Wang Bing: **Crude Oil**

Screenings, film installation, and DVD library

Light Industry, 220 36th Street, 5th Floor, Brooklyn, NY

Wednesday, November 4–Sunday, November 8

9 a.m.–11 p.m. daily

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From November 4 to 8, Triple Canopy and Light Industry present the East Coast premiere of **Wang Bing’s Crude Oil**, a fourteen-hour film installation tracking a fourteen-hour workday of crude-oil extraction in northwest China. Wang’s film will be on view from 9 a.m. until 11 p.m. each day, running five times in its entirety.

Accompanying **Crude Oil** in an adjacent room will be a film program by **Matthew Coolidge** of the **Center for Land Use Interpretation** and **Lucy Raven** (7:30 p.m., Wednesday, November 4; reception to follow), as well as the American premiere of Wang Bing’s **Coal Money** (4 p.m., Saturday, November 7; discussion to follow with NYU professors **Rebecca Karl** and **Zhen Zhang**) and a screening of Wang’s nine-hour **West of the Tracks** (12 p.m., Sunday, November 8). A curated DVD library of related films will be available for viewing throughout the week.

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A recent **New York Times** article on arbitrage in oil futures began: “Its superfast, supersecret oil trading software was called the Hammer…. Founded in 1986 by an options trader named Johann Kaemingk, Optiver has grown far beyond its roots in Amsterdam to trade on exchanges all over...
the world…. It deploys a sophisticated software system called F1 that can process information and make a trade in 0.5 milliseconds—using complex algorithms that let its computers think like a trader.”

What movie could capture these black-boxed, microscopic moments? The world outraces art: the sheer speed, placelessness, and impersonality of global finance, if not its crises, defeat our ability even to think it. And yet—work still has a time, a place, and a person. Each day, oil comes up from the ground and flows cross-country; coal is trucked day and night from mine to market; copper is mined, smelted, refined, wired; on plateaus and in pits, in deserts and on mountains, in cities and factories, in China, in America—by people. And here film can catch up. In *Crude Oil*, art-time and work-time coincide, and the film’s workers, in breakrooms and on oil fields, enter our space as equals.

Yet the time of reality needn’t always be “real time.” A diversity of forms can be found for work, workers, workplaces, and the landscapes of labor: the uninflected duration of *Crude Oil* and the Center for Land Use Interpretation’s topographical “landscans”; but also the still-frame animation of Raven’s *China Town* and the long-take montage of Wang’s *West of the Tracks*. This week, please join us in Sunset Park’s Industry City, an active industrial complex built at the turn of the twentieth century, as we map not superfaster, supersecret oil futures, but the oil-industrial present.

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**Wednesday, November 4–Sunday, November 8**

9 a.m.–11 p.m. daily

*Crude Oil (Yuan You)*

Wang Bing, 2008, 14 hours

“In the film-festival catalogues of Rotterdam and Hong Kong, it says that Wang Bing was filming on a plateau in the Gobi Desert, but in reality he had to move to a different mountainous region about 500 kilometers away, a journey on unmade snow-covered roads. The terrain that now plays the leading role in the film is in the province of Qinghai, a similar landscape to that of the neighboring province of Tibet (which of course is not regarded by everyone as a province). A high, empty, rough, windy, and desolate landscape. Yes, making films can still be adventurous. The filmmaker found that out at first hand. He started to have altitude sickness at the high oil installation. It was so severe that he had to stop shooting prematurely while the crew continued to film the rest of the material. When he was a guest in Rotterdam, the committed filmmaker had still not entirely recovered, but he did not seem to regret his adventure…. The idea was obviously that the whole work should be seen. That was not a punishment (apart from spending fourteen hours on folding chairs, maybe) because the work includes beautiful moments. For instance, the slow breaking of dawn above the rocky landscape while the men had already been at work for hours is an almost breathtaking spectacle. The question of whether *Crude Oil* by Wang Bing is an installation or a film screening is basically trivial. It is an important and grand work and the label is not that relevant. What is relevant is how an exhausting work like this can best be presented. And how it can live on.” —International Film Festival Rotterdam

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**Wednesday, November 4**

7:30 p.m.

