various stages of the filling of the reservoir. These omnipresent markers functioned analogously to the *chai* characters by serving as physical representatives of the future in the present.⁴⁸ Unlike *chai* however, which simply pronounces a future demolition—a promised absence that does not necessarily say anything specific about what is to follow—these markers simultaneously indicate both a future absence and a future presence. Cities, homes, cliffs and archaeological sites below the markers would disappear and water would come to take their place. That these signs often stood absurdly high above both the river and above the heads of people suggests a ready metaphor for how the future might have impinged and loomed on the present, pressing down on the residents of the gorges with a psychic weight equal to the water of the reservoir—some 600 feet deep and stretching for nearly 400 miles.⁴⁹

In a way, reservoir-related markers are merely among the newest manifestations of ancient hydrographic practice. For millennia, all along the Yangzi, but especially in and around the treacherous gorges, residents and travelers carved markers that indicated normal and abnormal water levels in order to aid navigation. The most famous of these hydrometric stations is perhaps the only one to remain accessible following the inundation of the mid-

⁴⁷ In an interesting parallel to my reading of the *chai* phenomenon, Wu Hung writes: "On the one hand, ruins are always fragmentary and their incompleteness registers the gap between the past and the present. On the other hand, ruins always connect the present with the past, and this connection evokes recollection." Ruins have a double personality, one half of which is defined by discontinuity and other, by continuity. Wu's comments come in the context of experimental Chinese art's confrontation with memories and materials from the Cultural Revolution, in which ruins, whatever their continuing psychic power, are indeed *historical* sites that both remind one of the past and also remind one that the past is indeed past. The situation becomes more complex when discussing 'fresh ruins,' which have come to typify many Chinese cities—sites that lack their own *history as ruins*. Once again, Wu Hung, writing of sites that have been demolished but not yet built upon, says: "these places lie outside normal life not only spatially but also in a temporal sense: time simply vanishes in these black holes. The past of these places has been destroyed and no one knows their future." The ruin photographs of an artist such as Rong Rong, about whom Hung also writes, depict eerie wastelands that are marked not so much by destruction, as by the few uncanny traces of previous residents that are exposed to view. Jia's decision to focus on how people continue to navigate and inhabit such spaces up until their final moment of oblivion suggests both a slightly less hopeless and ahistorical picture. See Wu, *Transience*, 86 and 113.

⁴⁸ Perhaps *chai* works its magic so effectively because, on its own, the character lacks any hint of tense. Chinese is an uninflected language, and without additional temporal markers, there is no way to tell whether *chai* should be read in the past tense: as, demolished, or, has been demolished; in the future tense: as, will be demolished, or, to be demolished; or, in the imperative: as, demolish! This is an ambiguity that collapses time: first, by bringing a future demolition immediately and unmistakably into the present; and second, by transforming the present in all its materiality into a ghostly remainder, into a bit of the past in the here and now. In this context, the spatial chaos of demolition inevitably breeds temporal confusion. Jiayan Mi, by contrast, inserts *chai* into a tripartite system alongside *yan* 淹 (flood, submerge) and *qian* 遷 (move, relocate) that suggests more of a sequence of events, but one which similarly "gives rise to an uncanny space of haunting, apparition, and doubling—the return of the dead, which I call spectropoetics." See Mi, "Framing Ambient Unheimlich," 24–5.

⁴⁹ The final stage of flooding brought the reservoir to 175 meters or 574 feet above sea level. The reservoir markers, which were sometimes quite large and made of concrete, resembled a cross between a monument and a grave marker. Both of these objects normally serve both to reach across time and to establish careful temporal distinctions, such as birth and death dates or the date of a specific battle. In this case, however, they create a sense of temporal and spatial disorientation that collapses distinctions—between now and later, here and there. The schizophrenic effect of this confusion reminds one of the *hua* 華 shaped monument from *Still Life* that takes off like a rocket ship: an incomplete monument to a not yet past present that launches off into the future of space. See Chapter 3.

Yangzi. Located near Fuling, west of the gorges, the White Crane Ridge, or *Baiheliang* 白鶴梁, is a 1,600 meter long sandstone ridge on which 14 carvings of fish and 165 inscriptions, some dating back to the mid-Tang Dynasty, are discernible. The eyes of the fish once indicated normal water levels and the inscriptions recorded especially low levels and their dates, though they were sometimes far more detailed (fig. 16).⁵⁰ The White Crane Ridge, which now rests some 40 meters below the Three Gorges Dam Reservoir, has remained visible through the construction of China's first "underwater" museum. This structure encircles the ridge (which remains exposed to the water) and is punctuated with windows that allow visitors to look through the murky water of the Yangzi at the famous carvings (fig. 17).⁵¹ The White Crane Ridge is testimony to some of the dangers and difficulties that the dam was built to remedy, but it also indicates a long tradition of direct observation of, and engagement with, the variable relationship between dry land and river, a relationship that was transformed by the dam. As one of the few pre-dam water level objects to survive in situ (and still remain visible), the ridge has become a relic for/of different ages—long an ancient text that until recently could still fulfill its original function, it is now a trace of the recent past that is enshrined as a monument for a future age when the ancient shape of the gorges and the river will have become only a distant memory.

Just as residents of Fuling would have been able to 'read' the history of the river and its low points using the White Crane Ridge, residents of the contemporary Yangzi could see the future of the river in the projected water level markers for the reservoir. Of course these signs were simply materializations of information with which residents would have been very familiar: instead of 120 or 140 meters, a citizen of Wushan or Fengjie might have thought, 'just below the threshold of my house,' or 'three stories above my apartment.' As we saw in *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, Ji omits explicit markers, indicating the eventual level of the water through the painting's vertical format (and, importantly, through its title), which seems to bury the foreground beneath the dense landscape. Even one of Ji's non-vertical images, such as *The Empty City—Autumn Colors* (fig. 18), which more closely resembles a vertical hand scroll (though it is displayed framed and in its entirety), displays a similar kind of compression and flatness. In this image Ji creates an overwhelming sense of inundation: water snakes through the landscape, and even unidentifiable blank spaces begin to resemble liquid incursion into the otherwise densely painted scene. As in the *Last Days Before the Flood* (fig. 19), which I describe below, *Autumn Colors* incorporates a distinctly distant vista (in the upper right hand corner here) that vaguely resembles an aerial view of the gorges. The scene of scavenging that unfolds in the rest of the painting is thus literally below this landscape of river and gorges, a spatial effect enhanced by Ji's use of transparent watercolor washes to fill in certain portions of the painting, particularly those depicting open water. We look *through* and *at* water, and the visibility of this medium reminds us of the omnipresence of the liquid element: it is there both at the moment of creation and the moment of destruction.

Another of Ji's distinctive techniques exemplifies this simultaneity: Applying what he has called "the method of erasure and montage...to collected historical materials," Ji uses water to wash away certain images so that he can layer new ones on top, "develop(ing) layers that work together as a whole."⁵² This process of controlled, small-scale flooding visibly distresses the mulberry paper with which he works, suggesting both the ephemerality and fragility of the

⁵⁰ See pages 38-39 of Lyman P. Van Slyke's excellent book, *Yangtze: Nature, History, and the River* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1998) for more information.

