



WANG TUO, *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting*, 2019, stills from single-channel HD video: 26 min 15 sec. Courtesy the artist; Blindspot Gallery, Hong Kong; and White Space Beijing.

Wang Tuo's *Symptomatic Silence of Complicit Forgetting* (2019) points to the lacerated state of Chinese society. The 26-minute film is rooted in literary and cultural theorist Aleida Assmann's book *Forms of Forgetting* (2016). Assmann posits that when historical events are systematically scrubbed from official records by political powers, the result is collective amnesia and silence. And yet, traumas have a way of resurfacing.

In Wang's nebulous, nonlinear video, the past wounds of the protagonists persist and inadvertently shape their present. The work begins with a young Red Guard chancing upon an intact library during the Cultural Revolution. He picks up a volume, the contents of which are narrated in a voiceover. The book is centered on a scholar who mourns the untimely death of his mother. His feverish guilt over his inability to repay his filial debt cripples him, and eventually leads him to confuse

his wife with his mother's ghost. Lost in chimerical figments, he commits suicide.

The Red Guard, we later learn, has scars of his own. We encounter him as a middle-aged writer, flipping through a family album. Wang pans across the photos tightly as different images of a woman fill the frame. Then, the photos merge with a staccato, stop-motion sequence of sepia-toned stills depicting other Red Guards forcing the writer to whip his own mother, a "bourgeois" performer of traditional Chinese opera. When the deed is done, he collapses, and the scene cuts back to his older self. He too is haunted by a ghost—the manifestation of his guilt. The film closes with the writer choosing to delete a digital file, titled "Amnesia," containing the memoir he labored over. Unable to voice what they remember or to truly forget, Wang's characters find themselves hopelessly trapped in a delusion.

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