Lucy Raven + Center for Land Use Interpretation

Lucy Raven and the Center for Land Use Interpretation’s Matthew Coolidge screen their recent work, followed by a discussion with Sam Frank of Triple Canopy. Reception to follow.
**China Town**  
Lucy Raven, 2009, 52 mins

"China Town traces copper mining and production from an open pit mine in Nevada to a smelter in China, where the semi-processed ore is sent to be smelted and refined. Considering what it actually means to ‘be wired’ and in turn, to be connected, in today’s global economic system, the video follows the detailed production process that transforms raw ore into copper wire—in this case, the literal digging of a hole to China—and the generation of waste and of power that grows in both countries as byproduct.” —Lucy Raven

An experimental animation edited together from more than seven thousand photos, begun while Raven was an artist-in-residence at the Center for Land Use Interpretation in Wendover, Utah.

**South Belridge Oil Field, Kern County, California, Landscan**  
Center for Land Use Interpretation, 2009, 11 mins

**Houston Petrochemical Corridor Landscan**  
Center for Land Use Interpretation, 2008, 14 mins

"A petrochemical system integrates the country through a continental network of facilities and pipelines. This network, assembled over the last hundred years, moves crude, gas, and chemical feedstock, from coast to coast, production areas to processing plants, tank farms to tanker ports, touching every state. It is a circulatory system of the American Land, moving the lifeblood of the economy, in this Petrochemical Age. Though the complexity, scale, and forms of the industry resemble those of science-fiction fantasy, they are real and present.

"The landscan is a new format for us: We scout and plan a route, then videotape it from above at high definition, usually from a helicopter, pointing the camera forwards and downward at an oblique angle. It’s a new form of photographic seeing: linear, time-based, real-time, unedited, and taking advantage of the clarity of high-definition video and gyro-stabilized camera platforms.” —Center for Land Use Interpretation

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Saturday, November 7  
4 p.m.  
**Coal Money (Tong Dao)**  
Wang Bing, 2008, 52 mins

On the coal road linking the Shanxi mines with the large port of Tianjin, in northern China, the drivers of 100-ton trucks shuttle endlessly to and from, day and night. On the roadside: prostitutes, cops, petty racketeers, garage owners, mechanics.

U.S. premiere of Wang Bing’s most recent documentary, which follows Chinese coal truckers from the mine to the market, as coal transforms into money. Screening followed by discussion with Rebecca Karl (Associate Professor, History and East Asian Studies, NYU) and Zhen Zhang (Associate Professor, Cinema Studies, NYU).  

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Sunday, November 8
12 p.m.

*West of the Tracks (Tie Xi Qu)*
Wang Bing, 2003, 554 mins

Part 1, Rust, 244 mins
Part 2, Remnants, 178 mins
Part 3, Rails, 132 mins

“Without question the greatest work to have come out of the Chinese documentary movement, and must be ranked among the most extraordinary achievements of world cinema in the new century.” —Lu Xinyu, *New Left Review*

“Wang Bing’s overwhelming *West of the Tracks* presents us with the panoramic spectacle of progress collapsing. Industry folds and empties its plants; workers lose their jobs and their benefits; people are idle and demoralized, and then they are unhoused, and they demolish their own former dwellings to cash in on their value as scrap; people scavenge among gargantuan ruins that loom like the remnants of a forgotten civilization of giants. It is every twentieth-century mural depiction of the struggle for the good life—socialist or capitalist—viewed in reverse. It is as if the film were being run backwards, or like the last lines of Rilke’s *Duino Elegies*: ‘And we, who think of happiness ascending, / would with consternation / know the rapture that almost overwhelms us, / when happiness fails.’” —Luc Sante


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Triple Canopy works collectively with writers, artists, researchers and other collaborators on projects that deal critically with culture and politics, and the ways people engage them, both online and in the world at large. These investigations are realized in an online magazine as well as in public programs and print publications encompassing various fields and locales. We aim to present work and advance ideas informed by a multitude of disciplines and perspectives, and to disseminate them among a broad and diverse audience. Triple Canopy, a nonprofit 501(c)3 organization, was founded in late 2007; our first issue was published on March 17, 2008.

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