⁵¹ See: http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/18/content_11395483.htm

⁵² See Melissa Chiu, "Interview," 89.

medium and also of memory and history. "Erasure and montage" fabricates a trace and promises the continued presence of that which has disappeared, an objective shared by Ji's obsessive interest in depicting a vision of the Three Gorges and its residents that no longer exists (if it ever did).

Watermarkers and collapsed time play a similar but more explicitly psychological role in Zhang Ming's 1996 film *In Expectation* (巫山雲雨 *Wushan yunyu*; the film's alternate English title is *Rainclouds over Wushan*) as forces of physical and temporal compression. Zhang's film begins on the day of ground breaking for the dam project and includes a number of images of the reservoir stage levels. Unlike Jia Zhangke, who as we saw in the previous chapter deploys these signs within his multiplanar technique to suggest temporal superimposition, Zhang Ming uses them to contribute to a noir-ish and deeply unsettled psychological narrative.⁵³ As Jason McGrath has written, "the Three Gorges Project in its first stage serves more of a metaphorical function to express the film's real concern—the alienated psychology and repressed sexual desires that imbue its characters."⁵⁴ To that end, the compression of time and space that these markers represent is linked to a psychological confusion that is akin to what we find in Ji's paintings even though the sources of confusion differ.

For example, near the beginning of *In Expectation*, the female protagonist, Chen Qing, leads a group of tourists to the small inn where she works. As they walk from the river to the inn, they pepper her with questions about the quality of the accommodations (which she answers dishonestly), stopping briefly along the way to read a large sign that lists the number of people scheduled to be relocated from Wushan County to make way for the reservoir (fig. 20). When they arrive and discover the poor quality of the facilities, Chen's boss and erstwhile lover, Old Mo, tries to pacify the tourists, convincing them that his hotel is their best option since "everyone knows the gorges will be flooded, so they're all hurrying to visit here," and the other hotels will be too expensive. Time is short, so come soon and stay here. This sense of shrinking opportunities, vanishing landscapes and fleeting time, does not simply bring the future into the present, however. As Chen works desultorily behind the front desk she is startled to find a strange, silent figure standing just outside the entrance to the hotel: this man is dressed in generically traditional Chinese clothing, carries a backpack and is wearing his long hair up in an old-fashioned bun (fig. 21). He looks for all the world like an ancient literatus, a fact that we could ignore were the inn not called the *Xianke lai lüguan* 仙客來旅社, or Welcoming the Immortal Traveler Inn. When she looks up again, the man has disappeared.⁵⁵

Within this single sequence we experience an unsettling compression that brings past, present and future into one surreal moment. Zhang draws here on the rich supernatural and literary aura of the Three Gorges to insert a mysteriously anachronistic figure, who, like many of Yun-fei Ji's figures, is both a ghostly presence and a material part of the landscape. There are

⁵³ This is not to overstate the differences between Zhang and Jia's works. The first of these markers appears in opening sequence of *In Expectation*, as Mai Qiang carries water back from the river. Above him on his side of the river a number of men are painting a marker that directly faces an ancient looking, abandoned stone building across the river, suggesting a conflation of time periods through the agency of the river. Another marker is painted midway up a large building in Wushan under which a group of elderly residents plays croquet.

⁵⁴ Jason McGrath, "The Cinema of Displacement: The Three Gorges in Feature Film and Video," in *Displacement*, 36.

⁵⁵ Nick Kaldis identifies this figure's clothing as "Daoist-type," which only adds to his mystical appeal. Kaldis also points out that the mysterious figure is played by Zhang Xianmin, the same actor who plays Mai Qiang. This doubling effect fits nicely with the psychosexual confusions of the movie's plot. See "Submerged Ecology and Depth Psychology in *Wushan Yunyu*: Aesthetic Insight into National Development," in *Chinese Ecocinema*, 64-5.

more easily identifiable, though less mystical figures of the past throughout *Still Life*. Li Bai, the famous Tang poet, crops up a number of times in that film, most notably over the loud speaker during Shan Tao's departure from Fengjie (see chapter 3), though again in the movie's penultimate scene, where Han and his new demolition crew friends drink and toast before his departure. The wine that they drink is called *Shiren Taibai* 詩仙太白, or Poet Immortal Tai Bai. Less specifically, but in keeping with the fame of the region's Tang dynasty associations, the inn at which Han stays is called *Tangren ge kezhan* 唐人閣客棧, which can be translated as either Chinese Pavilion Guest House, or the Pavilion of the Men of Tang Guest House. And finally, on the night that Mage is murdered, Han Sanming encounters three opera singers dressed as Liu Bei, Guan Yu and Zhang Fei, 3rd century figures made famous by the popular fictional tale, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*.⁵⁶

Like Du Fu, Fan Chengda, Lu You, Michael Cherney, Jia Zhangke and Ji, Zhang Ming draws on the Gorges' embodiment of the absence/presence dialectic to represent the gorges as a place where the past, present and future are simultaneously visible and in contact with one another. Though by no means inherently traumatic, this quality of simultaneity does in fact resemble the ways in which both past and future traumatic events exceed their temporal bounds to haunt the present. Perhaps it should come as no surprise then that the Gorges have long inspired artists grappling with personal and national traumas: the landscape's combination of absence and presence offered an easy model and a rich store of historical associations for representing the temporal displacements of these traumatic experiences.

The irony in *Still Life* and *In Expectation*, as in Ji's work, is that it is really the present and future that violently encroach on the past. Normally figures of mythical status forming an important part of the Three Gorges as historically and culturally sedimented topography, the Tang literati and Three Dynasties warriors have not returned to haunt the present—they too have been displaced by the dam and the coming waters. We see this type of displacement more literally in *Still Life*, when Shen Hong searches out her husband's estranged friend, Wang Dongming, who is working in Fengjie as an archaeologist. Racing against the completion of the dam and the rising of the reservoir, Shen finds Wang busy excavating an "ancient tomb" (*gumu* 古墓) from the Western Han (206 B.C.E.-24 C.E.). No simple excavation, Wang's work is a salvage mission that both exposes the past and removes it from its material context. The work site is a neat grid of rectilinear holes dug beneath an asphalt surface on flat ground. In the distant background the high-rises of the new city climb up the hills beyond the reach of the future reservoir, though much closer, and on the same level as the excavation, stands a lone, abandoned building. The neat, subterranean grid of the dig site perfectly mirrors the aboveground grid of windows that pierce this building (fig. 22). It is the as yet uncompleted dam and reservoir that prompt this paralleled desecration of both the present (the apartment building) and the past (the tomb). Though the source of all of this destruction and displacement does not yet exist in its finished form there is no need to wait for its traumatic effects—time, along with the city, has collapsed.

⁵⁶ I thank Jiwei Xiao for this identification. See "Zhongguo dianying shifou xuyao Bazan 中國電影是否需要巴贊," 69.

IV. Shrinking Spaces and Severed Limbs

The dig that we see briefly in *Still Life* is far more than a displacement of objects and a mirroring of the present in the past. Wang Dongming is, after all, excavating a "tomb," and we must assume that, in addition to burial objects, there are human remains to be exhumed and cataloged. The implied marriage of the human and the material is at the core of *Still Life*, which is structured around the circulation of basic consumer goods, such as tea and cigarettes. For Jia Zhangke, these objects are the connective tissue that keeps social bodies together (however briefly) in a highly unstable, post-socialist society. Yun-fei Ji goes even deeper in his own exploration of the links between human bodies, consumer goods and the spaces through which they move. Ji focuses on the physical processes of dispossession and the constriction of the individual and its place in the world both through various structural motifs, particularly compression and layering, and in his representation of the most basic and protective extensions of the human body—homes, consumer goods and domestic objects. Another of his vertical paintings, *Last Days Before the Flood* (fig. 19), will help set the terms.

