

Beijing in the Shadow of Globalization:
Production of Spatial Poetics in Contemporary Chinese Cinema, Literature, and Drama

By

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Introduction

This dissertation is a multidisciplinary study of the representation and reappropriation of space in contemporary Chinese cultural works. Focusing on Beijing, the capital city and the cultural center of China, the study analyzes selected contemporary filmic, literary, poetic, and dramatic works to investigate the significance of the metamorphosing spaces in China in a global context. Positioning itself in the dialectic of globalization,¹ the central concern of the study is to examine the possibility and capability of cultural products to influence and (re)mold social space and practice in cultural performance.

Though the beginning of globalization could be dated at the rise of the modern capitalist world-system, the term is commonly used to refer to the post-Cold War era where we observe its most intensive development. In its escalated evolvment, globalization has propelled global capitalism, modified the nature of the nation-state, and inseminated consumerism. On the one hand, it seems to exemplify what David Harvey calls “time-space compression,” a speed-up social life of perpetual nowness in a “global village” through technology and shrinking of time to the schizophrenic present.² On the other hand, “time-space distanciation,” as “both local and distant institutions and incidents have become mutually dependent and equally formative.”³

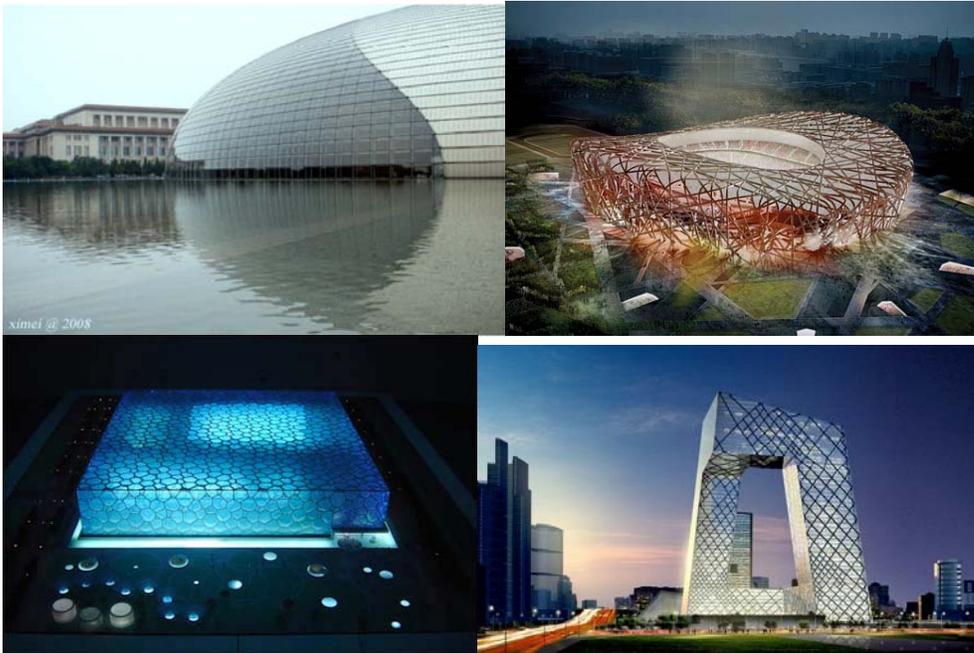
There have been different opinions on globalization’s impact on local identities. Some critics of globalization denounce it as a Eurocentric, equate it with Westernization, and call it a threat to local individuality and an attempt at cultural homogenization.⁴ Supporters of globalization cite historical examples of cultures’ mutual informativeness

and constructiveness.⁵ Globalization's impact on the spatial organization of social relations has been debated along a similar line. Capitalism's erosion of local identity and cultures has been suggested since the late 1970s. Sameness and placelessness are said to increasingly characterize post-industrial cities, though Manuel Castells argues that homogenization and deterritorialization are limited to the "space of flows," especially in places such as international airports, corporate buildings, and world class hotels.⁶ Some scholars identify space as ever-changing social processes and argue for the persistence of place identities.⁷ As Sheldon Lu has observed, though "China's entry into the capitalist world economy, troubled and difficult as always, has unleashed fantasies and imaginings that attempt to bypass the limitations of local and national traditions," it is also caught in the tension between "the universalizing, globalizing tendency of capital and the defensive enclaves of nationalism, localism, and tradition."⁸

The Transformation of Beijing: From the "Forbidden City" to a Knot on the World Wide Web

Beijing, the host of the 2008 summer Olympic Games, caught the world's attention. With the breathtakingly beautiful and densely coded opening ceremony directed by famous Chinese director Yimou Zhang, Beijing not only staged the most expensive and stunning theatrical spectacle of the Olympic Games in history, but also awakened the world to the indisputable fact of China's rise. Broadcasting along with the Games is the glamorous cityscape of Beijing, with its futuristic architectural symbols of

the “Bird’s Nest” (“Niaochao” 鸟巢, the Olympic Stadium), the “Egg” (“Judan” 巨蛋, the National Grand Theater of China), the “Water Cube” (“Shui lifang” 水立方, National Aquatics Center), and the “Big Pants” (“Da kucha” 大裤衩, the CCTV Tower), designed by world famous architects (Figure 1). The extremely competitive Chinese athletes (who won 51 gold medals and ranked second), marvelous artists, and enthusiastic volunteers of the Olympics brushed away an lingering image of the Chinese as backwards or godless Communists, and projected a picture of a new, modern, open China to the world.



(Figure 1⁹)

The enormous change, nevertheless, did not come overnight. Ever since Deng Xiaoping advocated the “reform and opening up” (gaige kaifang 改革开放) policy in the late 1970s, China has been fumbling to be rich, strong, and modern, in other words, to be more comparable to the West. With this ultimate goal in mind, China has shifted gradually from a centrally controlled and state economy to a market economy. To overcome the contradiction between socialist orthodoxy and capitalist practice, Deng

said, “It doesn't matter whether the cat is black or white, as long as it catches mice.” To feed the people and build a wealthy country become the overriding goals of the state despite their theoretical justifiability. The “absolute equality” boasted earlier by socialism is now taken as a tacit commitment to being “equally poor” and regarded as a constraint on development.

Deng further advocated developmentalism in 1992 when he traveled to China's southern provinces. Huge advertising boards, bearing Deng's famous slogan “development is the key” (fazhan shi ying daoli 发展是硬道理) proliferated in Chinese cities immediately. Consequently, the geographically uneven development is considered as an initial phase in the eventual evenness and equality across China. Against this background, coastal cities have been the first beneficiaries of foreign investment in the market economy, and some groups (such as small business owners) have been allowed to grow rich first, in order to encourage the others to catch up.

Beijing, the politico-cultural center of China, is an exemplary product of these policies. The most obvious change in Beijing in the last two decades has been in its physical appearance. Many traditional neighborhoods have been torn down and high-rise apartments are built. The construction boom was intensified by the 2008 Olympics, when government planners wanted Beijing to be China's face to the world. Official statistics show that about 40 percent of the approximately 3,700 *hutongs* (Beijing's traditional courtyards and alleyways 胡同) recorded in the 1980s have disappeared.¹⁰ Residents who have spent most of their lives there have been evicted with some compensation money to buy apartments in suburban areas far from the city center.

Hutong, the cultural and historical treasure of Beijing, has been almost erased completely from a modern and globalized Beijing, which is more like a standardized western metropolis. Though an apartment may provide modern facilities and comfort, many residents do not want to move, feeling attached to their traditional community with its *hutongs*. However, they have little power to contest authorities' decisions. These indigenous Beijing residents have been deprived of their homes and forced to the periphery, leaving the city center, the golden zone of gathered commercial and consumer forces, to high-tech intellectuals primarily migrated in from other provinces in China.

The change of cityscape in many perspectives reshapes and redefines human relationships in Beijing. The tearing down of traditional small lanes and demolition of conventional courtyards not only erase local culture, but also the sense of neighborhood embedded in the memories of many Beijing residents. The modern interpersonal relationship is doomed to be detached from real land. The amazing vertical stretch that modern architectures exercise destroys the attachment one previously has with real/physical land and diminishes the specificity of space in their uniformity of design. Human connection is therefore forced to depend upon advanced technologies such as cell phone and the Internet, and more frequently occurs in a virtual space. The geographical sense of place is thus diluted and replaced by a virtual one, which is heavily mediated by language and image. The phenomenon of *hutong* gentrification in Beijing thus seems to be a natural consequence of the controversy over *hutong*, though some scholars have persuasively argued that it is just another example of the commodification of the past.¹¹

Besides the changing face of Beijing's cityscape, the construction of the city's population is undergoing significant transformation. It was estimated that the floating

population in Beijing was about 1.31 million in the late 1980s and between 1.5 million to 2.43 million in the mid-1990s.¹² According to Beijing's first migrant population census conducted on November 1, 1997, there were 2.859 million migrant workers in Beijing, of whom 2.299 million lived in the city. Beijing's population at the time was 13 million.¹³ These migrant workers, mostly from the countryside, gathered in Beijing to earn a living and ideally become city dwellers. They have been a primary force in the reconstruction of Beijing, and their lives are increasingly integrated and intermingled with those of local residents despite discrimination and unequal treatment.

Though Beijing is in many ways as the unchallenged authority in China, the power dynamics across the ever-changing physical border of the city are not heading in a single direction. The city is expanding not only its geographical border but also its influence on economic, cultural, political, and ideological life in China and abroad. The relationship between the visible geographical border and the invisible cultural, ideological border becomes more and more complex at both the local and global levels. The ambiguous and shifting borders constantly shape and reshape people's identity.

A Survey of Critical Works on Beijing

Although Beijing has been playing a significant role in China and in the world, the city has not received as much scholarly attention as Shanghai. Numerous studies on Shanghai have been published in the past two decades.¹⁴ Old Beijing, which, according to Madeleine Yue Dong, refers to “not imperial Beijing but the historically recent Republican Beijing,” has been the subject matter of some impressive scholarship.¹⁵

Examining the evolution of labor dynamics and identities, David Strand has written a meticulous analysis of urban politics in Beijing in the tumultuous 1920s in *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s*.¹⁶ By bringing together “the political, economic, social, and cultural forces in Beijing life involved in the transformation of the old imperial capital and its re-creation as the ‘cultural city’ of modern China,” Madeleine Yue Dong extricates the present of Republican Beijing from a linearly conceived history by “uncovering the dynamic relationship between material life and cultural identity and by recognizing the active, creative ways in which the residents of Beijing dealt with the political, social, and cultural changes of their times” in her book *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories*.¹⁷

The development of new institutions, infrastructure, and groups in the city has also been studied.¹⁸ Keenly aware of the remarkable changes in urban spatial configuration and population composition, Li Zhang takes Zhejiangcun 浙江村, the largest transient community of Beijing, as the point of entry to examine the “floating population” (liudong renkou 流动人口) of urban migrants and to explore the connections between spatiality and citizenship in late socialist China in *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China’s Floating Population*.¹⁹ In light of the 2008 Olympic Games, the significance of urban image construction has been analyzed in several important books. Taking Yuanmingyuan 圆明园, Wangfujing 王府井 and the construction of Olympic projects as examples, Anne-Marie Broudehoux illustrates in *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* how China has used these urban restructuring modes to “attract world attention and capital to the city, namely the exploitation of cultural heritage and the careful manipulation of the past

in the selling of place; the commodification and aestheticization of places to serve business, shopping, and leisure functions; and the spectacular transformation of the city into a stage set for hosting of international media events and the performance of political rituals.”²⁰ In *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of Political Space*, Wu Hung focuses on what Robin Visser has succinctly called “how the Party and the ‘People’ (including artists) have symbolically altered its ideological center, the Square and its monuments,” and illustrates “the Square’s symbolic transformations from a restricted imperial domain to a public arena for the political expression of a modern nation-state, from an epic symbol of socialism to a holy relic of Maoism, and from a stage for orchestrated political theatre to in situ avant-garde performances and spontaneous antigovernment demonstrations.”²¹ Several studies of Beijing’s history, culture, and local life have been published recently to satisfy the worldwide curiosity about the host of the 2008 Olympic Games.²²

Many books have made great contributions to the knowledge of Beijing culture, such as *Beijing: Dushi Xiangxiang yu Wenhua Jiyi* (Beijing Urban Imagination and Cultural Memory 北京: 都市想像与文化记忆), edited by Pingyuan Chen 陈平原 and David Wang 王德威, which collects essays related to various aspects and periods of Beijing literature and culture, and *Jingpai Wenxue de Shijie* (The World of Beijing Literary School 京派文学的世界), edited by Daoming Xu 许道明, which provides a comprehensive analysis of Beijing Literary School.²³ *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, edited by Zhang Zhen, links film study with urban study. Several articles in the anthology focus on Beijing. For instance, in “Tear Down the City: Reconstructing Urban Space in Contemporary Chinese

Popular Cinema and Avant-Garde Art,” Sheldon Lu explores “the theme of the destruction and reconstruction of the city as depicted in multiple media in contemporary Chinese popular cinema and avant-garde photography and video;” in “Tracing the City’s Scars: Demolition and the Limits of the Documentary Impulse in the New Urban Cinema,” Yomi Braester “examine(s) both art films and commercial productions and focus(es) on their use of demolition as a symbol for the need to chronicle the city’s transformation.”²⁴

Although these studies have provided valuable information and insights on Beijing’s socio-political and cultural development, the complicated relations between Beijing’s transforming urban space and its cultural scene still await examination. This dissertation seeks to contribute to this field, by discussing space in contemporary literature, film, drama, and poetry. It is not a survey of Beijing’s contemporary cultural scene, nor is it a theoretical treatise on culture and space, though many chapters deal with these relationships. My initial interests are twofold: to explore new perspectives and insights that space-consciousness has brought to the contemporary cultural scene in Beijing; and to examine the social impact of these space-conscious cultural products.

Theories of Space and Time

The major theoretical framework that has inspired my study is Henri Lefebvre’s theory of space, in which he identifies three critical concepts: “spatial practice” (a close association, within perceived space, between daily reality and urban reality, under neocapitalism), “representations of space” (a dominant conceptualized space), and

representational spaces (a dominated space which the imagination seeks to change and appropriate).²⁵ Lefebvre describes a dialectical relationship within the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived (in spatial terms: spatial practice, representations of space, representational spaces). This triad goes beyond conventional binary theories (as subject and object, Descartes' *res cogitans* and *res extensa*, and the Ego and non-Ego), and places each element in a constantly changing relationship with the other two elements.

The critical theory of the spectacle, especially as elaborated in Guy Debord's *The Society of the Spectacle* is Lefebvre's focus in *The Production of Space*, which critiqued and expanded Debord's situationist ideas on many perspectives. As Kristen Ross has observed, "Though both Debord and Lefebvre agree that (historical or human) time has been dominated by (capitalist space), they disagree strongly as to what to do about it."²⁶ For Lefebvre, Debord's insistence on the primacy of time and its rediscovery is an ideological "fetishization of time," "which involves a reduction of the multi-dimensional complexities of space."²⁷ Unlike Debord, Lefebvre gives primacy to space and its reappropriation. Ross elaborates:

For him [Lefebvre], capitalist false consciousness is not the false consciousness of time, but the false consciousness of space. To abolish the capitalist state, space must be reappropriated on the planetary scale; historical time will be indeed be rediscovered, but "in and through [reappropriated] space." And this is because everything (all the "concrete abstractions") that revolutionaries seek to abolish -- ideology, the state, the commodity, money, value, and class struggle -- do not and cannot exist independently of space.

