

STUDENT: SK

ASSIGNMENT: FILM RESPONSE

Demolition and History in *Still Life*

There was one line near the beginning of *Still Life* that I feel is particularly significant. It was spoken during a scene in which a group of people are arguing with some sort of official (I think it is regarding their relocation situations), and he responds by saying that two thousand years of history have been demolished in two years, which naturally creates problems. The entire scene in which that line was spoken was actually given particular attention. It took place just before the protagonist appeared, and was not crucial to his conflict. Its inclusion must have been a deliberate choice by the director in order to make a point or to draw attention to a theme.

The idea of two thousand years of history being demolished in two years spans *Still Life*, because the whole film seems to be about the protagonist trying to find something that has disappeared. Another scene near the beginning which reflects this idea is when he is taken to an old address that has been flooded, and no longer exists. Clearly, *Still Life* seeks to highlight the larger implications of China's demolitions. While *Meishi Street* focuses on how the demolitions affected people in the immediate moment, *Still Life* is focusing on the fact that demolishing old buildings has the side effect of erasing the past. Interestingly, just because the physical buildings that provide a link to the past have been destroyed, it does not mean that people will forget. This makes the genre of documentary as alternative archives much easier to understand. Not having physical links to the past, and considering the fallibility of memory, it is no wonder that some directors make alternative archives.

In a way, *Still Life* can be considered a part of these alternative archives, because it deals with a moment in time that sees the disappearance of “two thousand years of history in two years”. *Still Life* also brings up very specific things, like the Three Gorges Dam, that can be considered historical markers. Although it is a fictional film, it is so linked to the historical moment in which it takes place that it can easily be viewed as archival footage. Of course, it can also be viewed purely as a fictional film. However, considering that the historical context that this film was produced in, it can have value not just as a fictional film, but as an authority on the particular moment in time that it focuses on.

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