Like *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, this large image presents a severely foreshortened, almost vertical landscape in which hills and trees frame the ruins of villages and homes. Nearly every surface is densely filled except for a small band of sky at the upper edge of the painting, below which a line of simply painted mountains extends into the distance. Three river-like bodies of water snake down from the mountains—one from the left, one from the right and one from just right of center—converging as a single, central river in the second quarter of the painting. This river seems to end abruptly near the middle of the image, where it passes by the chaotic ruins of a settlement, but reappears just below and to the right where it flows horizontally to the painting's edge. Ji creates a perceptible sense of receding space and depth through the use of both foreshortening and clearly delineated *qimo*, especially in the top half of the painting, which includes what appears to be a representation of the Yangzi and the Gorges. The pull of this depth is counteracted, however, by the fact that nearly the entire surface of the painting is filled with a dense landscape. Though one can identify a vista and a horizon, when viewing the painting as a whole, this upper edge appears as merely the very top of a landscape defined by vertical depth. From this perspective, the *qimo* does not lead us up and out, but down and in, towards the bottom edge of the image.

The overall effect is of an overwhelming sense of compressed vertical depth and flatness reminiscent of the *The Empty City—East Wind*. Aside from the way it submerges the landscape, however, this compression has another important effect. It redirects our focus onto the quotidian: the people displaced by the dam and their scattered objects and shelters. Though we are able to look beyond the surface towards something resembling a horizon line, the moral and affective core of the image lies not in the auspicious mists or majestic mountains, but in the lower left-hand corner. Directly beneath a laden packhorse, whose rear end faces the viewer, we find four figures: a woman and a child riding a bicycle are followed by another woman carrying a basket, all of whom follow a man carrying an over-sized load on his own back (fig. 23). This group, a family perhaps, is one of many similar groupings that appear in Ji's Three Gorges paintings. Sometimes sitting atop their belongings like refugees without a destination,⁵⁷ sometimes ambling affectlessly out of the frame,⁵⁸ these people are the only signs of life in landscapes that resemble disaster zones, and all of this well before the water's arrival. For Ji, as

⁵⁷ As in *A Monk's Retreat* (2002) and *The Move in Ba Don* (2002), *The Wait* (2009), *The Guest People* (2009) and *The Empty City—Autumn Colors* (2003).

⁵⁸ As in *Last Days Before the Flood* (2006) and *Four People Leaving Badong*, (2009).

for Jia Zhangke and the contemporary oil painter Liu Xiaodong, the people—their experiences, their hard work, their suffering, their migration—rather than the environment or the scenic landscape, are the most important aspect of the Three Gorges.

This painting shows its concern for these people by capturing a general process of constriction, compression and severing in which the residents of the gorges are increasingly and irrevocably dispossessed of their land, their homes, their objects, and, at least in the artistic record, the integrity of their very bodies. The formal techniques that I have explored in the context of traumatic or disordered temporality reappear here in order to give shape to this process of dispossession. Through the spatial composition of his paintings Ji figures the relatively simple physical process begun by the dam—the expansion of one thing and the contraction of another—and its morally and politically dubious companion process, the erection of a symbol of state power on a national and international scale at the expense of the landscape and its inhabitants.

This process can be subdivided into two stages: First, the destruction and dismantling of the manmade landscape; and second, the shrinking of the very land once inhabited and built-up by the former residents, now migrants. As ethically dubious processes, demolition and shrinkage represent the often unspoken imbalance between the agents of the dam project and those who have been directly affected. Ji's incorporation of water thus creates a synecdochical flood narrative in which the stranded survivors and the surging water stand for both the full narrative of the creation of the dam and reservoir and also a political allegory of its impact. As the nation and the party were glorified, as the scope and size of their reach were theatrically expanded, the material lives of those who lived below the final reservoir level were deconstructed to the point of non-existence. All that remains in Ji's pictures, and only temporarily, are the narrow spaces and tiny clearings in which figures huddle, looking more like refugees than participants in a national triumph. That the actual flood was more of an imperceptible creep, rather than a deluge, and that most of the residents of the area were compensated (probably insufficiently, as has become common practice in China) and relocated, has not decreased the attention that artists such as Ji, Jia Zhangke, Zhang Ming, Liu Xiaodong and the documentary filmmaker Feng Yan, among others, have paid to representing the story of displacement and dispossession.⁵⁹

In one of *Still Life's* most poignant moments, for example, Han Sanming visits the owner of the small inn where he stayed upon his arrival in Fengjie. Before Han enters the structure, the camera tracks rights, showing an array of household goods—a rice cooker, pots, thermoses, pans—that lead up to the once-illuminated sign, disconnected and removed from where it once hung, advertising the now-demolished inn (fig. 24). Han, curious and tentative, walks slowly into Mr. He's small, dark home as though it were any other unfamiliar space, though at the end of the scene, when he exits, we finally see that the old man's new home is built into the arches of a stone bridge. Too old to migrate but lucky enough to have some form

⁵⁹ Of course, many of the residents of the impoverished area would have long since looked far afield for economic opportunities that they could not find at home. One could argue that many of those displaced by the rising waters simply joined the already massive wave of internal emigration that has been driven by economic concerns. Still, the popular media has shown particular interest in the plight of those who resist the processes of destruction and constriction, who remain put when so many are on the move. The famous Chongqing 'nail house,' was a single-family residence whose owners refused to make way for the construction of a shopping mall. As the lone remaining structure on the construction site, the home was dramatically framed by the enormous pit from which it rose, defiant, but impossibly isolated and besieged. The juxtaposition of the tiny refuge of the family unit and the enormous scope of development provides a none too subtle image of how the twinned forces of the party and the market can painfully squeeze the personal and private domain. See: <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/27/world/asia/27china.html>, valid as of 4/10/11.

of shelter, Mr. He has nonetheless been forced into an interstitial space, beneath and between the recognized shapes of the city (fig. 25). The Chinese-Canadian director Yung Chang's *Up the Yangtze* presents an even more theatrical version of this scene. In that film, the impoverished Yu family occupies a flimsy home on the flood plains near the city of Fengdu, where they eke out a living with a small subsistence farm. As the documentary progresses, we witness the gradual rise of the river, which comes to surround the shack, turning it briefly into an island, before eventually swamping it completely. Slowly, steadily, their home is first turned into a ruin and then finally fully effaced as we witness them transport their worldly goods on their backs, in search of higher ground.

Like Mr. He and the Yu family, many of the figures that appear in Ji's paintings are similarly dispossessed—forced into interstices. Where Jia's old inn keeper is lucky enough to have a roof over his head, Ji's figures, like the Yu family, always occupy tiny patches of open ground, surrounded by worldly possessions that are nearly indistinguishable from piles of trash and wreckage. These groups are most clearly and consistently depicted in a series of images from Ji's 2010 exhibition, *Mistaking Each Other For Ghosts*,⁶⁰ in which they become the primary focus of representation. Even before this motif had developed into a theme however, Ji had already begun incorporating refugee-like figures into his paintings, most notably in the earlier *The Empty City* and *The Old One Hundred Names* series. What these paintings share is the careful use of natural features, especially trees, shrubs and stones to create pictorial cells, a technique that we saw in the *Migrants Scroll*. In paintings such as *The Empty City—Autumn Colors* and *A Monk's Retreat* in particular, these spaces, though they provide room for representing figures, are notable mostly for how claustrophobic they are, how they press and constrict the figures that they enclose.