With Lefebvre's fetishization of space in the service of the state, his analysis of the society of abstract space has three essential aspects – the visual-spectacular; the geometric; and the phallic, two of which are absent from Debord's theories on the

spectacle. The geometric formant is “that Euclidean space which philosophical thought has treated as ‘absolute’, and hence a space (or representation of space) long used as a space of *reference*.” “Isotopy” (or homogeneity) is characteristic of Euclidean space, which guarantees its social and political utility. For Lefebvre, the reduction to this homogeneous Euclidean space (first of nature’s space, then of all social space, which leads easily to the reduction of three-dimensional realities to two dimensions) has “conferred a redoubtable power upon it.”²⁸ As abstract space “cannot be completely evacuated, nor entirely filled with mere images or transitional objects,” it demands “an objectal ‘absolute.’” Therefore, “Phallic erectility bestows a special status on the perpendicular, proclaiming phallocracy as the orientation of space, as the goal of the process – at once metaphoric and metonymic – which instigates this facet of spatial practice.”²⁹

Is the rediscovery of time the key to liberation of space as Debord intends to suggest, or is the reappropriation of space the key to liberation of time as Lefebvre argues? Rather than falling into the conventional binary trap, I think the two concepts (time and space) are mutually dependent and should be considered separately. The liberation of time or space therefore comes from particular combinations of efforts from both of them. I suggest that the reappropriation of space in one’s leisure time is a critical initial step leading toward the rediscovery of time and liberation of space.

Why is one’s leisure time is chosen as the particular kind of time to start with?

Both Debord and Lefebvre recognize a frozen or vanished status of time in modernity.

For Lefebvre:

With the advent of modernity time has vanished from social space. It is recorded solely on measuring-instruments, on clocks, that are isolated and functionally

specialized as this time itself. Lived time loses its form and its social interest -- with the exception, that is, of time spent working.³⁰

He continues, “Economic space subordinates time to itself; political space expels it as threatening and dangerous (to power).”³¹ In the conspiracy of economy and politics, time is confined to economic space. While Lefebvre recognizes the latent controversial and rebellious power of time – to be more specific, leisure time exterior to or on the margin of economic space – which threatens political space and bargains with economic space, Debord has a more passive view of time. When discussing tourism, “a by-product of the circulation of commodities,” Debord points out that “The same modernization that has deprived travel of its temporal aspect has likewise deprived it of the reality of space.”³² For Debord, capitalism has condemned time to a state of inertia.

The requirement of capitalism that is met by urbanism in the form of a freezing of life might be described, in Hegelian terms, as an absolute predominance of "tranquil side-by-sideness" in space over "restless becoming in the progression of time.”³³

Debord’s obsessive concern with the commodity and its monopolization of time makes him, unlike Lefebvre, neglect the reversible power of the body. Acknowledging the brutal fragmentary forces capitalism enacts on fleshy (spatio-temporal) body, Lefebvre claims that “Any revolutionary ‘project’ today, whether utopian or realistic, must, if it is to avoid hopeless banality, make the reappropriation of the body, in association with the reappropriation of space, into a nonnegotiable part of its agenda.”³⁴ He emphasizes that “Its [the body’s] exploratory activity is not directed towards some kind of ‘return to nature’ but “lived experience” – “an experience that has been drained of all content by the mechanisms of diversion, reduction/extrapolation, figures of speech, analogy, tautology, and so on.”³⁵ To recognize the revolutionary potential embedded in the body is

to acknowledge the “restless becoming in the process of time,” especially one’s leisure time, which resists, threatens, and challenges the “absolute predominance of ‘tranquil side-by-sideness’.” Basing on and extending Lefebvre’s observations, I argue that some contemporary Chinese cultural works have successfully reappropriated space in their audiences’ leisure time, temporarily placed them above the matrix of modernity, and bestowed becomingness upon space and time in an imagined sphere.

The Rise of Representational Space and Spatial Practice Against the Hegemony of Spatial Representation

We will now narrow our focus to Beijing. In Beijing, the dominant position of representations of space has ostensibly been manifested in the monumentalization, commercialization and globalization of its cityscape, which have the Communist Party, the unchallenged governing power, as their backbone. Beijing’s cultural scene belongs to representational space. According to Lefebvre, “representational space is alive: it speaks....It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, ... it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.”³⁶ How could cultural products (representational space) combine with spatial practice to deny the “master territories,” to borrow Trinh T. Minh-ha’s words, challenge and influence dominant ideology (and thus representations of space) is a central concern of this study.

In the early twentieth century, the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke recognized the significance of the presence and authority of lyric poetry and created the “thing-poem.” In addition to bringing the substantial “thingness” nature of poetry into

consciousness, Rilke highlighted the significance of the organic space in which the “thing” is implanted, and depicted the dynamic relationships between “thing” and “not-thing”/organic space.³⁷ However, this ontological quality of poetry failed to draw attention at that time. It is not until Martin Heidegger explored the “opening up” process of artwork, the “Being of being,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought* that poetry’s organic nature and becomingness (“opening up”) is gradually acknowledged.³⁸ Poetic language, which consists of poetry, is the very organ that enacts the organic nature of poetry. The ontological being of poetic language has been recognized by Julia Kristeva, to whom poetic language is “text as practice,” which entails signification in process and constitutes a subject-in-process/trial.³⁹ Full of dialectic becomingness, the revolution in poetry therefore breaks through the confines of “representational space,” reaching out to spatial practice and representation of space. Because of the controversial and revolutionary potential embedded in the indeterminacy of poetry, Julia Kristeva made it the testing ground of the openness of the governing system. Some contemporary Chinese poets, such as Yan Li 严力, as this study argues, have created a poetic space in which to distance, critique, and resist the other discursive spaces. Notions of place and identity go through a gradual “opening-up” process in Yan’s poems and become informed by their linkages to the “outside.”

Poetry is not alone in possessing an organic nature. Observing the linguistic difference that informs any cultural performance, Homi Bhabha raises the notion of the Third Space. Bhabha identifies the disjuncture between the subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation. For Bhabha, the intervention of the Third Space of enunciation “makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process,” “destroys this

mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is customarily revealed as an integrated, open, expanding code,” and “constitutes the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew.”⁴⁰ Breaking through usual dualism, this indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation, which belongs to Lefebvre’s category of spatial practice, breeds hybridity and mutability in cultural practice and imbues cultural products (representational space) with immeasurable revolutionary potentials to influence representations of space.

Bhabha’s observation of the disjuncture between the subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation is reminiscent of the relations that Michel de Certeau describes between the operations of walking and the mapping of their paths and their trajectories. In *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Michel de Certeau likens walking to a space of enunciation. He maintains,

The act of walking is to the urban system what the speech act is to language or to the statements uttered. At the most elementary level, it has a triple “enunciative” function: it is a process of *appropriation* of the topographical system on the part of the pedestrian (just as the speaker appropriates and takes on the language); it is a spatial acting-out of the place (just as the speech act is an acoustic acting-out of language); and it implies *relations* among differentiated positions, that is, among pragmatic “contracts” in the form of movements (just as verbal enunciation is an “allocation,” “posits another opposite” the speaker and puts contracts between interlocutors into action).⁴¹

Bhabha’s concerns of discursive embeddedness, cultural positionality, and geo-temporal references that emerge from the disjuncture between the subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation are fully echoed in the triple functions of the act of walking that de Certeau describes above. Walking thus has a living, unfixable status, just like the

indeterminate space of the subject(s) of enunciation: “Walking affirms, suspects, tries out, transgresses, respects, etc., the trajectories it ‘speaks.’”⁴²

Bhabha’s notion of the Third Space of enunciation and de Certeau’s theorization of walking both seem to belong to Lefebvre’s category of spatial practice, each with an emphasis on a specific body activity. Bhabha, de Certeau, and Lefebvre have all recognized the intimate relationships between the bodies and spaces. They not only confirm that bodies are spatialized entities, but also point out that spaces and bodies reciprocally (re)produce one another.⁴³ Like Bhabha and de Certeau who associate the Third Space and walking with heterogeneous potentials, Lefebvre recognizes the body as a source of contradictory and subversive energy. To struggle against “the *ex post facto* projections of an accomplished intellect, against the reductionism to which knowledge is prone,” Lefebvre calls for an “uprising of the body.” The “uprising of the body” that Lefebvre proposes, as emphasized before, has “lived experience” as its object.⁴⁴

The heterogeneous potential associated with the Third Space of enunciation/walking/body, in a word in the sphere of “lived experience,” has been recognized and used in many cultural practices. In contrast to the dominant processes of visualization arises the exploration of the body, which has an emotional or psychological impulse at its core. In the literary field, some contemporary Chinese writers, such as Wang Meng 王蒙 and Xu Xing 徐星, use techniques, such as stream-of-consciousness, confessional narrative, and first-person narration, to maximally shorten the distance among writer, narrator, and reader, to magnify the author’s intention in cultural practice and thus to critique, challenge, and influence the dominant ideology. In the filmic works by Zhang Yang 张杨, Wang Xiaoshuai 王小帅, Jia Zhangke 贾樟柯 and Feng Xiaogang

冯小刚, that are discussed here, the theme of nostalgia saturates the drastically shifting cityscape of Beijing. Nostalgia and the unlocatable sense of history also frequent Yan Li's poetry. Contemporary Chinese theater director Meng Jinghui 孟京辉 has engaged in more sophisticated employment of affect for similar revolutionary purposes which I will explain later.

The Counteraction from Hegemony: Emotional Capitalism

The dominant space (representations of space), keenly aware of the contrastive and contradictory function associated with “lived experience,” tries to homogenize the other two elements in Lefebvre's triad: representational space and spatial practice, by operating “emotional capitalism.” Iva Illouz calls the intentional use of affect in capitalism to fuse emotional and economic discourses and practices to promote economy and regulate emotion “emotional capitalism.”⁴⁵ Subordinating emotional life of subjects to economic discourse, the broad sweep of emotional capitalism enacts the gradual transformation of the emotional into the economic. As astute an observation as this is, Illouz neither defines *affect* nor distinguishes *affect* from *emotion* in *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism*, and thus fails to elaborate how emotional capitalism manages to operate affect.

To understand the operation of emotional capitalism and to enable the possible employment of affect in other spaces, I read Illouz with Brian Massumi who offers meticulous examinations of notions, such as affect and emotion, in *Parables For the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Massumi equaled *affect* with *intensity*.⁴⁶ For

Massumi, affect/intensity is an automatic, latent energy source based in the body, which is beyond regulations of all discourses and free of all prescriptions;⁴⁷ an emotion is a subjective registration of the “the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience” and therefore is personal.⁴⁸ Though Massumi’s arguments are powerful and persuasive, he posits a problematic single-direction movement from affect to emotion, from the non-conscious to the conscious. If affect, unlike the affect-generated emotion, is completely unmanageable, then it could not possibly be employed by the capitalist economic discourse. Therefore, emotional capitalism could not take form.

Borrowing examples from Illouz, I argue that affect is not the only way to generate emotion (which Massumi describes as “intensity owned and recognized”). Emotion could be produced and managed by other means to render affect. A specific manipulative procedure pointed out by Illouz to create emotion is “adequate and standard speech patterns,” which disguise objective calculation with subjective delivery. This paradoxical phenomenon (subjective delivery vs. objective calculation) produced by emotional capitalism has made the *body* what Massumi calls “the body without an image.” For Massumi, the body without an image is a kind of programmed body. It is characterized by receptivity, accumulating “relative perspectives and the passages between them.”⁴⁹ Different from the body, its action is derived primarily from past accumulation rather than from present reality. The practice of emotional capitalism generates similar asubjective and nonobjective effect, which transforms *the body* to *the body without an image*, a dimension of the *flesh* capable of *self-affection*. Through self-affection, a talent commonly shared by actors, emotion can therefore be generated through linguistic means (for instance, ventriloquism) by the body without an image to

render intensity, which in its turn becomes owned and recognized, and further enhances the “authenticity” of the emotion. Therefore, for the body without an image, the relationship between affect and emotion is far more complex and dynamic than the one-directional one that Massumi has depicted.

The fledging operation of emotional capitalism leads to an accelerated process of substitution of the *body* with *the body without an image*, which consequently transfers every subject into an actor/actress in the emotional orchestra tailored for economy. Digging energies from the body/the body without an image, Meng Jinghui, as the study argues, creatively reconfigures theatrical space to enlivened lived experience and innovatively uses the discourse of affect to critically engage the contemporary theater with current socio-political and cultural issues and enact an alternative, resistant space to the dominant discourses in the post-socialist China.

The Structure of the Study

The dissertation is primary based on the observations of the following urban phenomena. 1) Marked by the widespread demolition and reconstruction, China’s cityscape has been modernized at the expense of its ancient architecture. A strong sense of nostalgia for its lost cultural heritage pervades contemporary Chinese culture. 2) Along with marketization, privatization, and globalization, the Chinese people have been placed into a much more liberal global context, which is shown by its awakening senses of selfhood, individualism, sexuality, and tolerance to diversity and difference. 3) The accelerated market economy and consumerism have generated anti-material sentiments,

in addition to the characteristic modernist senses of loneliness, alienation, and emptiness. Contemporary Chinese cultural works have captured these sentiments and created a resistant space to contemplate, parody, and subvert the overwhelmingly utilitarian political and economic landscape. 4) In the overwhelming consumerism, the much shortened if not completely erased distance between cultural product and commodity imposes new challenges on the role of artist in contemporary Chinese society. Despite the seductive power of consumerism, it is the artists' responsibility to guide Chinese people out of the darkness of soulless materialism and the ambiguity of the self-undermining socialist ideology in their everyday life.

Taking Beijing as an example, the dissertation analyzes selected cultural products through a spatial approach. It not only examines the significance of metamorphosing spaces in China as represented in representational space, but also investigates these cultural works' potential or capability to influence and (re)mold spatial practice and representations of space in cultural performance. The dissertation is divided into four chapters, focusing on contemporary cinema, poetry, stories/novels, and drama. While the chapters stand independently, they are connected in their commitment to the central concern of the study.

Chapter One, "A City of Disappearance: Trauma, Displacement and Spectral Cityscape in Contemporary Chinese Cinema," analyzes four contemporary Chinese films about spatial transformations in Beijing: *Shower* (Xizao 洗澡, Dir. Zhang Yang, 1999), *Beijing Bicycle* (Shiqisui de danche 十七岁的单车, Dir. Wang Xiaoshuai, 2001), *The World* (Shijie 世界, Dir. Jia Zhangke, 2004), and *Cell Phone* (Shouji 手机, Dir. Feng Xiaogang, 2004). It argues that the previously drab, politicized, and degendered space of

Beijing has become more commercialized, globalized, sexualized, and gendered. Instead of glorifying such a miraculous spatial reconfiguration, contemporary Chinese urban cinema tries to capture marginalized individual space, posing it as a resistant space against the grand narratives of modernization, globalization, and social progress, and questions the rationality beneath the surface splendor of the modern metropolis.

Chapter Two, “Transcendental Locality: Poetic Difference and Intimate Space in Yan Li’s Poetry,” claims that the avant-gardism of many contemporary Chinese poetic trends, such as the Lower Body (Xiabanshen 下半身) and Trash poetry (Laji pai 垃圾派), is actually entrapped in its opposition to established politics, primarily the politics of the body and economic discourse. It then analyzes several poems by the Beijing-born poet – Yan Li. These poems represent the transforming socio-political spaces in contemporary China, and create a poetic space to distance, critique, and resist the other discursive spaces on the one hand, while on the other indicate the gradual “opening-up” of the unchallenged bound between location and identity, both of which are increasingly informed by their linkages to the “outside” or the “other.”

