

*News from the Near Future*, 2003, offers yet another reflection on film's ability to allow an event to take place anywhere – a phenomenon that comes close to what Valéry termed 'ubiquity' when he argued, long before the advent of television, that images would one day be brought into homes like gas and water. Tan was invited by the Amsterdam Film Museum to work with the early news reel footage in the archives, footage that was originally shown in weekly instalments at the local movie theatres before the beginning of a feature film. 'Some reels were a bit dull since the events and the people portrayed in them have been long forgotten,' says Tan. 'In others, the camera came too late and had nothing to show because the event had already happened.' After screening countless reels, Tan decided to collect one recurring image for her own work: water. Constructed entirely from archival footage, *News from the Near Future* moves from dainty flâneurs wandering on shore to swimmers bravely jumping into the water, from ships heading out to sea to ships struggling in a storm, from flooded city streets to calm waters. 'The water acts as a metaphor for time passing and for the media, which seems to have engulfed us, explains Tan, who coloured the black and white sequences in monochrome shades and added a soundtrack that mixes faint radio samples with white, brown and pink noise. In the video installation, the found footage – projected on a large-scale screen and doubled as a reflection on the glossy floor in front of the screen – recalls the lost itinerary of the images: from the reflecting surface of the sea to the movie theatre screen.

While constructed from past images, *News from the Near Future* also tells the story of a catastrophe that never really happened. As one watches the projection, a narrative slowly starts emerge from the fragments, which take the viewer from the security of the shore to a violent storm that capsizes a ship and floods cities before settling back into an eerie calm. Far from rewriting the past, Tan was interested in exploring the possibilities of the future. 'I used old images to tell a sci-fi tale,' says the artist. 'A poetic science fiction.' Here, the archive is not a document lying dormant that can revive the truth about history but rather a means of creating – and contemplating – events that have not yet taken place. Indeed, the ephemeral nature of the footage – as the latest news about current events during a week that expired long, long ago – allows Tan to treat the images as poetry instead of history. Contemporary viewers are fully willing to accept Tan's fiction precisely since the events and the people are no longer recognisable. Transported to 2004, the news reel gains a dull legibility that allows for other readings, events and narratives. Avoiding both documentary and nostalgia, Tan suggests that forgetting and obsolescence are vital elements in the life of the archive which allow its holdings to gain a whole new use and value.

Of course, Tan's novel approach to archival research raises more questions than it resolves. While a news reel's obsolescence can be easily measured by the passage of time, our ability to forget an image is difficult to ascertain. How does forgetting take place? As Freud argued, there is much evidence of forgetting; while the reasons for repressing the past may be elucidated, the act of forgetting remains a mysterious process with respect to time. Like mourning – which wears away the memory of person without reaching obliteration – forgetting paradoxically depends on a faint recollection that gradually becomes dormant and then refuses to resurface. In the end, Tan's news may nothing other than a shrewd reminder that the images we watch today will also become illegible, slowly disappearing in ways we cannot fathom.

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