Compression/shrinkage and demolition represent nothing less than the destruction, or "unmaking," of a particular world—that constituted by the area of the Three Gorges. This idea of "unmaking" derives from Elaine Scarry's investigation of the processes and effects of torture in her seminal (and controversial) work, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*.⁶¹ In that work, Scarry traces not only how torture and war are acts of unmaking, but also the fundamental cultural structures that underlie *making*, or the creation of our world. For Scarry, making, or as she divides it, "making-up" and "making-real," is the process through which humans come to terms with and attempt to protect their fragile, physical forms. "Making-up" is an initial imaginative projection of the self out into the world, and "making-real" is a physical projection of the self, what she calls "the action of creating verbal and material artifacts."⁶² In her scheme, the threat of pain is anterior to all human creation. If, as she compellingly defines it, making is a process of replication and extension of the human body out into the world, then unmaking, as exemplified in torture and war, entails first the

⁶⁰ These include: *The Wait* (2009), *The Guest People* (2009), *Under the Trees* (2009), *Four People Leaving Badong* (2009), *The Meeting Point* (2009), *Blind Stream* (2008) and *Strange Creatures Appear* (2008).

⁶¹ Although Scarry, like the scholars of trauma that I have discussed above, begins with limit events that are either undeniably immoral (torture) or of questionable morality (war), her conceptualization of the structures underlying these acts shows how they might apply equally well to other, less unambiguous situations, particularly those in which the interests of the individual and the state collide. It is not the structures of torture and war that concern me here, but rather the processes that go along with them, that shrink the world of the tortured and raise the insignia of state power. In the act of torture we might term this process dispossession through pain. The major difference here is that we are discussing a process in which dispossession precedes and generates pain. This is not to say that pain is merely a byproduct of dispossession (for the two are inextricably linked), rather that dispossession is a primary cause of pain and is perhaps more prominent here because it is easier to represent using the spatial/visual structures of painting.

⁶² Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 21.

constriction of the body and its extensions, and finally the deconstruction of language and a remaking of the resultant pain into an "insignia" of power.⁶³ The building blocks of one structure are dubiously appropriated for use in another.

In Ji's paintings, the insignia of power are everywhere and nowhere—they are the dam that never appears and the dog-faced red guards that menace *The Empty City—East Wind*, the roiling waters that wreak havoc in *A Monk's Retreat* and the public security officers that float at the watery edge of *The Three Gorges Migration Scroll*. What Ji captures in his images is a tipping point, the extended moment when the homes and land of the Three Gorges migrants are first appropriated and disassembled in preparation for a dubious act of making. More plainly put, this is the process whereby the world of the residents of the gorges shrinks as the dam and reservoir grow. The various claustrophobic, liminal spaces in Ji's work are merely temporary resting places where these straggling migrants find a brief respite before the final, definitive constriction forces them elsewhere.

An early and dramatic example of constriction as a type of extreme dispossession appears in *A Monk's Retreat* (2002; fig. 9). This painting envisions the creation of the dam and reservoir as a catastrophic flood, a maelstrom that engulfs everything in its way—animals (real and imagined), automobiles, homes, water towers. Though Ji's later work seems to shy away from this apocalyptic vision, it reminds us here of the cruel irony of a project that was promoted as a means of flood control.⁶⁴ The violent deluge in *A Monk's Retreat* stretches from the left edge across two thirds of the large image (37 x 139 inches), lapping menacingly at a patch of dry ground on the far right, where a group of five men crowd within a thicket and atop a rock outcropping (fig. 26). Though a single, pig-faced figure stands beyond the trees and rocks, craning his neck towards the waves, none of the others seem to attend to the flood. Surrounded by everyday goods—hot water thermoses, electric fans, umbrellas and eggs—and snugly isolated from the raging waters, they appear affectless, bored. On closer inspection, however, one notices something strange about three of the men and the semi-human-looking outsider: their bodies have no flesh: their bones, organs and blood vessels are exposed (figs. 27 and 28).

These strangely serene men with their visible viscera immediately evoke not only early European anatomical renderings of the human form, but also their iconic repetition in Luo Ping's *Ghost Amusement* (Fig. 29). This painting includes figures copied directly from a Chinese copy (1630), based on a German copy (1605), of the *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543), with illustrations by Andreas Vesalius (1514–1564).⁶⁵ Luo Ping's skeletons were apparitions from a ghostly realm, depicted to shock, entertain and impress his literati audience, who might want to

⁶³ Peter Singer attacks almost all of these points in a 1986 review of Scarry's book. Reserving most of his scorn for Scarry's ahistorical treatment of torture and her "blithe disregard for the ordinary canons of argument," Singer is far less convincing in his critique of Scarry's theories of the "making and unmaking of the world," choosing to attack her methodologies (which are undeniably unorthodox) and basic understanding of Marx (which is indeed idiosyncratic), rather than her actual ideas. He is particularly and willfully naive in his contention that torture need not have any significant relation to state power, suggesting that according to Scarry's account, only "extremely unstable governments" should turn to torture, a fact not confirmed by the historical record. In fact, Scarry's argument emphasizes moral legitimacy and strength (though it also addresses governments that are actually, politically weak), as opposed to the degree of a particular regime's hold on power. See Peter Singer, "Unspeakable Acts," *The New York Review of Books* 33 (27 February 1986): 27–30, 29, and 27.

⁶⁴ Indeed, the contrast between the stated aims of the project and Ji's depiction calls to mind the Great Yu, whose hydrological contribution did indeed solve, rather than cause a great flood. In Ji's more recent works, especially those displayed in the 2010 exhibition, *Mistaking Each Other for Ghosts*, Yu appears again and again in the texts that accompany the images.

⁶⁵ Jonathan Spence, "Specters of a Chinese Master," *The New York Review of Books* 56, no. 19: 14.

hire him to paint for them. For Yun-fei Ji, however, these forms (which retain fleshy faces, and in one case, wear pants) are not novel additions to a *tour de force* of the strange, but rather everyday, middle-aged men, who stand dramatically exposed. Despite their nonchalance, they are vulnerable, deprived of the human body's first line of defense, its most basic, protective membrane: the skin. The menacing waters and the sheltering trees thus assume even greater power—one as a threat and the other as a substitute, but equally imperiled armor.

In her analysis of *Das Capital*, Scarry explores the relationship between the body and another type of armor, material goods. She sees objects as metaphorical extensions of the body, and as buffers against physical suffering and pain: "material culture incorporates into itself the frailties of sentience, is the substitute recipient of the blows that would otherwise fall on that sentience."⁶⁶ Those who are wealthy, of course, enjoy a much greater buffer between their bodies and the world; they are, in Scarry's terms, "radically embodied." The poor, on the other hand, are not merely poor, but radically "disembodied," and thus constantly imperiled:

Not just suffering but all forms of consciousness are involved in the difference between belonging to the people who are disembodied and belonging to those who are radically embodied, for the very end point of one's precariousness (after many tiers of objecthood are crossed) is the starting and stable point of the other's existence: the second endures in near objectlessness; all his psychic states are without, or nearly without, objectification; hence in all his or her life activities, he or she stands in the vicinity of physical pain.