Chapter Three, “Paradigms of Flexible Configurations: I-Generation and Beijing-Punks in Wang Meng, Xu Xing, and Chun Shu,” examines the contested drama of the epic quest for self-identity through critical rereading of literary works by Beijing writers from three generations: Wang Meng’s “Kite Streamers” (*Fengzheng piaodai* 风筝飘带, 1979), Xu Xing’s “Variation without a Theme” (*Wuzhuti bianzhou* 无主题变奏, 1985), and Chun Shu’s *Beijing Doll* (*Beijing wawa* 北京娃娃, 2001). It contends that essential to China’s explosive urban space is the paradigmatic reconfiguration of self-identity, struggling for discursive and intersubjective legitimacy. Wang Meng and Xu Xing have

used stream-of-consciousness, confessional narrative, and first-person narration, to dig into the unconscious world of personal desire and interfuse the positions of writer, narrator, and reader, to amplify the author's intention in cultural practice to critique, challenge, and influence the dominant ideology. In contrast, Chun Shu's straightforward oppositional position ironically leads to her eventual submission to and collusion with the mainstream consumerist culture.

Chapter Four, "Staging Spatial Conflicts and Affect in Emotional Post-Socialism: Meng Jinghui's Theater," examines two plays directed by Meng Jinghui: *Gossip Street* (Huaihua yitiaojie 坏话一条街, 1998) and *Rhinoceros in Love* (Lianai zhong de xiniu 恋爱中的犀牛, 1999), suggesting that contemporary Chinese drama has broken from the long tradition of realistic drama in China in both content and form. Instead of realistically representing a grand history on stage, contemporary Chinese drama examines the everyday lives of common people, actively and effectively involving its audience in a profound exploration of characters' psychological and spiritual life. Beneath the hilarious feast of language and rhythmic vocal and movement games in *Gossip Street* rests a profound message: rich legacies of Chinese culture, such as folklore (minyao 民谣) and other language forms, have been endangered by urbanization. Meng conveys the urgency of the call for preservation of natural state of being not by didactic means, but by showering his audience with the rich and penetrating artistic power of conventional Chinese culture in a reappropriated space of the theater. *Rhinoceros in Love* showcases the social illnesses that accompany commercialization and consumerism, calling for people's sincerity and true feelings. Like *Gossip Street*, this play mixes vocal patterns with movement rhythm games. It employs trendy language and subject matter, and

pastiches poetry, prose, traditional Chinese opera, advertisement punch lines, live music and songs, to generate affect to ensure a provocative and boisterous theater atmosphere and to enhance the uplifting power of art. The resistant and rebellious space that Meng's plays create has an engaging appeal to Chinese urban youth. The wild popularity of his plays has revived the once dreary Chinese theater.

¹ See Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991); Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi, eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Saskia Sassen, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: The New Press, 1998); David Leiwei Li, ed., *Globalization and the Humanities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Sheldon H. Lu, *China, Transnational Visuality, Global Postmodernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001); Kang Liu, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004); Gregory B. Lee, *Chinas Unlimited: Making the Imaginaries of China and Chineseness* (London: Routledge Curzon, 2003); Claire Huot, *China's New Cultural Scene: A Handbook of Changes* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000); Geremie R. Barmé, *In the Red: On Contemporary Chinese Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Ben Xu, *Disenchanted Democracy: Chinese Cultural Criticism after 1989* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).

² David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

³ David Leiwei Li, ed., *Globalization and the Humanities* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004). P. 2.

⁴ See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁵ See Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Allan Pred and Michael J. Watts, *Reworking Modernity: Capitalisms and Symbolic Discontent* (Hegemony and Experience: Critical Studies in Anthropology and History) (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

⁶ Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society, The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture Vol. I* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1996).

⁷ For instance, John Agnew maintains that place identities continue to characterize localities because of the physical uniqueness of individuals' paths which constantly build and transform places. Manuel Castells believes areas which are not connected with, or relevant to, the space of flows retain their quality and distinctiveness. See John A. Agnew and James S. Duncan, eds., *The Power of Place: Bringing Together Geographical and Sociological imaginations* (Winchester, Massachusetts, 1989); Doreen Massey, *Space, Place, and Gender* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994); Manuel Castells,

Technopolis of the World: The Making of Twenty-First-Century Industrial Complexes (London, New York: Routledge, 1994).

⁸ Sheldon H. Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 2.

⁹ Upper left: the Egg ("Judan," the National Grand Theater of China). Summer 2008. Author photo. Upper right: the Bird's Nest ("Niaochao," the Olympic Stadium). Summer 2008. Available online at <http://www.sauer-thompson.com/junkforcode/archives/2008/08/beijing-olympic.html> (accessed February 17, 2009). Lower left: the Water Cube ("Shui lifang," Beijing National Aquatics Center). Summer 2008. Available online at <http://www.sauer-thompson.com/junkforcode/archives/2008/08/beijing-olympic.html> (accessed February 17, 2009). Lower right: the Big Pants ("Da kudang," the CCTV Tower). Summer 2008. Available online at <http://youngarchitect.wordpress.com/2008/> (accessed February 17, 2009).

¹⁰ Daniel Schearf and Alex Sullivan, "Beijing's Traditional Neighborhoods Fall Victim to Olympic Building Frenzy," available online at <http://www.voanews.com/english/2006-06-05-voa13.cfm> (accessed February 20, 2007).

¹¹ Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), p. 275.

¹² Fei Guo and Robyn Iredale, "Unemployment among the Migrant Population in Chinese Cities: Case Study of Beijing," available online at <http://mams.rmit.edu.au/ed11vkl1vshs1.pdf> (accessed February 20, 2007).

¹³ "China's floating citizen," available online at <http://www.china.org.cn/english/2005/Dec/153273.htm> (accessed February 20, 2007).

¹⁴ Some examples of this scholarship are Frederic Wakeman, Jr., *Policing Shanghai, 1927-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Bryna Goodman, *Native Place, City, and Nation: Regional Networks and Identities in Shanghai, 1853-1937* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995); Gail Hershatter, *Dangerous Pleasures: Prostitution and Modernity in Twentieth-Century Shanghai* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Emily Honig, *Sisters and Strangers: Women in the Shanghai Cotton Mills, 1919-1949* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1986); Emily Honig, *Creating Chinese Ethnicity: Subei People in Shanghai, 1850-1980* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); Elizabeth Perry, *Shanghai on Strike: The Politics of Chinese Labor* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1993); Elizabeth Perry, *Proletarian Power: Shanghai in the Cultural Revolution* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1997); Frederic Wakeman, Jr., and Weh-hsin Yeh, eds., *Shanghai Sojourners* (Berkeley: University of California, Institute of East Asian Studies, Center for Chinese Studies, 1992); Leo Ou-fan Lee, *Shanghai Modern: The Flowering of a New Urban Culture in China: 1930-1945* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1999); Yingjin Zhang, *The City in Modern Chinese Literature and Film: Configurations of Space, Time, and Gender* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996); Yingjin Zhang, ed., *Cinema and Urban Culture in Shanghai, 1922-1943* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1999); Carlton Benson, "From Teahouse to Radio: Storytelling and the Commercialization of Culture in 1930s Shanghai" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1996); Xincun Huang, "Written in the Ruins: War and Domesticity

in Shanghai Literature of the 1940s” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1998); Hanchao Lu, *Beyond the Neon Lights: Everyday Shanghai in the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999); Weh-hsin Yeh, ed., *Wartime Shanghai* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Weh-hsin Yeh, *Shanghai Splendor: Economic Sentiments and the Making of Modern China, 1843-1949* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹⁵ Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), p. 2.

¹⁶ David Strand, *Rickshaw Beijing: City People and Politics in the 1920s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

¹⁷ Madeleine Yue Dong, *Republican Beijing: The City and Its Histories* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), pp. 8-12.

¹⁸ For instance, see Mingzheng Shi, “Beijing Transforms: Urban Infrastructure, Public Works, and Social Changes in the Chinese Capital, 190-1928” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1993); Timothy Weston, “Beijing University and Chinese Political Culture, 1898-1920 (Beida)” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1995); Richard Belsky, “Beijing Scholar-Official Native-Place Lodges: The Social and Political Evolution of Huiguan in China’s Capital City” (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 1997); Weikun Cheng, “Nationalists, Feminists, and Petty Urbanites: The Changing Image of Women in Early Twentieth-Century Beijing and Tianjin” (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1996).

¹⁹ Li Zhang, *Strangers in the City: Reconfigurations of Space, Power, and Social Networks within China’s Floating Population* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001).

²⁰ Anne-Marie Broudehoux, *The Making and Selling of Post-Mao Beijing* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p.20.

²¹ Robin Visser’s review on Wu Hung’s *Remaking Beijing: Tiananmen Square and the Creation of Political Space* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2005) <http://mclc.osu.edu/rc/pubs/reviews/visser2.htm>. Accessed on Dec. 1, 2008.

²² See Michael Meyer, *The Last Days of Old Beijing: Life in the Vanishing Backstreets of a City Transformed* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008); Jasper Becker, *City of Heavenly Tranquility: Beijing in the History of China* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Lillian M. Li, Alison J. Dray-Novvey, and Haili Kong, *Beijing: From Imperial Capital to Olympic City* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007); Susan Naquin’s *Peking: Temples and City Life, 1400-1900* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000).

²³ See Pingyuan Chen and David Wang, eds., *Beijing Dushi Xiangxiang yu Wenhua Jiyi* (Beijing Urban Imagination and Cultural Memory) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2005); Daoming Xu, ed. *Jingpai Wenxue de Shijie* (The World of Beijing Literary School) (Shanghai: Fudan University Press, 1994).

²⁴ See Sheldon Lu’s “Tear Down the City: Reconstructing Urban Space in Contemporary Chinese Popular Cinema and Avant-Garde Art” and Yomi Braester’s “Tracing the City’s Scars: Demolition and the Limits of the Documentary Impulse in the New Urban Cinema,” in Zhang Zhen ed., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the*

Turn of the Twenty of the Twenty-first Century (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

²⁵ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), pp. 38-39.

²⁶ Kristen Ross, "Review of Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space*," in *Not Bored* 30, 1999, available online at <http://www.notbored.org/space.html> (accessed on February 18, 2009).

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 285.

²⁹ Ibid., p. 287.

³⁰ Ibid., p. 95.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995), p. 120.

³³ Ibid., p. 121.

³⁴ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 166.

³⁵ Ibid. p. 201.

³⁶ Ibid. p.42.

³⁷ Rainer Maria Rilke, "To Lou Andreas-Salomé," in Jon Cook ed., *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 36.

³⁸ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 39.

³⁹ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.181.

⁴⁰ Ibid., pp. 54-55.

⁴¹ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1984), p. 97.

⁴² Ibid., p. 99.

⁴³ For instance, see Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 195.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 200-1.

⁴⁵ Iva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 5.

⁴⁶ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 27.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 25.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁹ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p. 57.

Chapter One A City of Disappearance: Trauma, Displacement and Spectral Cityscape in Contemporary Chinese Cinema

China has been undergoing enormous changes since the social and economic reforms unleashed by Deng Xiaoping. These changes are represented in various spaces, the most noticeable of which is cityscape, which has been commercialized, monumentalized, and globalized. This chapter will relate Henri Lefebvre's space theory to the contemporary Chinese economy and urban landscape, and then examine the manifestations of space as represented in four Chinese films: *Shower*, *Beijing Bicycle*, *The World*, and *Cell Phone*. All four of these films depict spatial transformations in the Chinese city. The previously drab, politicized, and degendered space of Beijing has become commercialized, globalized, sexualized, and gendered. Instead of glorifying such a miraculous spatial reconfiguration, contemporary Chinese urban cinema tries to capture marginalized individual space, posing it as a resistant space against the grand narratives of modernization, globalization, and social progress, and questions the rationality beneath the surface splendor of the modern metropolis.

Henri Lefebvre's Conceptualization of Space

Henri Lefebvre maintains in his groundbreaking exposition of the production of space that "formerly each society to which history gave rise within the framework of a

particular mode of production, and which bore the stamp of that mode of production's inherent characteristics, shaped its own space."¹ Lefebvre's exposition primarily rests on Marxism (commodity, labor, class conflict, etc), prioritizes the power of production, and illustrates a top-down (mode of production – spatial arrangement) constitutive mode of space. In this top-down spatiological model, Lefebvre divides social space into three subcategories: spatial practice, representations of space, and representational spaces, and tries to link the triadic spatial system with subjects by shifting his focus to the *body* and its multiple relations with space. He thus offers a "perceived-conceived-lived" triad of concepts in his discussion of space.² Lefebvre elaborates, "That the lived, conceived and perceived realms should be interconnected, so that the 'subject', the individual member of a given social group, may move from one to another without confusion – so much is a logical necessity."³ This approach enriches his previous top-down, production-oriented spatial system with psychological and esthetical dimensions, and softens the rigidity and violence of the space that is dominated and inscribed by various discourses with dynamic spaces of appropriation and internalization.

The notions that bodies are spatialized entities, and that spaces and bodies mutually (re)produce one another are not new. Analyzing the policed boundaries of body caused both by brute action against individual bodies (e.g., imprisonment) and by the common social norms underpinning those actions, Michel Foucault maintains that bodies become the nexus at which power is produced through activation and resistance.⁴ Michel de Certeau considers space as both the constitutive medium of embodiment and as something constituted by bodily practices.⁵ The inscribability and transgressability of both space and bodies foreground their very nature of being narratives. Derrida's notion of the

rhetoricity of all texts characterizes also the sphere of space, which is, unarguably, also a certain kind of text.⁶ In the filmic representations of Beijing that this chapter examines, we will see there is no lack of metaphors and rhetoric of Beijing, and of (re)inscribed bodies in this space manage to retain, react to, and act upon their “being-inscribed” state. Lefebvre’s most important contribution to the study of space is his linkage of the previous models with Marxism, highlighting the significance of economic factor that resonates with the process of globalization.

When discussing social space, Lefebvre refers to Marx’s identification of “things/not-things” and adopts Marx’s analysis of things as “ideological objects” into his interpretation of social space. Lefebvre explains that “This space qualifies as a ‘thing/not-thing’, for it is neither a substantial reality nor a mental reality, it cannot be resolved into abstractions, and it consists neither of a collection of things in space nor an ensemble of things related to space, it has an actuality other than that of abstract signs and real things which it includes.”⁷ Lefebvre’s approach innovatively links the realm of capitalist economy with that of social space, and broadens its subject from the strictly defined “things qua commodities” to a more dynamic spatial actuality. As global capitalism and spatiology are indispensable to globalization, the torrents between things and not-things described by Lefebvre echoes those between the global and the local.

Using this “thing/not-thing’ quality to analyze the process of globalization, we see that along with the process of global capitalism, the space of “not-things” (the abstract space fraught with discourses, ideological, political and institutional powers) becomes subordinate to the space of “things,” be they commodities or non-commodities; while the space of “non-commodities” becomes subordinate to the space of “commodities.”

Examples that testify to these tendencies are plenty: political powers across the globe tend to prioritize if not serve economic developments (for lack of any successful alternative, capitalist economy seems to be the only possibility); cultural and historical legacies are universally threatened with devastation; natural space on a global scale is invaded for commercial purposes; individuals, groups, or nations are threatened by the potential if not already actual danger of loss of identity (the increasing impossibility for subjects to live out of the categories of laborer and consumer). We will observe later in this chapter that “thing/not-thing” is a useful framework with which to analyze the tangled relations between economic development and urban space under the discourse of globalization in contemporary China as depicted in several contemporary films.

The Chinese Twist of Lefebvre’s Space Theory

Although the movement from “production of things” to “production of space”⁸ suggested by Lefebvre is applicable to most capitalist countries, China is a special case. In contemporary China, the production of space, which fosters the marketization and urbanization, is not initiated by a certain mode of production as one expects to find in capitalist countries. Before Deng Xiaoping’s policy of “reform and openness” (*gaige kaifang*) since 1978, China was an isolated country with a socialist planned economy. It was a political and administrative decision of China’s government to designate Shenzhen, Zhuhai, and some other cities as Special Economic Zones (SEZs) in the early 1980s after observing the economic prosperity brought by the capitalist economic system in the West. The government experiments with market economy and privatization in SEZs and

gives them special economic policies and flexible governmental measures to facilitate business operations. In other words, the “production of space” in the SEZs is initiated by the government to nurture a mode of production (the production of things), not the other way around. The economic success of these SEZs made the government open first coastal cities and then major inland cities to foreign investment, and promote marketization and privatization on a national scale.

The reversed order of movement from production of space to that of things is caused by China’s special situation. As we all know, China has a long history of feudalism, a well-developed political system that dictated the production of space and things. In “*Shi* (officials, scholars 仕) *nong* (peasants 农) *gong* (craftsmen 工) *shang* (businessmen 商)” the four categories of ancient Chinese citizens, *shi* ranks the first, while *shang* the last. As the social order of these categories was rooted in the Confucian emphasis on ethnics, *shi*, who possessed the most cultural and ethnic capital, enjoyed enormous privileges over the other three categories and constituted the feudal government, which exercised its power over the production of space with the help of its army. This production and maintenance of space by the feudal government not only stabilize the feudal system, but also guaranteed sustainable production. The capitalist mode of production emerged in China in the 16th century, the late Ming Dynasty, but it failed to become a dominant mode of production and thus never had the power to produce corresponding spaces to facilitate its development.

After the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, political space once again became dominant, dictating, coordinating and penetrating all other spaces including the space of the country’s planned economy, and making them its subsidiaries. Deng’s

famous slogan, “Development is the key” (*Fazhan caishi yingdaoli*) evolved from the never-admitted realization that the spaces in China produced out of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong thought cannot generate and foster either an efficient mode of production, or a keen awareness of the global context in which China has positioned itself. Just as Liu Kang remarks, “Globalization is not simply a new international or global conceptual framework by which China’s changes can be understood. Rather, it is both a historical condition in which China’s *gaige kaifang* [reform and openness] has unfolded and a set of values or ideologies by which China and the rest of the globe are judged.”⁹ The policy of *gaige kaifang* targets the economic sphere. It has reconfigured spaces to initiate, spur, and spread single mode of production: capitalist economy. Obviously, the Chinese Communist Party wants to maintain its political, cultural, and ideological stability, while at the same time it is adapting its economic systems to the international economic system, which could bring in foreign capital and employment opportunities for the local laborers. The paradox of an ideology generating certain spaces and a mode of production that opposite to its tenets reveals the shifting nature of the leading party under the inescapable impact of global capitalism. Nevertheless, the changes in the economic field inevitably affect and reshape the contours of ideology and local culture. When marketization and privatization take control of the mode of production in China, it inevitably produces spaces that facilitate that mode of production.

As the government has already taken the initiative by redefining spaces to reshape the mode of production, the subsequent spatial changes accelerated by production of things have been manifested even more dramatically and arbitrarily. If China was under the supervision of ideological powers from its establishment in 1949 to the 1970s, then

contemporary China is operated by economic forces, which dictate the ordering of the other dimensions such as ideology and culture. In a word, the national priority of economic development instigated China's willingness to join the discourse of globalization, and its economic development is a natural product of this motivation, arguably at the expense of its culture and ideology.

China's enormous economic success has justified the mode of production (socialist market economy with Chinese characteristics) that the government fostered by reforming social spaces. The discrepancies between the country's institutions and its institutionalized spaces have been glossed over by its economic success and unprecedented consumption. In the Post-New Era (hou xin shiqi), a term used to refer to the period since 1989,¹⁰ Chinese society has been cautiously diverting its attention from politics to economic development. Spurred by the slogan "Development is the key" and the promotion of the idea of "allowing a group of people to get rich first," the Chinese people are being driven single-mindedly to pursue material gains, bypassing or ignoring ambiguous political and ideological issues. The teleology of developmentalism has created an enormous disparity between rich and poor, uneven geographical development, corruption, crime, and instability, aside from severe moral and spiritual degradation. People are left to their own resources to survive materially and spiritually in China's turbulent climate of modernization and globalization.

The visual aspects of Chinese people's daily life have undergone dramatic changes in the wake of China's marketization, urbanization and globalization. These processes have radically transformed China's cities, wiping out their traditional architecture, erasing their valuable cultural heritages, and replacing it with glamorous

skyscrapers. People who occupy this transforming urban space also transform themselves. One can easily spot cool Western looks on the streets of big Chinese cities. Chinese urban youth are often seen in Starbucks with laptops and iPods, just like their counterparts in the West. Innumerable migrations (*mingong* 民工) constitute another significant aspect of the monstrously attractive modern cityscape.

The cityscape has reshaped human relationships: the cozy and familiar sense of community has been supplanted by the coldness and indifference of (post)modernity. People are less tied to their birthplaces, but move around, usually from the countryside to city, from inland to the coast, and from small town to metropolis in search of a more prosperous future. In China, mobility is necessary for survival. Only a few privileged Chinese citizens enjoy mobility for recreational purposes, although travel and the status of what Aihwa Ong has called “flexible citizenship” are now popular among the middle and upper classes.¹¹ The majority has to cope with the limited mobility imposed on them by China’s government-fueled marketization and globalization and their relationship with place has become less ontological and more semiotic.

Filmic Representation of Contemporary Beijing

The emerging and expanding metropolis in China has become the representative locale where the conflicts and congruencies of globalization and localization, western and indigenous culture, and (post-) modernity and convention are ostensibly staged. Many Chinese domestic films are set against such a glamorous space, and reflect upon its significance in visually and linguistically reshaping and redefining human relationships

and socio-cultural values. By exploring four contemporary Chinese films, I examine the reconfiguration of space in contemporary China and the intricate relations of space within the framework of globalization.

Shower: A Nostalgic Fantasy of Disappearing Hutong Culture

Zhang Yang's *Shower*, well received both in China and abroad, is full of detailed cultural codes. Numerous scenes subtly present the contrast between the traditional and the modern, in terms of space, subjectivity, and interpersonal relationships. The shock of the futuristic opening scene in which we see someone use a "body washer" (an automatic shower machine) is contrasted instantly with a traditional bathhouse (owned by Master Liu) where men of all ages enjoy hot baths, massages, fire cup treatments, pedicures, and intimate social interactions. With the arrival of Da Ming (Master Liu's elder son) from Shenzhen, a special economic zone in China, we observe the juxtaposition of the intimacy of the traditional community of Master Liu and Er Ming (Master Liu's second son, who is mentally retarded) with the estrangement embedded in Da Ming's relationship with his relatives and acquaintances.

In the film, place and location are tied to people's identity, shaping and regulating people's relationships. The traditional bathhouse is not only a place to become clean, but also a social place where neighbors gather, exchange news, help and entertain each other. It is a relaxing and healing place where a troubled marriage is rejuvenated (He Zeng and Wang Fang's marriage is saved by the "Mandarin Duck bath" arranged by Master Liu), and where suppressed talent is unveiled (Miao Zhuang can sing "O Solo Mio" only when

water is pouring down on him). Though the bathhouse is old, and in desperate need of repair, Master Liu and Er Ming find meaning and pleasure of life in their daily ritual. Their enjoyment is subtly and humorously conveyed through the small tricks they play on each other in their daily chores. Although Er Ming is mentally retarded, his close relationship with Master Liu is contrasted sharply with the formality between the Master Liu and Da Ming. Both Master Liu and Er Ming belong to the bathhouse, where people care more about each other than about money; while Da Ming belongs to Shenzhen, where money defines everything including interpersonal relationships.

The complicated attitude of local dwellers toward the old houses in the back alley was revealed by Master Liu's words to Da Ming on the roof of the bathhouse after repairing it one rainy night: "These



houses are like old people. No matter how hard you try to fix them up, they're still old. But they're special. This is where I've spent my life." (Figure 2) Master Liu knows that these old neighborhood houses will be torn down sooner or later, just as he himself will die. His words to Da Ming, not only the modern "intruder" but also Master Liu's heir, reveal his deep awareness and calm acceptance of social development. Nevertheless the downplayed meditating tone of the roof scene set against a pink morning sky intensifies the immeasurable loss of culture and memory in the processes of China's modernization and globalization in a seemingly casual and trivialized detail.

With the tearing down of the old facilities in Beijing, the local people suffer from the loss of memories, communal customs, and genuine interpersonal connections. The harmony of the traditional bathhouse of *Shower* has been destroyed, and replaced by

multilayered displacement on the level of culture, as well as individual psychology and temporality. As Sheldon Lu has insightfully pointed out, “*Chai* (demolition 拆) is the very theme of much contemporary Chinese visual art. It points not only to the physical demolition of the old cityscape, but more profoundly to the symbolic and psychological destruction of the social fabric of families and neighborhoods.”¹² What comes with the demolition of old architecture is a rationale rooted in developmentalism, the remoteness and coldness of which is hinted at in the scene in which Er Ming is tackled by three hospital attendants when Da Ming attempts to send him to the mental hospital after Master Liu’s death. Though institutionalization and modernization can be degrading and impersonal, the fact that everybody in the neighborhood, no matter how reluctant, agrees to move shows that economic development is irreversible.

Lefebvre maintains that:

Today everything that derives from history and from historical time must undergo a test. Neither ‘culture’ nor the ‘consciousness’ of peoples, groups or even individuals can escape the loss of identity that is now added to all other besetting terms... Ideas, representations or values which do not succeed in making mark on space, and thus generating (or producing) an appropriate morphology, will lose all pith and become mere signs, resolve themselves into abstract descriptions, or mutate into fantasies.¹³

Unfortunately, *Shower* is a “fantasy” that “offers a nostalgic look at a bygone way of life.”¹⁴ Because some of the local cultures and customs of Beijing displayed in the film had virtually disappeared by the time the film was made, some have criticized Zhang Yang for showcasing an “imaginary” local culture to appeal to the western gaze. This criticism of Zhang’s self-Orientalism is valid to a certain extent, as the globalized Western countries do eagerly seek heterogeneity and diversity to counterbalance their keenly felt homogenization.¹⁵ Nevertheless, Zhang argued that he wanted to arouse the

audience's awareness of and concern for the cultural loss associated with China's economic progress. He insists that he made the film not for film festivals, but for the Chinese, with attention to the relationships and feelings close to Chinese people's lives.¹⁶ Numerous viewers' responses online testify that the film's international appeal rests in its subtle and nostalgic treatment of interpersonal relationships, not in its "exhibition" of indigenous cultures.

In other words, *Shower* successfully represents a social space, which, to use Lefebvre's words, qualifies as 'thing/not-thing.' As Lefebvre claims, "Theory has shown that no space disappears completely, or is utterly abolished in the course of the process of social development – not even the natural place where that process began. 'Something' always survives or endures – 'something' that is not a *thing*."¹⁷ Though the film is focused on disappearing (if not already gone), nuanced, and region-specific culture, it has been welcomed both domestically and internationally. Its extremely positive reception testifies that the represented conventional space on screen has not yet disappeared completely. Something not only survives the ruthless process of modernization but also comes back to haunt us. Despite the different orientations of Zhang Yang and those international-festival-minded Chinese filmmakers, they surprisingly reach the same target, which is reminiscent of what Sheldon Lu has pointed out "The transformation of a new sensory economy in contemporary Chinese cultural production, through what some critics have termed the 'post-material' condition, is concomitant with the destruction of old spatial forms and the reconstruction of new cities."¹⁸

Stepping out of this marketized mind-set of the argument on the film, we approach the complex relations among space, culture and subject. Bathhouse (zaotang 澡

堂) and *hutong* (traditional alleyways) designate special spaces, different from private showers in individual homes and modern districts of apartment complexes. In bathhouses, one socializes in the nude with people whom one usually has known for decades. There is no modern equivalent of such spaces. Physical exposure, which belongs primarily to private or commercial spaces in the modern world, is naturally integrated into this semi-public space (bathhouse) where intimacy and formality is fused into an expected coziness. This space has an ambiguous color, and functions as a meeting place of public and private.

The buffering effect that these traditional spaces offer is different from those offered by such modern facilities and architectures as theme parks and shopping malls. The former is closely tied to people's everyday life: people go to the bathhouses to clean, refresh, and entertain themselves; residents in Hutongs smell and taste each others' meals and exchange help and favors; In contrast, the latter stands more separately from daily life: people take vacations and shop or "getaway" on weekends; the fake impression given by the internet of progressively more transparent relations between the public and the private (the publicizing of private spaces and privatizing of public spaces) can hardly penetrate the inertia and isolation of real spaces, and thus remain primarily in the imaginary virtual world. The demolition, reformation, and symbolization of these traditional spaces unavoidably changes, reduces, and erases subjects' practices within these spaces and the residue of history and culture embedded in these spaces. The "fantastic" space represented in *Shower* thus presents a "third" space, which is differentiated and estranged from both the traditional space and the modern space, and

projects a resistant space on screen to recollect the past while questioning and challenging the present and the future.

Analyzing a flashback sequence of trading grain for water in *Shower* which links the father with water, Sheldon Lu keenly observes:

the self-conscious evocation of *Yellow Earth* wraps up and inverts fifteen years of New Chinese Cinema (1984-1999), not by dismissing the Chinese father as a backward figure in the nation's quest for modernity but rather by returning to him as the root of harmony and life much needed in the time of mindless commercialization and globalization.¹⁹

If the Fifth Generation films have been preoccupied by vast rural areas and obsessed by a rebellious desire to overthrow the patriarchic figure of the “father” as a representation of “historical and cultural reflection” (*lishi fansi, wenhua fansi* 历史反思, 文化反思) in the 1980s, then contemporary urban films refocus on the city, a fixed centre which is surrounded by and privileged over peripheral areas and constitutes a hub in the global network. The “father” figure, present in or absent from contemporary urban cinema, has been inscribed with new meanings and intimately linked to space. In *Shower*, the father is closely associated with the bathhouse, which symbolizes the essence of China's traditional culture, and the father's death coincides with the demolition of the place. In the other three films, the patriarchic power has been disseminated in the urban space, which exercises omnipotent powers over its inhabitants.

Beijing Bicycle: Sacrificed Youth in the Heat of the Concrete Buildings

The same juxtaposition of traditional and modern architecture also appears in Wang Xiaoshui's *Beijing Bicycle*. Though this film depicts a confusing cityscape, the

marks of modernity and commercialization are evident and aggressive. *Hutong*, as a form of space, becomes the embodiment of certain feelings. It marks out a private sphere, be it that of an individual, a family, or a neighborhood, confronting the outside - the *other*: the modern and the unfamiliar.

Beijing Bicycle unfolds with the juxtaposition and intertwining of the lives of two teenage protagonists, Gui and Jian. Despite their obvious differences in class, fate, and background, both of them live in back alleys (Gui lives with his countryman, and Jian lives with his reassembled family) and their fates are linked by a bicycle, the vehicle once a necessity in Beijing now a luxury boundary-setting symbol for urban youth. For most Beijing residents, owning a car has become a symbol of success. The busy modern street scene delivered in dazzling light with fast tempo is represented in the film as an alien “other” to both Gui and Jian, whose lives are rooted in *Hutongs* and entangled with a bicycle.