Scarry's point is basic: the poor are exposed to all manner of pain and suffering. What she attempts to single out within our understanding of poverty, however, is the deep importance of material culture, both symbolically and practically. In her scheme, the production of material goods is an expression of the human drive to create, and through creation, to assuage and prevent pain.⁶⁷

In their emphasis on the connection between material poverty and pain, Scarry and Ji share an approach to objects as basically benign and essential components of humanity. This helps us to see that the omnipresence of consumer goods in Ji's paintings is not simply part of his attempt to document authentically what he saw during his trips to the gorges, but rather another indicator of how precarious the lives of these people have become, how literally close they are to danger and pain. Depicted as homeless and refugee-like, the Three Gorges migrants have only the smallest of material buffers between themselves and the nearly apocalyptic world that they inhabit. Their relative lack of material objects increases the significance of what they do have, each object assuming a talismanic importance incommensurate with its functional banality. *A Monk's Retreat* makes literal the metaphorical connection between the body and its material trappings: if you remove the goods that these men can carry on their backs and the

⁶⁶ Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 244.

⁶⁷ Though her exploration of creation is impressively ambitious, incorporating as it does an extended discussion of both the Bible and *Das Capital*, Scarry's particular style of argumentation sometimes generates unexpected results, and even after reading her account of creation we must confront the seemingly immovable fact that a great many objects are created in order to inflict, not assuage pain. As Geoffrey Harphman notes in his mostly insightful but occasionally patronizing account of Scarry's work, Scarry's tendency for hyperbole can lead to a single-mindedness that weakens her own arguments. As an example, he understands Scarry as arguing that "regardless of the intentions of makers and consumers, material artifacts—including presumably, all the instruments at the torturer's disposal and all the machines of war—have but one 'absolute intention,' to relieve sentient being of its pain." Here, as elsewhere in her work, individual examples tend to weaken the almost broadly symbolic gestures of her philosophy. Whether this constitutes grounds for refuting her arguments, as Peter Singer does so gleefully in a review of *The Body in Pain*, however, is less certain. See Geoffrey Harpham, "Elaine Scarry and the Dream of Pain," *Salmagundi*, 130/131 (Spring 2001): 228.

clothes that they wear, you will see that they are not simply naked, but painfully disembodied, stripped of their very skin. In Ji's painting, this dramatic exposure seems to be the end result of the processes that squeeze these men into the tiny, liminal space of the grove. As the flood rages and consumes the landscape and its human infrastructure, they are increasingly dispossessed and compressed within an ever-shrinking realm.

Up to now, we have conceived of the physically and politically dispossessed as suffering primarily under various forms of constriction and disembodiment, of a gradual shrinkage of their space and their material extension into the world. This is clearly an important aspect of Ji's paintings and of his method for depicting the realities of a landscape that has in fact shrunk. What Scarry's writings help us see in *A Monk's Retreat*, however, is that dispossession does not occur solely through constriction, but can entail more immediately violent methods. For Scarry, there is a basic enervation and physical dismemberment at play in unmaking that can be traced to the mechanisms of the capitalist system itself. Following Marx's most figurative expression of the concept of alienation, Scarry treats the product of labor in pre-capitalistic systems as the "extended body" of the worker. Capitalism does not simply alienate the worker from his products, it severs "the worker from his own extended body." Like the worker whose connection to his externalized body has been severed, the residents of the gorges as depicted in Ji's paintings are not simply homeless, they are the victims of a violent dismemberment, a gruesome flaying and a severing of perhaps the most important human link aside from family relations, that between the fragile body and its various forms of protection.

Though we have also looked first and foremost to the "radically disembodied" human form for evidence of violence and pathology, many of Ji's paintings also gesture to an anterior state in which residents of the gorges were more fully embodied. This state emerges in the form of the abandoned and partially destroyed buildings that litter the landscape. One such building floats eerily through *A Monk's Retreat* (fig. 30), though both *Below the 143 Meter Watermark* and *Last Days Before the Flood* incorporate abandoned homes more extensively into the landscape. More than ruins, these structures were once shelters, and as such, extensions of the human body, exoskeletons that protected and contained their now peripatetic residents. The empty home is thus akin to the actual human skeletons that appear in some of Ji's paintings (*The Autumn Colors* and *Fragrant Creek* from the *Empty City* series are good examples)—divorced from their original functions, empty and gaping, they haunt the landscape as quasi-human forms, reminding us that the effect of the dam is not simply displacement, but rather a more fundamental assault on the body in its many manifestations (fig. 31).

These homes, however, do not exist simply as empty, but intact shells: they are everywhere shattered and broken into their component parts—doors, roofs, stones and boards. The severing of humans from their shelters by no means precludes this ever-finer process of dismemberment in which homes are actively taken apart or crushed by the force of the water.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ In Jia Zhangke's *Still Life*, this process is not carried out by an imagined and sudden deluge, but by the very people who once inhabited the homes and the cities that they are now hired to destroy. Like Liu Xiaodong, whose Three Gorges paintings in some ways inspired *Still Life*, Jia focuses a great deal on the bodies of these demolition men. Often shirtless (whether at work or at rest) and not infrequently simply in their underwear, these men appear simultaneously powerful and vulnerable, muscled and exposed. Liu is extremely body conscious, and many of his paintings focus on the partially naked forms of working people, both male and female. Perhaps because *Still Life* and his documentary *Dong*, which focuses on Liu's Three Gorges paintings, were filmed partly simultaneously, Jia's film shares this focus, though in a somewhat less exaggerated manner. Though their physiques might momentarily convey health, especially to a western audience unaccustomed to the daily sight of physical laborers, they actually signal their poverty, or in Scarry's terms, their disembodiment. Similar figures appear in Ji's work, though the most striking examples are not able-bodied workers, but literal skeletons who comb the abandoned

These forces of constriction, disembodiment and physical violence reach a theatrical peak in the image that begins the first section of this chapter, Ji's *The Empty City-The East Wind* (see figs. 1 and 3-8). This work, whose general form and complexities I have described at length above, is distinguished first and foremost by its extreme density and compression. Aside from a narrow band of air and water at the upper edge of the image, the composition is nearly solid, comprised of a number of very loosely distinguished diagonal bands of human, semi-human and ghostly figures, animals, trees, rocks and all manner of ruins, including buildings, the reappearing car, barrels, boxes and various unidentifiable objects. Though water is only barely visible as a faint line at the horizon, *The East Wind* resembles Ji's earlier flood images, especially *A Monk's Retreat* and *The Flooding of Ba Don*, in which the landscape is devastated by the rising waters. Here however, the title suggests that it is not the flood that wreaks havoc, but rather the 'east wind,' possibly unleashed by the painting's central figure, a pig-faced Cultural Revolution red guard who stands precariously atop a karaoke parlor sign at the very center of the image. Aside from the awkwardly recumbent Liu Shaoqi-like character near the bottom edge, this Red Guard is the only figure whose body is not at least partially obscured, and along with his two Red Guard companions, he is also one of the only fully clothed figures in the painting.