For Jian, a Beijing teenager, the fast changing landscape and the prosperity of the city have nothing to do with him. Though this city is his birthplace, he is estranged, if not excluded, from its development and construction, physically and spiritually. He frequents deserted construction sites where he practices his bicycle skills with his friends and glimpses the busy swelling city from afar. He has no personal space at home either, where he shares a tiny room with his stepsister whom his father favors. He seeks refuge on courtyards and rooftops. Scrutinizing the ambiguous relations between the conventional and yet still dominant rhetoric of improving one’s *suzhi* (quality 素质) through education and the inevitable early commodity envy caused by surging consumerism in contemporary China, Gary Xu points out in his analysis of this film that

“Early commodity envy is normally integrated in the image of improved and desirable *suzhi* when the commodity assumes transnational symbolic power, which, together with China’s traditional valuation of education, disguises the fact that the body of the urban single child is as much an object of exploitation as that of the migrant laborer.”²⁰

The tyrannical, exploitative power of urban space exerts its power more cruelly on Gui, a migrant from the countryside, who is exposed to a living space that is completely different from that of his ancestors. His longing for the city is mixed and complicated by the desperation caused by discrimination, exploitation, and sometimes abuse of migrants. There are many scenes in the film in which we observe the urbanite treating Gui as a disposable being. The secretary at the Feida company where Gui works talks to him always in demanding tones and forces him to work one extra day beyond the limit of the agreed contract to obtain the bike. The hotel front-desk attendant would even detain Gui because of a misunderstanding for which she is partially responsible. Gui’s innocence and stubbornness are juxtaposed against the caustic indifference and violence of the city. The silent trauma is stunningly depicted in the final scene in which the heavily bruised Gui swaggers through the crowded streets shouldering his damaged and yet finally owned bicycle (Figure 3). Urban space, once again, plays the role of the patriarchic power, dehumanizing people.



For Gui, the fantastic city scenes can only be glimpsed from far away as an invisible person. There are several voyeuristic scenes in which Gui and his countryman peep at a woman (played by Zhou Xun) who constantly changes her clothes and poses

before the mirror in a big apartment. They later discover this woman is only a maid in the household and comes from the countryside. This discovery informs the two men that the modern erotic urban body they gaze upon is actually a fake one. This, as Gary Xu pointed out, reveals “the pure arbitrariness” of such an urban-rural divide, which is based on status symbols such as clothing.²¹ The irony also in many aspects echoes the central theme in the film: the fakeness of the city’s superficial prosperity and the oppressive nature of the new mode of production, which is embodied by the imported Fordism operating as the guiding principle for the express company for which Gui works.

In *Beijing Bicycle*, we see modernity exerting its power on an economic level. The government-sponsored developmentalism has generated a process of commercialization of space which seems to exert on the one hand an integrating power, motivating people to work and giving people hope, and on the other, an excluding, if not expelling, effect, trashing and destroying people’s dreams and values. Dictated by economic forces, “place” is gradually stripped of its cultural and historical significances and becomes a monster with its own subjectivity. People who inhabit the space become marginalized and objectified by the “reformed” urban space.

The World: A Tale of the “Forbidden” Global Village

Set against the backdrop of globalization and China’s commercialization, Jia Zhangke’s *The World* meditates on the ironic and superficial relations among space, subject, culture, and identity. The word “place” in *The World* is devoid of its physical meaning. Place is no longer attached to any specific piece of soil, but assumes a more

abstract, symbolic, and virtual significances. This significance heads toward a global spectacular sphere at the expense of specific historical or cultural depth. This tendency comes with China's shift from an agricultural economy to an industry and information-technology one. The significance of place rests on its position as a nexus in a global network. The sense of substantiality associated with the word has been trivialized, and "place" has been supplanted by a multi-dimensional word "space," which could somehow penetrate the limits of place and time and create a space with more independency. "Real place" (the physical existence of location), has been turned into a stage (to represent) and a storage (to contain), both of which functions are captured by such a structure as the shopping mall, a representation of artificial culture and a container of conditioned subjects. This phenomenon exemplifies the irony that Arif Dirlik observes: "the very effort to manipulate places in the marketing of commodities and images is responsible also for the renewed awareness of places."²² This irony has been captured and illustrated by Jia Zhangke's *The World*.

"The World" is actually the name of a theme park in Beijing, which exhibits scale replicas of landmarks from around the globe. "The World" is also a container of migrant laborers newly arrived from the interior to serve in the park. The Beijing marked by the World Park and populated by rural laborers obviously has nothing to do with the old Beijing, which could house characters such as those in Lao She's *Teahouse* (Chaguan 茶馆) or *Camel Xiangzi* (Luotuo Xiangzi 骆驼祥子). The protagonists in the film, Zhao Tao and her boyfriend Taisheng, like many other characters, are not born in Beijing but come from Shanxi to seek opportunities. In their daily practices, they reshape and are reshaped by the space. As subjects, they experience a double displacement in the park:

they move from the countryside to Beijing where they are surrounded not by an urban Chinese culture but by a fake and inaccessible global microenvironment.

The discrepancy between space and subject is evident in the beginning sequence of the film in which the camera follows the fully costumed Zhao Tao wandering the showgirls' shabby and crowded dormitory and dressing room. The scene cuts directly to a glamorous show performed by these girls and then suddenly back to their quiet underground living space. The contrast of places reveals the temporal and commoditized nature of the subjects' presence. It also represents a collision of diverse dimensions of time: the migrant actor's psychological time – which is very much attuned to the temporal dimension in which he/she grew up; the time performed on stage – the representation of a historical spectacle of Mongolian culture following the latest Las Vegas style act; and the stagnant real life time of these actors backstage.

These dimensions of time contradict and negotiate with each other. The psychological time of the subjects belongs to the past, which is conveyed by the lingering camera with a subdued sense of nostalgia. This past dimension is preserved by memory, manifested by habit, and challenged by the present. The present real live time is full of bleak darkness, which is meant to be endured temporarily and to serve as a jumping board to the future. The only glamorous time is the fake time on stage. Regardless of the virtual nature of this staged time, it seems to be the only possible means of assisting the migrants to reach their dreams. The subjects in the film thus live in a gap of various temporal dimensions, neither in the past, the present, nor the future. It is a time in its own constantly transforming process, which though thick with references to a vague future, belongs to no specific time zone.

This makes one think of David Harvey's contention that "progress entails the conquest of space, the tearing down of all spatial barriers and the ultimate 'annihilation of space through time.' The reduction of space to a contingent category is implied in the notion of progress itself."²³ It is a "progress of becoming, rather than being in space and place."²⁴ It is in this gap of multi-layered annihilation of space and time that the modern subjects are imprisoned. The spectacular cityscape in Beijing can be interpreted as a produced, commercialized space (using Henri Lefebvre's term²⁵) intended to disguise the government promoted reproduction of the capitalist mode of production and to seduce people into the unshakable circle of commodity, consumption and production.

The opening sequence is followed by another silent scene, in which the Eiffel Tower and other world famous landmarks are clearly identifiable in the background. A



hunchbacked Chinese beggar walks slowly into the screen from the left, shouldering a heavy parcel. This old man walks to the middle of the screen, stops, and then turns to face the camera. Though the face is completely in the shadow, one can sense a haggard face full of bitterness, struggle, and marks of age (Figure 4). The "authentic" old Chinese man in the foreground contrasts sharply with the "imported" landmarks of the world in the background. Both the old Chinese man and the landmarks, regardless of their fakeness, are in Beijing, a city that seems to be neither the old man's birthplace, nor the original site of the landmarks. The sense of displacement of both subject and object is thus silently conveyed in this scene with its subtle irony and strong visual contrast. World

Park unmistakably expresses China's wish to go global by globalizing and monumentalizing its local space even if it is accompanied by cultural and humanistic loss. As Sheldon Lu points out, "World Park is a monument to China's imaginary integration into the world at large, but the characters from Shanxi province are not part of this brave new world. They are vagrant people at the margins of China's modernization."²⁶

Xiaotao and Taisheng come to Beijing to pursue a dream. Though the capital city exposes them to many fresh facets of life, most of which are under the glamour of commoditization, the two are actually on their way to self-destruction. Taisheng, as a park policeman, becomes involved in illegal activities, and then has an affair with a married woman who is waiting in Beijing to join her husband overseas. Xiaotao eventually learns of the affair. Until this point Xiaotao has withstood the adverse effects of Beijing and the World Park, but now, disillusioned by her boyfriend's disloyalty, she kills herself and Taisheng with leaked gas, as it appears in the ambiguous ending of the film.²⁷

Urban phenomena such as adultery, work-related injuries and deaths, migrant laborers, petty gangsters, small-scale merchants, prostitutes, and showgirls all find their representations in the film. The dramatic turns of modern urban life upset the peacefulness and security the Chinese conventionally seek. Everyday life in contemporary Beijing is a drama on the concrete stage of the World Park, which stands as a miniature of the stage of the metropolis. Jia Zhangke shows us that the glorious high-rises of Beijing have come at a tremendous human and cultural cost. On the diverse stages presented in *The World*, though there are constant signs of the lack of

governmental guidance and regulation, life tragedies are in general downplayed and released in a subdued tragic tone. This kind of treatment also characterizes Jia Zhangke's other films such as *Platform* (Zhantai 站台, 2000), *Xiao Wu* (Xiao Wu 小武, 1997), and *Unknown Pleasures* (Ren Xiaoyao 任逍遥, 2002). Nevertheless, the naturalistic acting and the subtle juxtapositions of the spectacular stage performances in the World Park and the bitterness of life in Beijing intensify the silent suffering and invisible pain endured by Chinese people under China's modernization. Lu points out "the miniature virtual world entraps its workers and is a mockery of globalization."²⁸ The film also represents a gendered space, subordinating female figures to the aggressive and masculine commercialization, globalization, and memorialization of space and reducing them to spectacles on the "global" stage and to illegal sex workers. This sexualized and gendered space serves as a contrast to the previously degendered or gender-neutral Mao period, which is characterized very well by Mao Zedong's favorite proverb – "Women hold up half the sky."²⁹

To summarize, in *The World*, the migrants are displaced people. The relationship between people and place in the film is temporal, opportunistic, commercial, and staged. On the one hand, they are "global" beings living in "globalized surroundings"; on the other hand, they are trapped in this fake, unreal "prison" of the World Park. If we see a globalization of local specificities in *The Shower*, then in this film, we see a localization of the global where the significance of the local has been emptied out. The transaction between local and global conducted in *The Shower* is primarily on a cultural level (an imaginary visual space for the disappearing local culture and history), although economic development overpowers cultural needs at the end. In *The World*, we witness a more

“mature” fusion of culture and economy, adopting Fredric Jameson’s famous declaration, “the becoming cultural of the economic, and the becoming economic of the culture.”³⁰

One notable thing is that the “culture” that goes through the global economic filter or has been generated by that filter is not the kind of “culture” that bears unique and irreplaceable tempo-geographic marks, but a commercialized culture. The immense reduplication capability of this kind of culture deprives its own dimension of temporality. Thereby in the theme park *The World*, a presumably cultural space, the transaction between the local and the global is conducted ironically on a practical or economic level with only a pseudo-global viewpoint and an ironic mimicry of misplaced minority shows which lack any specific cultural and historical depth or sincerity.

Cell Phone: The Intimate Foe of the Modern Being

Moving from *The Shower* to *Beijing Bicycle* and then to *The World*, we see that globalization and modernization have transformed space and subjects, and trivialized the significance of place. In Feng Xiaogang’s *Cell Phone*, we continue to observe how the concepts of space and subject have been mobilized and redefined, and how the significance of location is trivialized by modern technology. Feng Xiaogang, the most popular commercial film director in China, is known for his series of highly acclaimed “New Year Celebration Movies.” *Cell Phone* is extremely popular in China. At first sight, it seems to be a film about adultery. The underlying contrast between the traditional and the modern is to a large degree glossed over by Feng Gong’s hilarious acting. Nevertheless we can trace contrasts between the countryside and the fashionable modern places (such as the protagonist’s stylish home and office, and luxurious hotels), between

the literally unwired village and the wireless-phone-dominated city, and between the conventional community built on trust and mutual support and the modern casual relationships underlined by exchange value and deceit.

In *Cell Phone*, the complex relationships between men and women unfold in connection with cell phones. Arjun Appadurai points out that “Electronic media give a new twist to the environment within which the modern and the global often appear as flip sides of the same coin. Always carrying the sense of distance between viewer and event, these media nevertheless compel the transformation of everyday discourse.”³¹ The cell phone, the most popular communication tool in contemporary urban China, transcends spatial constraints, mediates private and public, and sparks numerous stories between men and women. It can both hide and reveal the protagonist’s identity, and has become a symbol of the commercialization of interpersonal relations.

In the film, Yan Shouyi, the male protagonist, though not handsome, is very popular as he is at the zenith of his career. He has the power to recommend people for TV programs, and the money to own a car and a luxurious apartment - a living standard which can only be enjoyed by members of the upper class. In other words, he is a very successful migrant in Beijing. In contrast to the name of his TV talk show, *Youyi Shuoyi* (Speak your mind 有一说一), Yan is deceitful in real life. He handles his cell phone to conceal his affairs: He takes the batteries out of his phone to make certain he "cannot be reached," using excuses like being in a meeting to cover his dates with other women; he often speaks as if the connection is bad and he is unable to hear callers' voices; he changes his cell phone’s mode to vibration when he does not want to pick up his lover’s

call in the presence of his wife. All these scenes are delivered in such a humorous yet realistic tone that no audience can miss the underlying sarcasm.

Yan's splendid performance nevertheless demonstrates his subordination to his phone. No matter where Yan is, his lover can always intrude through his cell phone. His cell phone helps him hide his identity, but it is also ready to reveal his secrets at any time. He has only temporary power over his cell phone, while his cell phone always relays his lies back to him and, in the end, punishes him.

A remarkable example of the power struggle between Yan and his cell phone happens when Yan, Shen Xue (Yan's wife), and Fei Mo (Yan's colleague) get their feet massaged. In this scene, Hu Yue (Yan's lover) calls. First she sends Yan a text message informing him that she is in the same hotel room in the city of Qingdao that they once stayed together, and scolding him for lying to her. Upon receiving this, Yan deletes the message, switches the phone mode to vibration mode, and then, after glancing at Shen Xue who is watching from a distance, declares that the next day has a fifty percent chance of rain. Shen Xue, who is obviously less complex than Yan, accepts this explanation (in China, one receives the weather forecast daily from one's cell phone or pager), and asks whether she should bring an umbrella. Fei Mo, who knows all Yan's secrets, answers yes, since nobody knows when it will rain. This answer alludes to the likelihood that Yan's relationship with Shen Xue will sooner or later be affected by Yan's affair with Hu Yue. Having barely escaped from suspicion, Yan is reminded by the massage girl that his cell phone is vibrating. Yan pretends that he has just noticed, picks up the phone, and then cuts off the line, saying the caller had hung up. Shen Xue naively

asks Yan to call the person back, but Yan replies that the number is unfamiliar, and might belong to one of the journalists he is avoiding.