His body fully intact and protected beneath semi-military garb, the pig-man stands above the fray. Crushed beneath him and the sign upon which he stands are a host of figures—nearly naked and unmistakably pained, their bodies are cut off by the jumble of refuse in which they are trapped. Though their expressions and positions are too numerous to describe in detail, we can isolate a few telling examples. Emerging directly beside the Red Guard (it looks almost as though her left arm is wrapped around his body), from underneath the top of the sign lies a dark-skinned woman, her breasts exposed. Gaunt and wizened, her body visible only from the waist up, the woman's eyes are closed and it is impossible to determine if she is alive or dead. To her right is another woman; young and smooth-skinned she looks with profound pain to the left of the painting towards an elderly, nearly skeletal figure who is crushed under a roof and who reaches out towards her. Seemingly pinned beneath the opposite side of the same roof are two shirtless figures wearing the familiar dunce caps of those denounced during the Cultural Revolution. Near the lower right hand corner is a black and white horse flying head first towards the bottom of the painting; next to it, the severed head of a woman faces in the opposite direction.

These particular humans are joined not only by a host of similarly tortured companions, but also by various mysterious, barely visible, non-humans. Whether bird-headed, pig-faced or of indeterminate morphology, these monsters differ from their human counterparts in that they remain perfectly placid amidst the chaos. Like the Red Guards that menace the upper half of the painting, they contribute to the atemporal, dream-like quality of the image, in which the effects of the dam project are jumbled together with all manner of psychological and historical detritus. Though we have already suggested some possible readings of these characters and the painting's special temporality, what is most striking about this image are not the uncanny elements, but the physical suffering of the human figures. Stripped of their clothing, of their homes and of any form of protection, they are exposed and physically compressed, their bodies metaphorically and literally severed, crushed beneath the remains of a human settlement. Absent are the small islands of space that provide temporary refuge to the migrants in so many of Ji's other paintings: here, there is nowhere to stand and everyone is in the midst of pain, unmade by the chaos of wind and water.

landscape for useable goods. These scavengers are barely distinguishable from the living, fully fleshed migrants that rest amidst the wreckage.

Coda

*And across the western Jiang we shall erect a wall of stone,
That will rend Mt. Wu's clouds and rain,
Till from the lofty Gorges issues a placid lake.*

更立西江石壁，
截斷巫山雲雨，
高峽出平湖。

—From "Swimming 游泳" (1956) by Mao Zedong

In August of 2012, the historian of early China Robin McNeal published an article about both 20th century scholarly attempts to construct a Chinese mythology that could compare to (or, ideally, outshine) Western myth and also how Chinese mythology has come to play, once more, an important role in the post-Reform period. As a case study, McNeal looks at an outdoor sculpture park in the Yangzi city of Wuhan 武漢 that is dedicated to the many stories surrounding Yu the Great (fig. 1). Bearing the name *Dayu shenhua yuan* 大禹神話園 (Yu the Great Mythology Park), the park represents an impressive attempt both to create what McNeal calls a "visual Chinese mythology" and also to link current and recent events, such as massive flooding in 1954 and 1998, to the spirit and ancient narrative of Yu.¹

The sculptures in the Wuhan park depict Yu as an *Übermensch*—thick with muscles, exposed to the waist and posed heroically (fig. 2). This is a far cry from the fully clothed and somewhat effete eminence imagined by the Southern Song painter Ma Lin 馬麟 (ca. 1180-ca. 1256) (fig. 3). The methodical engineer of an ordered Chinese civilization that we encountered in the introduction to this dissertation and his later manifestation as a serene sovereign have been replaced by a specimen of physical and national perfection. It is this last Yu who was invoked by those promoting the dam project. As Jiang Zemin proclaims in a November 8, 1997 speech given at the Three Gorges dam site, Yu the Great represents a "spirit of tenacious struggle" (*wanqiang fendou jingshen* 頑強奮鬥精神) in the ancient Chinese people's drive to "transform nature" (*gaizao ziran* 改造自然). He goes on to cite the Maoist chestnut, "man must triumph over nature" (*ren ding sheng tian* 人定勝天) before situating the dam project in the context of less historically nebulous engineering projects, such as the famous waterworks at Dujiangyan 都江堰 and the Great Canal.²

Ironically, of course, the dam project as apotheosis of the Chinese spirit of struggle and progress through engineering has brought about a return to the very diluvian state against which Yu was supposed to have struggled so hard. Indeed, despite Jiang's claims, the dam really bears little relation to Yu and his dredging (which accorded with the "natural" tendencies of water); more than anything else, it is the perfection of the methods of blocking and containing practiced so disastrously by Yu's father, Gun, who was executed for his failures.

¹ Robin McNeal, "Constructing Myth in Modern China," in *The Journal of Asian Studies* 71 (2012): 679-704.

² The speech is archived at the official news site of the Chinese Communist Party: <http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64185/180138/10818621.html>

Yu is not alone among famous mythological figures associated with the Gorges in being co-opted by those who advocated for the dam project. There is perhaps no better example of this type of co-optation than Mao Zedong's poem, "Swimming" (*youyong* 游泳), which he wrote in June 1956, following a famous swim across the breadth of the Yangzi near Wuhan:

起宏圖。	I raise a grand plan:
一橋飛架南北，	A single bridge, flying, will span south and north,
天塹變通途。	Transforming a natural moat into a thoroughfare.
更立西江石壁，	And across the western Jiang we shall erect a wall of stone,
截斷巫山雲雨，	That will rend Mt. Wu's clouds and rain,
高峽出平湖。	Till from the lofty Gorges issues a placid lake.
神女應無恙，	The goddess, if she remains in good health,
當驚世界殊。	Will surely marvel at how altered is our world.

Mao makes no mention of the people who will be displaced from the Gorges; neither does he acknowledge the environmental toll of such a project. Instead, he wonders about the goddess of Mt. Wu, a figure of ancient lore who has for over 2000 years sensually presided over a poetic conception of this region as a land of mysterious clouds and rain, a well-know euphemism for sexual intercourse. The goddess is among the most familiar staples of poetry about the Gorges, and Mao repeats the cliché almost as a matter of course, though he seems to imply that his world has no need of such figures, that it has changed in some fundamental way.

The only real change that this poem predicts is a final, violent sundering of the inscriptional relay between the aesthetic and physical landscapes, which began with the lore of Yu the Great and was embodied by the stories surrounding the goddess of Mt. Wu. This is possible not because, as Mao would have it, the world has changed, but because he believes: first, that he is able to reverse the deeds of Yu; and second, that he can adapt the methods of Gun for the goals of the new communist state. The impulse to inscribe persists through all of this, but its technological expression obliterates the very landscape to which inscriptions once adhered, leaving behind only an un-inscribable wall of concrete and a placid lake, a glossy, reflective surface that subsumes the ruins of the past and refuses to bear traces into the future. The flow of history, like the flow of the river, has been stopped, replaced with a structure this is simultaneously ruinous and monumental.

These images bring immediately to mind Marc Reisner's *Cadillac Desert*, a scathing history of water management and mismanagement in the American west, where he writes:

When archaeologists from some other planet sift through the bleached bones of our civilization, they may well conclude that our temples were dams. Imponderably massive, constructed with exquisite care, our dams will outlast anything else we have built—skyscrapers, cathedrals, bridges, even nuclear power plants. When forests push through the rotting streets of New York and the Empire State Building is a crumbling hulk, Hoover Dam will sit astride the Colorado River much as it does today—intact, formidable, serene.³

Were an extra-terrestrial archaeologist to stumble upon the Three Gorges dam they would, of course, have no way of knowing about the individual lives, bodies and shelters of the men and

³ Marc Reisner, *Cadillac Desert: The American West and Its Disappearing Water* (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 104.

women who once inhabited or traveled through the flooded landscape. That is unless, through a miracle of happenstance, Du Fu's poetry or Fan Chengda's diary, Jia Zhangke's film or Yunfei Ji's paintings survived intact in some crumbling archive or library. If our extra-terrestrial scholars chanced upon these artifacts they would see that the temple was built upon the wreckage of cities and villages that were produced slowly over a great span of time and then suddenly disassembled, brick by brick, by the people who once lived there: All dams, like all temples, must be built by someone.