This scene cuts to a night at Yan's home. Yan is looking for the newspaper to take to the bath, and finds Shen Xue cleaning his razor on it. Shen picks up the page that Yan is interested in, carefully cleaning it before handing it to him. Praising her for being considerate and family oriented like his first wife, Yan takes the paper and goes into the bath, where he places the paper on the toilet cover, sits down, and calls Hu Yue. He covers his mouth when he whispers to Hu that he had been in meetings all day long and had no time to call her back. Just at this moment, Shen Xue breaks into the bath with one of her fingers bleeding. Shen searches the shelves for some bandages, and catches Yan sitting on the top of the toilet with a dumbfounded countenance in the mirror's reflection. "What you are doing there?" she asks.

Yan is startled and stands up. The camera pans Yan from head to foot. Just beside his feet lays his cell phone. "I'm using the toilet." He stumbles, and then, calculatingly turns back to flush the toilet. Yan's witty performance fails to cover his odd behavior (Figure 5). Back in the



sitting room, Yan pretends to admit that he made a call to his ex-wife's brother and states that his precaution had been intended to protect Shen. He does not want Shen to mistake his care for his son and first wife as an attempt to rekindle their relationship. Shen says, "I still feel you are not absolutely loyal to me. I don't want to be a fool. I can live well without you. Write me a self-criticism."

From these scenes, we see how Yan manipulates his cell phone to hide his affair with Hu Yue; and how his cell phone puts him in embarrassing situations. He is eventually deserted by both his women and society, as Hu blackmailed him with some cell phone footage of their affair and replaced him in his job. In the final scene, he refuses to own a cell phone and is actually terrified by the newest model, which has GPS tracking on it. The final scene, strongly ironic, reveals Yan sitting alone in a shabby apartment in a skyscraper in Beijing, holding a global positioning cell phone in hand, and screaming out loud in horror. This reminds its viewers of the Foucauldian all-encompassing, prison-like surveillance system in modern society. What is absent from the film is the silent suffering of Yan's two ex-wives. As Yan still has an apartment in the global city Beijing, Yan's first wife leaves the city to live with their son elsewhere and we are not told of the whereabouts of Yan's second wife. Modern city space, characterized by commercialization, globalization, and monumentalization, becomes the powerful new father figure, exerting patriarchal powers over modern beings.

In *Cell Phone*, we see how modern technology deprives place of its significance and reconfigures interpersonal relationships. The products of modern communication technology unwittingly encourage subterfuge and adultery. The virtual space that electronic media creates provides opportunities but also virtualizes and destabilizes conventional familial structures and interpersonal networks. Family, the fundamental unit of social relationships is a place where one detects the deep roots of traditional Chinese culture and values. It is the site of possible resistance to the homogenizing forces of globalization and modernization. When this locale of groundedness and integrity is shaken, commercialized and dismantled, subjects are thrown into the outer world, the

abstract and commercialized spaces dominated by political, ideological, and capitalist discourses. This will confine the subjects to the market as laborers and consumers, and reduce their individual subjectivities to affiliations to commodities and signs. They will be possessed by secondary manifestations through commodities and services, only capable of temporary genuine emotional release over the Internet. As the modern cityscape comes to be populated by this kind of “shadow subjectivity” – bodies incapable of appropriating dominated spaces (in the real world), and subjectivities without bodies (in the virtual world), this modern cityscape could be considered a spectral one.

Conclusion

Despite the diversity and plurality in their content and cinematic style, the four films discussed here are all representations of China’s urban space in the context of commercialization, urbanization, and globalization. We see how modernization has transformed conventional notions of space and time, moving people from rural places to cities, and reshaping interpersonal relations. The urban space depicted in these films has very complicated characteristics. On the one hand, the space has been “modernized” and decorated with unmistakably modern architectural features and remarkable monuments. On the other hand, the space has shown its monstrous nature by erasing traditional cultures and reconfiguring human relations. Ironically, with the process of China’s urbanization, its urban space, as we see in all four of the most popular and influential contemporary Chinese films, becomes virtual and homogeneous. The structures and objects bearing unique historical and cultural legacies (such as *Hutong*) are disappearing. Those remaining or newly constructed are commercialized and chiefly serve economic

ends. Traditional substantive interpersonal connections, especially family relationships, are trivialized, traumatized and commercialized. Modern beings are overwhelmed by a sense of nostalgia and are isolated and objectified by modernity and electronic media. In a word, urban space as represented in the four films exerts tyrannical powers, determining people's way of life, alienating people from their pasts, and reorienting interpersonal relationships. People, who live in the urban space, have to cope with the shifting environment, internalize and appropriate its futuristic demands with no other choice. These films reflect and criticize the aftermaths of change in urban space and offer alternatives to the grand narrative of the government.

Frederic Jameson has explored the dialectical relations between standardization and differentiation, the two ends of the spectrum of globalization's effects. Globalization, especially global capitalism, has caused local economies to flourish, enabling subjects by exposing them to wider sources of information, and liberating local specificities on a global stage; at the same time, globalization has diminished the specialty of locality, reducing everything to its economic value. The cityscapes represented in the four films are, to a large extent, the result of these dynamic and interlocking effects. The metamorphoses of China's cities are above all governmental decisions made in the context of globalization. To remold China's production mode, spaces are redesigned and reformed first in SEZs and then on a national scale. Economic success and global connection are unfortunately not the only results caused by spatial changes. As we see in the films, in a global economy traditional customs and values become increasingly ghostlike, haunting and revisiting those people who still possess cultural heritage and

historical consciousness, and leaving the majority disconnected from the past and tradition.

Depicting conflict between past and present, old and new, local and global, real and imaginary, these filmmakers ask their audiences a question: Do we have to forget who we are and where we come from in order to embrace economic prosperity? A clear message we see from these films is that we are found by global capitalism (not the other way around) and we are lost in it. The cost is devastating. It results not only in a spiritual void and loss of identity, but also a loss of the soul (as corruption, crime, and prostitution have become serious problems in contemporary China). Some contemporary Chinese filmmakers have traced to the root of the problem and proposed a different space - the assaulted, disappearing, shadowy and always “in-between” space - in their films to spur contemplation and awareness. Brian Jarvis states that “Marginalized spaces are always implied and central to any map’s significance, they are a clue to the ideology through which space is seen and felt.”³² Although the cityscape represented on screen is fraught with trauma and displacement, and haunted by ghosts of both the past and the future, it has managed to represent a different, resistant space. The marginalized cultural and individual landscapes are captured and empowered on screen by contemporary filmmakers to analyze, contemplate, parody, and subvert the overwhelming utilitarian economic landscape.

¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991), p. 412.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 38-40.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

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- ⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, ed. Colin Gordon (Pantheon: New York, 1982).
- ⁵ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984).
- ⁶ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *The Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Harvest Press, 1982), pp. 207-272.
- ⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 402.
- ⁸ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 410.
- ⁹ Liu Kang, *Globalization and Cultural Trends in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2004), p. 2.
- ¹⁰ Sheldon H. Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 204-210.
- ¹¹ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), p. 6. Ong illustrates that "'Flexible citizenship' refers to the cultural logics of capitalist accumulation, travel, and displacement that induce subjects to respond fluidly and opportunistically to changing political-economic conditions."
- ¹² Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, p. 167.
- ¹³ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 416.
- ¹⁴ Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, p. 172.
- ¹⁵ For the concept of Orientalism, see Edward Said's *Orientalism* (Vintage, 1979). Ray Chow coined the term "self-Orientalism" in her *Primitive Passions: Visuality, Sexuality, Ethnography, and Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- ¹⁶ Augusta Palmer, "After 'Spicy Love Soup,' Zhang Takes 'Shower,'" *Indiewire*, available online at http://www.indiewire.com/people/int_Zhang_Loehr_000707.html (accessed May 29, 2007).
- ¹⁷ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 403.
- ¹⁸ Sheldon H. Lu, "Tear down the City: Reconstructing Urban Space in Contemporary Chinese Popular Cinema and Avant-Garde Art," in Zhang Zhen ed., *The Urban Generation: Chinese Cinema and Society at the Turn of the Twenty-first Century*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), p. 138.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 144.
- ²⁰ Gary G. Xu, *Sinascapes: Contemporary Chinese Cinema* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2007), p. 76.
- ²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- ²² Arif Dirlik, "Place-Based Imagination: Globalism and the Politics of Place," in Roxann Prazniak and Arif Dirlik eds., *Places and Politics in an Age of Globalization* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), p. 23.
- ²³ David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1990), p. 205.
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 205.
- ²⁵ Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 36-46.
- ²⁶ Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, p. 153.

²⁷ The ending does not show directly that Xiao Tao killed Taisheng and herself. After Taisheng went into Xiao Tao's room, the scene is cut directly to one in which people dragging their dead bodies out of the gas-filled room. Xiao Tao is the biggest suspect, though it could be an accident.

²⁸ Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, p.154.

²⁹ For more information on gender issue in the Mao's era, see Emily Honig's "Maoist Mappings of Gender: Reassessing the Red Guards," in Thomas Laqueur ed., *Chinese Femininities/Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 255-268.

³⁰ Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 60.

³¹ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), p. 3.

³² Brian Jarvis, *Postmodern Cartographies: The Geographical Imagination in Contemporary American Culture* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), p. 8.

Chapter Two Transcendental Locality: Poetic Difference and Intimate Space in Yan Li's Poetry

Poetic space is a very special kind of space. It has the “things/not-things” quality Lefebvre assigns to space in general. In the early twentieth century, the German poet Rainer Maria Rilke, under the influence of the French sculptor Auguste Rodin, developed his notion of the “thing-poem,” a notion that shows his preoccupation with the presence and authority of lyric poetry. In his 1903 letter to Lou-Andreas Salomé, Rilke expressed his wish to make poems on the model of Rodin’s paintings and sculptures, as these could

implant the thing into the surrounding space more passionately, more firmly, and a thousand times better than before, so that it does not move when you shake it. The *thing* is definite, the art-thing must be still more definite; removed from all accident, reft away from all obscurity, withdrawn from time and given over to space, it has become enduring, capable of eternity.¹

Unfortunately, Rilke’s idea of poem as object eclipsed the significance of the organic space in which the thing is implanted. Rilke’s dynamic relationships between “thing” and “not-thing”/organic space were largely ignored.

About forty years later, American poet Louis Zukofsky had a similar aspiration.

He wrote that a good poem is

precise information on existence out of which it grows, and information of its own existence, that is, the movement (and tone) of words... This integrates any human emotion, any discourse, into an order of words that exists as another created thing in the world, to affect it and be judged by it.²

For Zukofsky, poetry is derived from everyday existence, affecting the world and judged by it as a “created thing.” Treating the poem as a “design or construction,” Zukofsky’s

conception of the space of the poem is more technical in its emphasis on “precise information”; while Rilke assigns an ontological function to a work of art, which could penetrate its immediate reality and reach eternity through infinity.

This ontological quality of poetry failed to draw attention until Martin Heidegger remarked in *Poetry, Language, Thought* that “The art work opens up in its own way the Being of beings. This opening up, i.e., this deconcealing, i.e., the truth of beings, happens in the work.”³ Unmistakably, the “opening up” of poetic discourse also indicates a process of dialectic “becoming.” In “The Ethics of Linguistics,” Julia Kristeva articulated this act of becoming:

The rigid, imperious, immediate present kills, puts aside, and fritters away the poem. Thus, the irruption within the order of language of the anteriority of language evokes a later time, that is, a forever. The poem’s time frame is some ‘future anterior’ that will never take place, never come about as such, but only as an upheaval of present place and meaning.⁴

The organic nature and becomingness of poetry are rooted in the ontological being of poetic language, “an order of words” that consisted the “created thing.” For Kristeva, poetic language is text as practice as it constructs a “new symbolic device – a new reality corresponding to a new heterogeneous object.”⁵ This signification in process consequently constitutes a subject-in-process/on-trial. The revolution in poetic language is therefore also a revolution in the subject. The notion of poetry finally evolves from a simplified “thing-poem” to an infinitely in-process one, which specifies the role of poetic language and the poet.

The “things/not-things” quality of space, which is either produced by production mode as Lefebvre proposes or generated by politics as in the case of China,⁶ is obviously more deceptive with the nature of “ideological objects” (“things”) hidden and official

semiotic discourse dominant; while poetic space, which could be roughly assigned to Lefebvre's category of representation space, always bares "the truth of beings" in a dynamic and infinite process between "things" and "not-things," upheaving "present place and meaning." In other words, poetry as a form of cultural products is not static "things," but organic, indeterminate things that unfold controversial and revolutionary potentials in cultural practice (being read).⁷

When China's social space undergoes enormous transformation, one cannot help wondering what happens to its poetic space, the most marginal and yet most revolutionary space. From an imperial capital to an Olympic city, the wide scope and the fast speed of Beijing's metamorphosis are unmatched. As the cultural center of China, it is home to almost all of China's top artists. Many important movements in poetry have been closely associated with the city. These factors make Beijing an interesting case to study of the intricate relations between poetic space and social space.

This chapter begins by tracing the history of Beijing-related poetry movements from 1917 to the end of 1980s, and then describes the poetry scene of the People's Republic of China in the last twenty years under the accelerated processes of globalization and modernization. This chapter will argue that the avant-gardism of many trends in contemporary Chinese poetry, such as the Lower Body and Trash poetry, are entrapped in their pseudo-opposition to the established politics and discourses, primarily the politics of the body and economic discourse.

This chapter then analyzes several poems by the Beijing-born poet, Yan Li, and argues that these poems are more than representations of the transformation of socio-political spaces in contemporary China. They create a poetic space to distance, critique,

and resist the other discursive spaces (representations of space and spatial practice), while indicating the gradual “opening-up” process of the notions of place and identity, which are increasingly informed by their linkages to the “outside”.

Poetry Movements Associated with Beijing

From an imperial city to a Republican capital (during part of the Republican period), to the capital of People’s Republic of China, Beijing has always occupied a central place in China’s national history. The overlap of temporalities in this city makes it impossible to discuss the present without knowing the past. A survey of Beijing’s historical movements reveals that Beijing has always nurtured fresh, innovative, and rebellious poetry movements. New Youth (Xin qinnian 新青年), the influential revolutionary literary magazine that launched the New Culture Movement (Xinwenhua yundong 新文化运动, 1917-1923) and published many vernacular poems by Hu Shi (胡适, 1891-1962), Shen Yinmo (沈尹默, 1883-1971), and Liu Bannong (刘半农, 1891-1934), is one of the most important forces in introducing and promoting “new poetry” (xinshi 新诗) written in the vernacular (baihua 白话). The editorial department of the New Youth was moved from Shanghai to Beijing in 1917, when its founder Chen Duxiu (陈独秀, 1879-1942) accepted a teaching position at Beijing University. When Chen Duxiu was imprisoned in June 1919, not long after the May Fourth Movement, the journal was suspended for five months and moved to Shanghai in October, though its editorial department remained in Beijing.