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Appendix

Images for Chapter 3

Specters of Realism and the Painter's Gaze in Jia Zhangke's Still Life



Figure 1 - Han Sanming with Kuimen in the background



Figure 2 - Front of the 10-*yuan* note



Figure 3 - Back of the 10-*yuan* note



Figure 4 - Shen Hong and the *hua*-shaped monument



Figure 5 - *The Wanderer Above a Sea of Mist*, around 1818
Oil on canvas, 37.3" × 29.4"
Hamburger Kunsthalle



Figure 6 - Chairman Mao Goes to Anyuan, 1967
Oil on canvas, 86.6" × 70.9"
China Construction Bank



Figure 7 - Resolutely Follow the Great Leader Chairman Mao's Forward March, 1969
Poster, 28" × 42"
Collection of Stefan Landsberger



Figure 8 - Man's Whole World is Mutable, Seas Become Mulberry Fields: Chairman Mao Inspects Areas South and North of the Yangtze River, 1968
Poster, 24" × 33.25"
Collection of Wang Mingxian



Figure 9 - The four "*shaofu*" (young women)



Figure 10 - Han Sanming and his demolition crew before they discover Mage's body



Figure 11 - Han Sanming and his wife share a piece of candy in an abandoned building



Figure 12 - Watching the building implode



Figure 13 - Han Sanming in his underwear



Figure 14 - Shen Hong looks towards the shuttered factory



Figure 15 - Reservoir water level marker



Figure 16 - Television images from Shen Hong's boat ride home



Figure 17 - Deng Xiaoping and others



Figure 18 - Mao gazing



Figure 19 - Shen Hong's unquenchable thirst



Figure 20 - Posters of Marx, Engels, Lenin, Stalin and Mao

Images for Chapter 4

Ink in the Wound: The Three Gorges Paintings of Yun-fei Ji



Figure 1 - *The Empty City—East Wind*, 2003, 35.5 x 53.5 inches,
ink and watercolor on *xuan* paper



東巴漲水



大禹治水已是遠古的事了，但長江仍年年洪水為患兩岸百姓深受其害早於世紀初孫文先生便提出在三峡截江建壩的說法幾十年後毛澤東主席又推動這一主張水庫終於於九四年動土將於明年完工庫深一百九十餘米方圓五百公里珍湖北四川兩省工萬此遠洋貨輪亦可直抵重慶促進內地經濟繁榮解決廣大地區用電問題為我國建設現代化的宏偉工程是進步與現代化的象徵一碑一瓦地拆遷了十三座城市一百四十個鄉鎮一千三百個村庄不得不離開他們祖祖輩輩的家園辭別親友離散異地我東去時香囊春筍等情景雖已六年之久却歷歷在目特做移民圖以為記錄戊子年四月李雲飛

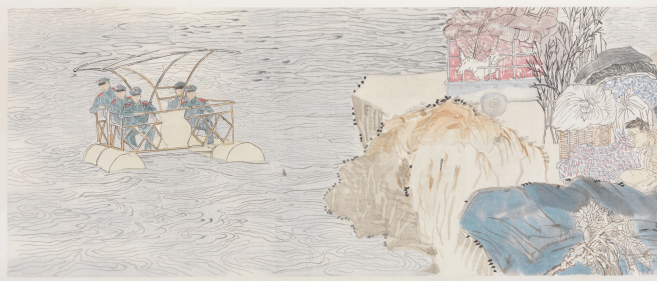


Figure 2 - *The Three Gorges Dam Migration*, 2009, 120 x 12 inches, hand-printed watercolor woodblock mounted on paper and silk



Figure 3 - *The Empty City–The East Wind* (detail)



Figure 4 - *The Empty City–East Wind* (detail)



Figure 5 - *The Empty City–The East Wind* (detail)



Figure 6 – *The Empty City–The East Wind* (detail)

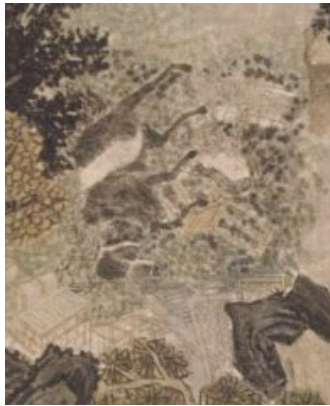


Figure 7 – *The Empty City–East Wind* (detail)



Figure 8 – *The Empty City–East Wind* (detail)



Figure 9, part 1 – *A Monk's Retreat* (left half), 2002, 190.5 x 115 inches, ink and mineral pigment on *xuan* paper



Figure 9, part 2 – *A Monk's Retreat* (right half)



Figure 10 – *A Monk's Retreat* (detail)

Figures 11 and 12 currently unavailable – *The Flooding of Ba Don*, 2002,
ink and color on paper, collection of Worcester Art Museum



Figure 13 – *Below the 143 Meter Watermark*, 2006, 118.5 x 58.15 inches
mineral pigment and ink on *xuan* paper, collection of Worcester Art Museum



Figure 14 – The character *chai*



Figure 15 – Three Gorges Reservoir zone watermarker, still image from *Still Life*