After the May Fourth Movement, the Association of Literature Study (Wenxue yanjiu hui 文学研究会) was established in Beijing in 1921, which proclaimed “art for life’s sake” (wei rensheng er yishu 为人生而艺术). It gathered a large group of poets, such as Liu Bannong, Zhou Zuoren (周作人, 1885-1967), Yu Pingbo (俞平伯, 1900-1990), Zhu Ziqing (朱自清, 1898-1948), Xie Wanying (谢婉莹, 1900-1999; Bing Xin 冰心), Xu Yunuo (徐玉诺, 1894-1958), Wang Tongzhao (王统照, 1897-1957), Ye Shaojun (叶绍钧, 1894-1988), Zheng Zhenduo (郑振铎, 1898-1958), Guo Shaoyu (郭绍虞, 1893-1984), Liu Yanling (刘延陵, 1894-1988), Xu Dishan (许地山, 1893-1941; Luo Huasheng 落花生), Liang Zongdai (梁宗岱, 1903-1983), Zhu Xiang (朱湘, 1904-1933), Xu Zhimo (徐志摩, 1897-1931), and Li Jinfa (李金发, 1900-1976), and published many new poems written in the vernacular in its associated literary magazines, such as *Novel Monthly* (Xiaoshuo yuebao 小说月报), *Literature* (Wenxue 文学), and *Literature Weekly* (Wenxue zhoubao 文学周报). In 1921, some famous poets of the Association of Literature Study, such as Zhu Ziqing, Ye Shaojun, Yu Pingbo, and Liu Yanling, founded the first poetry organization in the history of the modern Chinese poetry, the Chinese New Poetry Society (Zhongguo xinshi she 中国新诗社). Its monthly magazine, *Poetry* (Shi 诗), became showcase for poems written in the spoken Chinese, as well as for translated poems and critical essays on poetry.

Advocated by some poets of the Association of Literature Study, the Short Poetry movement (Xiaoshi yundong 小诗运动, 1922-1925) started in 1922. These short poems (duanshi 短诗), partially influenced by Rabindranath Tagore’s poetry and Japanese

Haiku, consisted of no more than four lines, and sometimes, just one. Bin Xin, a prominent representative of the movement and the author of “Stars” (Fanxing 繁星) and “Spring Water” (Chunshui 春水), was studying in Beijing at that time. The other key figures of the Short Poetry movements were Zhu Ziqing, Liu Bannong, Yu Pingbo, Zheng Zhenduo, Wang Tongzhao, and Shen Yinmo among others, all of whom were either studying or teaching in Beijing in the early 1920s.

Morning Poetry (Chenbao shijuan 晨报诗镌) was founded in Beijing in 1926 signaled the beginning of the modern Chinese poetry with a certain tonal pattern and rhyme scheme (Zhongguo xiandai gelü shi 中国现代格律诗); it is also referred to as Formalist poetry.⁸ Major poets, such as Yang Shi'en (杨世恩), Sun Ziqian (孙子潜; Sun Dayu 孙大雨), Zhang Mingqi (张鸣琦), Wang Xiren (王希仁), and Cheng Kansheng (陈侃声; Hexi 鹤西), called for “new form and new rhythm” (xin geshi yu xin yinjie 新格式与新音节) in writing vernacular poems.⁹ Wen Yiduo (闻一多; Wen I-to, 1899-1946), a graduate of Tsinghua University, opposed the poetic trend proposed by Hu Shi which rejected conventional metrical schemes in favor of the natural speech rhythm, and argued for the significance of form in poetry. Wen’s theories of form published in “The Form of Poetry” stated that “No game can be played without rules: no poems can be written without form.” He adds that poetry should have the beauty of music, painting, and architecture.¹⁰ According to Wen, the visual pattern with its balanced grouping of characters and lines gives the composition a symmetrical architectural beauty, while the auditory pattern with its metrical elements of foot, tone, and rhyme provides the poem musical and aesthetic enjoyments. As Julia C. Lin notes,

Wen's theories failed to solve all the prosodic problems, but they opened up new areas for exploration and at the same time offered a usable prosodic system for the new medium [the vernacular]. They were especially meaningful at a time when modern Chinese poetry was desperately in need of order and new direction.¹¹

Influenced by this Formalist movement, many poetic trends, such as Square Poetry (Fangkuai shi 方块诗) and Bean Curd Poetry (Doufukuai shi 豆腐块诗), appeared, paying special attention to the external architecture of poetry. The Formalist movement was the forerunner of Crescent Poetry (Xinyue shi 新月诗), which the chapter will describe later.

During the period of the Left-Wing poetry movement (Zuoyi shige yundong 左翼诗歌运动), Beijing hosted two important poetry magazines, Elegance (Xiaoya 小雅), and Poetry Journal (Shige zazhi 诗歌杂志), a national magazine launched by Xu Zhimo and Wen Yiduo. From 1934 to 1937, the period of the July 7 Incident (Lugouqiao Shibian 卢沟桥事变, 1937), Beijing was the center of poetry in northern China. Many poets, such as Feng Zhi (冯至, 1905-1993), Liang Zongdai, Sun Dayu, Zhou Zuoren, Zhu Ziqing, Yu Pingbo, He Qifang (何其芳, 1912-1977), Bian Zhilin (卞之琳, 1910-2000), Luo Niansheng (罗念生, 1904-1990), Ye Gongchao (叶公超, 1904-1981), Fei Ming (废名, 1901-1967), Xu Fang (徐芳), Wang Liaoli (王了一, 1900-1986), Li Jianwu (李健吾, 1906-1982), Lin Geng (林庚, 1910-2006), Lin Huiyin (林徽因, 1904-1955), and Cao Baohua (曹葆华, 1906-1978), gathered in Beijing where they regularly attended poetry readings.¹²

Crescent Poetry (Xinyue Shi 新月诗派), developed by the Crescent Society, took form in the mid 1920s, and gained a reputation for its advocacy of new poetic forms. For

a period of time, it countered the sweeping current of sociopolitical verse. Xu Zhimo, a graduate and later a professor at Beijing University, is the best-known and most admired writer of Crescent Poetry. He and Wen Yiduo launched the *Poetry Journal* to encourage the development of a new verse form in 1926, and later the *Crescent Monthly*. According to Julia Lin, Xu's

distinctive talent lies in his adroit blending of classical diction with the more vigorous colloquial; in his flair for combining the whimsical with the poignantly serious, the abstract with the concrete; and in his deft use of illuminating metaphors and symbolism.¹³

Xu and Wen's emphases on formal excellence and aesthetic values pushed their contemporaries to meditate on the intrinsic nature and function of poetry.

In the 1960s and 1970s, Beijing was a center of underground poetry, which broke the Maoist grip on literature. In the late 1950s, underground poets Zhang Langlang (张郎郎, b.1943), Guo Shiying (郭士英, b. 1942), and Guo Moruo (郭沫若, 1892-1978) met for poetry readings first in Zhang's home in Beijing and later on the campus of Beijing Normal University when they set up their club The Sun's Column (Taiyang zongdui 太阳纵队).¹⁴ Another famous Beijing underground poet of this period is Guo Lusheng (郭路生 b. 1948, Shizhi 食指), the author of the well-known poem "This is Beijing at 4:08." Handwritten copies of his poems were circulated throughout Beijing and many other provinces, where they inspired the later emerged Menglong (Misty or Obscure) poets. Maghiel van Crevel observes, "A closer look at Guo's prestige makes him a transitional figure between Socialist Realist and Obscure poetry and to some extent enervates the myth of his literary influence on the next cohort of unofficial poets."¹⁵

Around the Qingming Festival (the 106th day after the winter solstice, also known as Tomb Sweeping Day) in 1976, simmering rebellious sentiment burst forth among tens of thousands of Beijing residents who laid paper wreaths, placed white paper chrysanthemums, and posted handwritten poems at the foot the Monument to the People's Heroes in Tiananmen Square, mourning Premier Zhou Enlai's death and criticizing the Gang of Four. The police, under orders from Party Chairman Mao Zedong detained about 4,000 people in or near the square. Like the May Fourth Movement in 1919, the Tiananmen Poetry Movement of April 5, 1976 ushered in a new era of political and cultural activity.

Menglong (Misty or Obscure) Poetry

Beijing is also the cradle of the Menglong poetry, represented by Mang Ke (芒克, b. 1950), Bei Dao (北岛, b. 1949), Shu Ting (舒婷, b. 1952), Jiang He (江河, b. 1949), Yang Lian (杨炼, b. 1955), and Gu Cheng (顾城, 1956-93). Influenced by western modernism and eager to rebel against the poetic conventions, they experiment with poetic form and content. The Menglong Poets derived their name from the “opaque” meaning of their poems, which contrasts sharply with the previous transparent poetry of the Maoist years. Most of the misty poems were published in the first known unofficial literary magazine *Today* (Jintian 今天), edited by two Beijing poets, Bei Dao and Mang Ke, and others in the late 1970s and 1980s. As Michelle Yeh points out, Menglong poets have highly individualistic styles “focusing on private thoughts and feelings that seemingly have no social significance,” and that “the tendency toward individualism that is

expressed in both form and content was regarded as the direct result of the influence of Western modernism.”

In addition to using deliberately elusive language and individualistic styles, Menglong poets are well known for their subversive spirit.

Debasement is the password of the base,
Nobility the epitaph of the noble.
See how the gilded sky is covered
With the drifting twisted shadows of the dead¹⁶

These lines opens Bei Dao’s most famous poem “The Answer” (Huida 回答), written during the 1976 Tiananmen demonstrations and became the anthem of the pro-democracy movement of 1989. Though Bei Dao was at a literary conference in Berlin at that time, he was not allowed to return to China. Three other leading Menglong Poets, Yang Liang, Duo Duo (多多, 1951-), and Gu Cheng (顾城, 1956-1993), were exiled. Michelle Yeh has keenly observed,

Although it is true that the *Today* poets were not unique in their use of the image of breaking the silence in the post-Mao period, they went far beyond the Tiananmen Poetry Movement of April 5, 1976 and poets of earlier generations, who were rehabilitated by Deng Xiaoping and resumed writing in the late 1970s and early 1980s. They were not just reacting against ‘the Gang of Four’ as the culprit responsible for the Cultural Revolution but challenging Communist ideology in general as it bears on literature and art.¹⁷

The following lines, quoted also from “The Answer,” offer a glimpse of the rebellious spirit of *Today* poets.

I don't believe the sky is blue;
I don't believe in thunder's echoes;
I don't believe that dreams are false;
I don't believe that death has no revenge.¹⁸

Oppressed by the suffocating political discourse, Menglong poetry ushered in a longing for freedom and individuality and became the literary flagship of China’s democracy

movement. Beijing is also the place where Meng Ke, Genzi (根子, b. 1951), and Duo Duo, members of the “Baiyangdian School of Poetry” (Baiyangdian shipai 白洋淀诗派), wrote in the 1970s.¹⁹

Contemporary Poetry Scene

After the heyday of the Misty Poetry passed in the early 1980s, a new generation of poets emerged, known as “the Newborn Generation” or “the Third Generation.”²⁰ Eager to bid farewell to Bei Dao and Shu Ting, and look for fresh poetics that could express their own sensibilities, many poetic trends emerged. At one end of the spectrum, there are trends such as New Classicism (Xin gudian zhuyi 新古典主义) and Wholeness-ism (Zhengti shige 整体诗歌), which were influenced by the “root searching” (xungen 寻根) literary movement in the 80s, seeking inspirations from the long tradition of Chinese culture; at the other end, there are trends such as No-no-ism (Feifei zhuyi 非非主义), They (Tamen pai 他们派), Machos (Manghan zhuyi 莽汉主义), College Students (Daxuesheng shipai 大学生诗派) and the Coquetry School (Sajiao pai 撒娇派), which claim to be anti-elite, anti-sublime, anti-heroic, anti-imagery, and anti-aesthetic. To analyze this diverse landscape, Yeh identified the three trends: “the stream of life” (shenghuo liu 生活流), “the stream of consciousness” (yishi liu 意识流), and “the roots-searching school” (xungen pai 寻根派) respectively, “of which the second is less well defined and not necessarily included.”²¹

When discussing “the stream of life” trend of experimental poetry, Yeh

insightfully compared it to its predecessor Menglongshi:

As a conscious reaction to Menglongshi, it shows some striking differences. Unlike its predecessor, poetry of the stream of life is not interested in depicting the hero; it is more concerned with the everyday life of Everyman and Everywoman. Distinguished from the intense lyricism and dense imagery-usually figurative--of Menglongshi, poetry of the stream of life more often employs the narrative mode, related in a prosaic, colloquial, nonfigurative language and a low-key, matter-of-fact tone. The experience typically found in this poetry is personal, trivial, awkward, embarrassing, or frustrating but nonetheless human and universal. If the speaker in Menglongshi usually enjoys an omniscient point of view or embodies a transcendent "I" where microcosm and macrocosm are merged, poetry of the stream of life prefers a more limited point of view, showing the individual as bogged down by limitations of all kinds, diffident, suspicious, and capable of self-satire and self-parody. The solitary tragic hero we encounter in Menglongshi is replaced here by the antihero, usually a city dweller trying to get by in an irrational, hostile universe (Yeh, 1989,1991).²²

Yeh argued later in her essay that despite significant differences between the Poetry of the Newborn Generation and Menglongshi, they have some substantial similarities.

First, they share essentially the same aesthetic consciousness expressed in the belief in the independent value and autonomous nature of poetry, the emphasis on the centrality of language, and the pursuit of creative freedom. Second, the three trends can all be traced to their predecessor; each picking up on a distinct aspect of the earlier poetry, they may be seen as a further development of, rather than a sharp break with, Menglongshi.²³

At the end of the 1980s, the base of the experimental poetry temporarily shifted to the south, where it was represented by some Sichuan poets, such as Liao Yiwu (廖亦武, 1958-), Zhou Lunyou (周伦右, 1952-), Li Yawei (李亚伟, 1963-), Shi Guanghua (石光华, 1958-), and Zhai Yongming (翟永明, 1952-), and several Shanghai poets such as Meng Lang (孟浪, 1955-) and Mou Mou (默默, 1956-), affected by the 1989 Tiananmen Incident.

Since 1990, the landscape of poetry has been changing energetically. As China's market economy has been full flowering since 1989, the Post-Misty poets have been under severe pressure from China's rapid commercialization and materialism. With the fast development of the Internet, numerous online poetry discussion boards and forums have emerged.²⁴ The easy access to the Internet and to online publication have attracted an unprecedented number of followers to what had been an almost deserted field of poetry. Since online publications do not need to go through editorial filtering, poets have the freedom to experiment with both the content and the form of their poems. "While direct access to online readers and easy communication with fellow poets democratize, to some extent, the world of poetry," as Michelle Yeh maintains, "they are also conducive to alliances and movements."²⁵ The newly emerging virtual space quickly becomes the hotbed of self-fashioned and effect-oriented poetic movements.

Conventions in poetry writing have either been openly challenged or ignored. New labels, such as Lower Body Poetry (Xiabanshen 下半身)²⁶, Trash Poetry (Laji Shi 垃圾诗)²⁷, and Saliva Poetry (Koushui Shi 口水诗)²⁸, appear at a neck-breaking speed to transgress, shock, and push the boundaries of poetry.

Daily life in urban China is the theme of most of these poems. The need to narrate individual experiences is privileged over national/historical lyricism and social concerns. Sex and desire are the major fields for these poets to assert their "avant-garde" and unconventional spirits. Conventional poetic language, which is formal, grammatically correct, and highly aesthetic, is largely discarded. Vulgar or sensual languages, dialects, and deliberately manipulated language combinations become the new media of poetry. These changes in both subject matter and poetic language mark a clear departure from

previous poetry trends and, to a degree, revitalize the marginalized poetic field in market-driven contemporary China by their remarkable successes in garnering fame and other benefits.