Figure 16 – detail of inscription on the White Crane Ridge

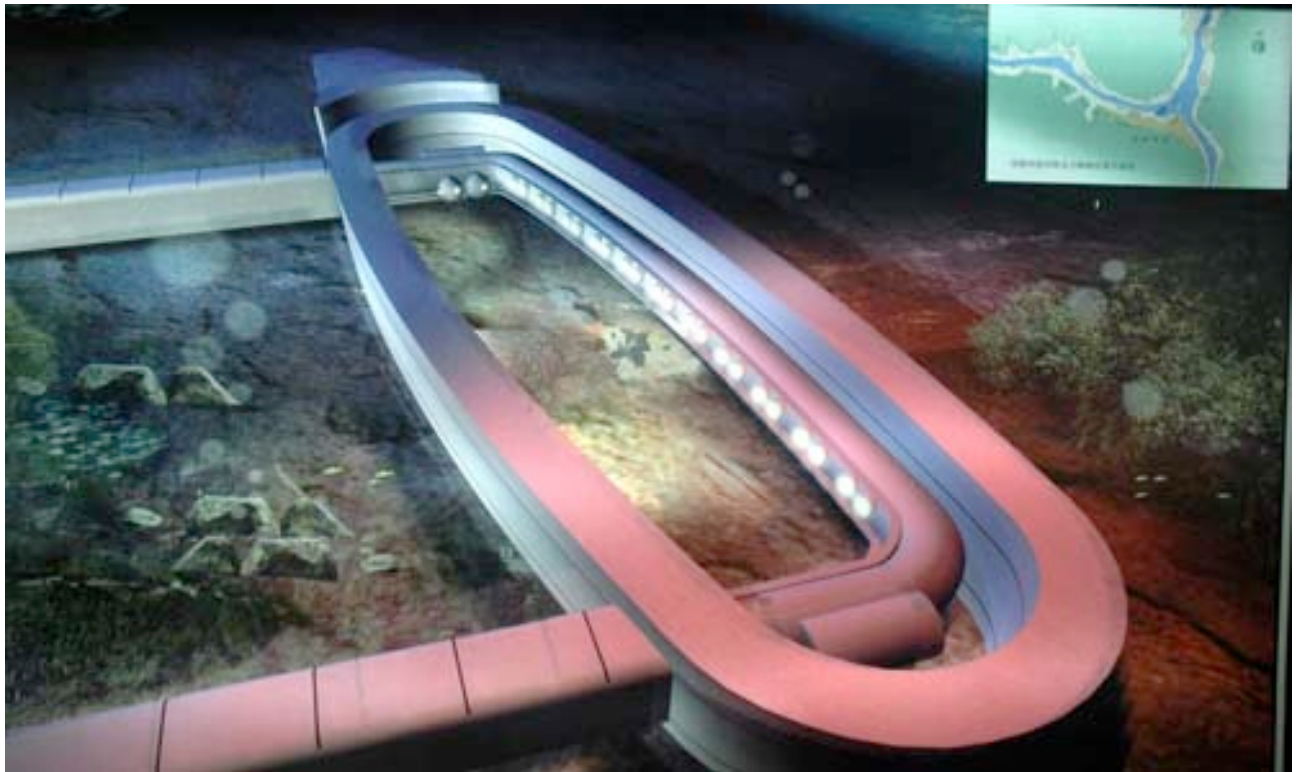


Figure 17 – representation of the White Crane Ridge underwater museum



Figure 18 – *The Empty City – Autumn Colors*, 2003, 32.5 x 92.5, ink and Chinese watercolor on *xuan* paper, collection of the Museum of Modern Art, New York



Figure 19 – *Last Days Before the Flood*, 2006, 75.5 x 70 inches, mineral pigment and ink on *xuan* paper, collection of the United State Embassy, Beijing, China



Figure 20 – Relocation chart from *In Expectation*

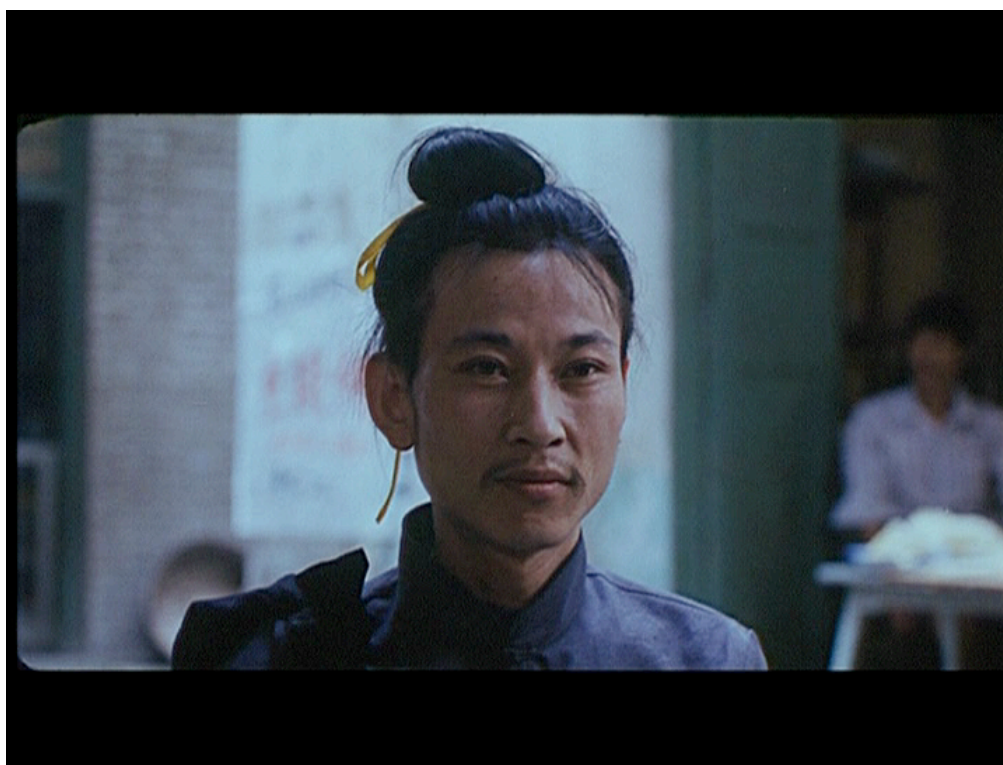


Figure 21 – Mysterious figure from *In Expectation*



Figure 22 – Excavation site from *Still Life*



Figure 23 – Last Days Before the Flood, detail



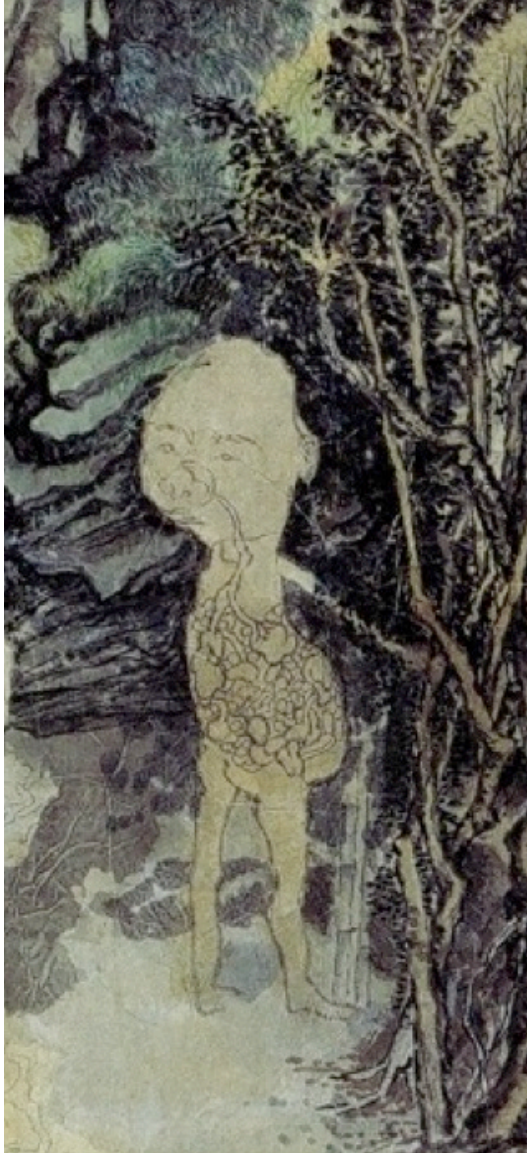
Figure 24 – Tangren ge kezhan sign from *Still Life*



Figure 25 – Bridge home from *Still Life*



Figure 26 – *A Monk's Retreat*, detail



Figures 27 and 28 – *A Monk's Retreat*, details



Figure 29 – Luo Ping, *Ghost Amusements Scroll*, detail



Figure 30 – *A Monk's Retreat*, detail



Figure 31 – *The Empty City-The Autumn Colors*, detail

Images for the Coda



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3 – Ma Lin (active mid-13th century), attributed, Yu the Great National Palace Museum, Taipei