Despite these new trends' innovatory explorations in poetic content, form and language, many are put in doubt of their real poetic value besides of being an “alternative” to the established poetic tradition, taking into consideration the amorality, the meaninglessness, and the self-possessed eroticism of their subject matter; their formless form; and their use of the colloquial language which doesn't have any aesthetic value or significance (*saliva*, *koushui* 口水). Ostensibly most of these modern poetic trends are opposed to the traditional, the official, the national, the collective, the political, and the lyrical discourses, being contemporary, individual, apolitical, erotic, quotidian, and colloquial.²⁹

But, are they really “avant-garde” in spirit? Peter Bürger defines the avant-garde in his influential *Theory of the Avant-Garde* as that specific movement in the early twentieth century which sought, not to develop, as was the case with Impressionism, Cubism or Fauvism, a particular style, nor to attack prior schools of art, but to question the role of “art” as an institution in a bourgeois society.³⁰ In this sense, these contemporary poetry trends are not avant-garde as they intentionally use their oppositional positions to the past and the established to generate shocking effects in order to submit themselves and their poetry to the processes of marketization and commercialization, instead of challenging “the very role of ‘art’ as an institution.”

Yin Lichuan, one of the most well-known lower body poets, writes in her “A Little More Comfort”:

ah a little bit up a little bit down a little bit left a little bit right
 this is not love making this is hammering a nail
 ah a little bit faster a little bit slower a little bit loser a little bit tighter
 this is not love making this is anti-vice or tightening a shoelace
 ah a little bit deeper a little bit shallower a little bit softer a little bit tougher
 this is not love making this is massage, writing poems, washing hair or feet
 a little more comfort ah a little more comfort
 a little bit gentler a little bit ruder a little bit more intellectualized a little bit more
 commoner-ized

a little more comfort³¹

Such explicit erotic language is featured in most of her best-known poems, such as
 “Lover 情人”, “Flirting 挑逗,” and “Love Story 爱情故事.” This new generation of
 poets’ obsession of the “body,” for both male and female poets, reveals their brazenness
 of prostituting poetry to move from the margin to the center. It needs to be noted that
 poetry sufficed of pervert sexuality long exists before the emergence of these current new
 trends, for instance doggerel with sexual implications (Dayou shi 打油诗 or Tiaokan shi
 调侃诗) has long existed in Chinese poetry, but this kind of ragged verse was generally
 considered low and mundane, being excluded from the serious literature. No previous
 poets therefore have dared to establish their reputation on doggerel verse. On the
 contrary, these contemporary Chinese poets try to win as much attention as possible by
 writing poems that say nothing besides: “look, I have the guts to describe my perverted
 life and to talk about feces in my poems.” They shocked the readers into the realization
 that such poems can actually be published. This newly exercised and officially approved
 freedom is nothing (definitely not a breakthrough in poetics) but a conspiracy with
 commercialism and a pseudo-confirmation of the loosening control of the governmental
 ideology. Ironically, poetry, which Julia Kristeva has made the testing ground of the
 openness of the governing system, resulted in volunteering showcase of an illusory

openness in the suicidal hands of these contemporary Chinese poets.

Lower Body poets declared that poetry should go to the roots of human instinct, to “pursue a palpable presence of the flesh,” to use Shen Haobo’s words. Obsessed with physical pleasure and personal life, these poems are detached from outer spaces. The ontological and organic nature of poetic language is completely discarded, and instead consists of signifiers without signification. The dynamic relations between poetic space and outer space (things/not things) were destroyed. Poetic space has been reduced to nothing by oppressing outer spaces. Though these poetry trends try to supersede the old-fashioned poetic languages and styles and demonstrate their own idiosyncrasies towards the erotic, the quotidian, the colloquial, and the “unpoetic,” they cater to the practice and logic of the dominant market economy, incorporating the production of poetry into the circulation of capital in the economic system by first writing for the market, and then packaging, marketing, and selling their poems for money and fame.

From another perspective, one may say that the body has unfortunately become the only territory left in contemporary China for one to obtain some kind of feelings, even though these body-related and spiritless feelings have already been incorporated seamlessly into the global libidinal economy. Beyond the body and those trivial mundane details, life is governed by market rules and is too standardized to be worthy of any depiction. These seemingly victimized young poets, most of whom were born in the 1970s, thus in their turns market their own bodies and privacy to fashion their poems, shock the poetic market, and package fame and publicity in return.

These trends echo the literary trend of “body writing” (shengti xiezu 身体写作) represented by the “beauty writers” (Meinü zuojia 美女作家, such as Mian Mian 棉棉

and Wei Hui 卫慧) who emerged in the late 1990s and at the turn of the twenty-first century. These beauty writers provide detailed accounts of sexual life, drug use, and prostitution in their semi-autobiographical books, which are extremely popular among urban youth. According to Sheldon Lu, the depiction of female sexuality by “beauty writers” indicates on the one hand of “the politics of liberation and excess in the Chinese experience of modernity, an existential condition that has rarely existed, especially for women and women writers;” on the other the phenomenon that “bespeaks the logic of cultural commercialization, in other words, the self-packaging of the body for media effects.”³² The self-fashioned poetry movements in contemporary China assimilate this logic. They “write with their lower bodies” (Xiabanshen xiezhuo 下半身写作) pushing liberations of individuality, sexuality, especially female sexuality, and language styles which were formerly controlled, politicized, and reified; while they employ these liberations for economic ends and thus confine them in economic terms.

Therefore, instead of being rebels, these newly emerged poets are the products of China’s ongoing commercialization and globalization. They have nonchalantly rejected anything that could constitute a poetic space, which has some kind of aesthetic value or is independent of or resistant to the dominant economic discourses. Poetry, the field traditionally honored by its truth-generating and aesthetically oriented inner space, is thus deprived of its depths. The field of poetry in contemporary China has been commoditized to a certain degree and become more and more a game field charted by various empty and depthless labels.

The role of poet in the Chinese society had changed accordingly.³³ Poets have been seen as the soul of the people and the pioneers of national movements (for instance,

the ancient poets Li Bai 李白 and Du Fu 杜甫, and the modern poets Hu Shi and Guo Moruo).³⁴ The purity, the independence, the seriousness, the loftiness, and the avant-garde spirit that had been associated with poethood have been turned into superficiality and playful absurdity. After examining “the promotion of poethood” in contemporary China, Maghiel van Crevel points out,

for all their self-proclaimed ordinariness, members of the earthly camp still view poethood as a superior quality of extraordinary importance and social relevance. As for authors of elevated persuasion, the special status of the poet has always been among the tenets of their poetics.³⁵

He adds that, “Poets’ recent image- (re) building facilitates a modest, politically disinterested celebrity discourse and commodification of contemporary poethood, a category that has traveled all the way from the proud and righteous to the hip and shameless.”³⁶ Despite of the already marginalized position of poetry, the reputation of contemporary Chinese poetry has hit bottom. Paradoxically, for all its professed anti-elitism, “Lower Body poetry, including that of ‘popular’ firebrand Shen Haobo, hardly reaches beyond an elite audience.”³⁷

In short, what these contemporary Chinese poets intend to convey through their poems is neither content nor form, but the spirit of being an alternative to the established norms, which they demonstrate by what Charles Bernstein called “debunking any possibilities for meaning.”³⁸ The Lower Body poets and the Trash poets among others did win their markets by shocking their readers. Beneath the displayed superficial audacity, however, they were actually immersing themselves in descriptions of amoral sexuality or mundane chores to escape from the cruel processes of modernity and globalization which they failed to understand, analyze and go beyond.

Although, as Maghiel van Crevel notes, “Shen Haobo, the driving force behind

the Lower Body, combines theatrical, rude machismo with angry rants on social injustice, and Yin Lichuan alternates her caustic descriptions of sex, love and bourgeois lifestyles with sensitive portrayals of low life in the urban jungle: junkies, prostitutes and a small-time city thief,” the social commentary of their poems is obviously not their focus and often inevitably dimmed by their graphic eroticism.³⁹ In several poems of Xu Xiangchou, a representative Trash poet, we could detect sarcasm and irony. The dirty words he used perversely to convey that irony repulses the readers. The “unpoetics” and “anti-sublimity” epitomized by these new generation of poets unintentionally relegated them to an oppositional position. The superficial, non-essential goals they have on their agenda and the paradoxical popularity they enjoy push readers to question the standards that have been used to evaluate the qualities of Chinese poetry. The diminishing poetic nature reflected in these new poems blurs the distinction between poetry and other literary genres.

Poetry seems to have become the last testing ground for those pseudo-alternatives powered by nothing but commoditized libido and witty dialects to occupy after their successes in the literary and film. These self-proclaimed “popular” poets were not really as daring as the Beauty writers, and some Fifth and Sixth Generation filmmakers who had already found their “pioneering” ground. They simply imported the already tested and safe-proved forbidden fruit to their laboratory of poetry. Their conspiracy with depthlessness and non-essentialism, the characteristics of postmodern society, betrayed the revolutionary tradition of Chinese poetry.⁴⁰ As they simply mirror and reflect the dominant discourses, in spirit, these self-proclaimed poetic revolutions are not revolutionary at all. They nevertheless made themselves no less famous than their

domestic “teachers” in the other genres, mainly because poetry has a sublime and holy place in the hearts of ordinary Chinese people, who are proud of China’s long poetic tradition. Even in the money-driven contemporary China, Li Bai and Du Fu are still well known and revered by ordinary Chinese. It’s a relief to see these trends have gradually gone into dead ends. The Lower Body poetry, which entered poetry scene flamboyantly in 2000, faded in 2004.

Although poetry is not necessarily connected with sublimity, it certainly needs to house spirits. When this spiritual field is contaminated with fetishism of body, sexuality, and commodity, and dominated by dirty, filthy, shameless, and blasphemous immorality, the last spiritual front is lost in the Chinese market. (Shen Haobo became famous for his depictions of his encounters with prostitutes!) When a country’s cultural workers perpetually busy themselves looking for alternatives to the established and the manifested just to get fame and money, and fail to comprehend the discourses they are in, how could they obtain a critical distance and original spirits to inspire their readers, and to have real, substantial, and fundamental breakthroughs instead of some false and superficial alternatives?

Poetic language has long been regarded as the most sensitive language to represent social reality, and as the most innovative, daring, and powerful language to challenge the dominant discourse. The sensibility, energy, insight, and power that poetic language possesses have their roots in the souls and spiritualities of the poets (though not necessarily their moralities). They come not from simple pastiches of erotic or dirty talk. Kristeva’s “subject-in-process” cannot be identified in these contemporary Chinese poetry trends. They are “transgressive” only in the sense that they joined the celebration

of “the politics of liberation and excess,” to borrow Sheldon Lu’s comments on China’s Beauty Writers, which is unprecedented in Chinese literary history. As for the poetry itself, it has been led into a hall of mirrors, containing nothing but hideously glimmering surfaces. Therefore, the so-called avant-gardism of these contemporary Chinese poetic trends is still entrapped in its pseudo-opposition to the established politics, primarily the politics of the body and economic discourse.

Yan Li’s Poetry

Are we, even poets, rendered powerless by an oppressive submission to postmodernism and globalization? Charles Bernstein argues:

We can act: we are not trapped in the postmodern condition if we are willing to differentiate between works of art that suggest new ways of conceiving of our present world and those that seek rather to debunk any possibilities for meaning. To do this, one has to be able to distinguish between, on the one hand, a fragmentation that attempts to valorize the concept of a free-floating signifier unbounded to social significance...and, on the other, a fragmentation that reflects a conception of meaning as prevented by conventional narration and so uses disjunction as a method of tapping into other possibilities available within language. Failure to take such distinctions is similar to failing to distinguish between youth gangs, pacifist anarchists, Weatherpeople, anti-Sandinista contras, Salvadoran guerrillas, Islamic terrorists, or US state terrorists. Perhaps all of these groups are responding to the “same” stage of multi-national capitalism. But the crucial point is that the responses cannot be understood as the same, unified as various interrelated “symptoms” of late capitalism. Nor are the “dominant” practices the exemplary ones that tell the “whole” story.⁴¹

For Charles Bernstein, the fighting ground for the revolutionary therefore locates in an indeterminate middle zone on various boundaries, instead of on a direct oppositional position. Such “on the boundaries,” “in-between” characteristics could be identified in poetic works by Yan Li.

Posing against the noisy if not chaotic domestic poetry scene, the Beijing poet, Yan Li, become prominent. Yan Li's special experience and complicated identity make his case interesting. Yan Li was born in Beijing in 1954. He was associated with the Stars Group (Xingxing Huahui 星星画会) artists who were noted for their abstract and surrealistic styles in late 1970s and early 1980s, and the Misty Poets. He moved to New York in 1985, where he started the literary magazine *First Line* (Yi hang 一行) in 1987. Yan is a prolific artist and writer, having published many poetry collections and novels and exhibited his painting around the world. Paul Manfredi observes Yan's peripheral position and yet his undeniable contribution:

Yan, since his participation as a poet in *Today*, and as a painter in Stars, has found himself at a kind of periphery of Chinese cultural production. As a poet who left China, Yan was placed outside of the literary encampments discussed above, and as a poet who paints, he is sometimes left out of poetry circles altogether. Yan's well-organized presence online is itself indicative of his achievements, taking the initiative afforded by technology to occupy a kind of peripheral space that nonetheless intersects in both written text and visual image with numerous centers (Taiwan, China, New York City) at once.⁴²

Though first associated with Misty Poets, Yan Li has his own poetic style, which he developed and enhanced in his years of international travel. In contrast to those domestic Third Generation poets, Yan Li's association with the Star Group and Misty Poets bestowed upon him a sense of social and historical responsibility and a memory of a past in which depth and essence were cherished and valued. His overseas experience provided him in-person experience of capitalism and an otherized position of the modernization and globalization processes in China as an inside observer. Because of this background, he still writes poetry even though most of Misty poets have ceased to do so. Although he is very active in the Chinese poetry circle, he writes differently from those "popular" "label poets"⁴³.

Globalization and consumerism are frequent themes of Yan's poems. His poetic language is direct and critical, conveying his profound understanding of the encroachment of global capitalism and consumerism. In his poems, one can always detect the struggle the self-reflective poet experiences, facing the overwhelming economic transformations that China has undergone in the last two decades. His "Report and Instruction" is such an example.

Report!
 I report to the officer of the New Century:
 Discover new situations in both front and back.
 Treating materialism as friend or enemy,
 Either side aims at consumption.
 Another new situation:
 We discover over ninety percent of plastic in spiritual products,
 And over ninety percent of profit in material products.

Instruction please!
 Do I still need to lay in ambush in between?⁴⁴

The title - "Report and Instruction" - may sound strange to the contemporary Chinese. As mentioned earlier, Yan was born in the 1950s and lived through the traumatic years of Cultural Revolution (1966-1976). Both his grandfather and father were persecuted by the Red Guards, and his grandfather, an extremely famous doctor in Shanghai who raised Yan for several years, committed suicide as a result of the relentless persecution. Till the end of 1970s, it's natural for people to report about almost everything including their own private lives to the Communist Party, and live according to the instructions they receive from the Party. The battlefield setting of the poem symbolizes the confrontation between China and the west in the Cold War era. At that time, China was against materialism calling for spiritual utopianism, while the West was all for materialism which was regarded by the Chinese government as the spiritual

pollution. The short but powerful lines, with Yan's use of punctuation, intensified the war situation.

The past hostility between the two sides has been muted by their shared interest in consumerism. Aside from the homogeneous impulse of consumption, spiritual products have materialized and become spiritless, since "over ninety percent of plastic" is found "in spiritual products." Unlike these lifeless spiritual products, "over ninety percent of profit" is found "in material products." The line between the two battlefields is now disappearing. The poem is an insightful depiction of a China that is obsessed with materialism and consumerism. With such a clear "report" in hand, one cannot help wondering why the poet still needs to ask for "instruction" and why the poet simply cannot follow suit with the popular Third Generation poets' and become wealthy.

The need for "instruction" from above indicates Yan's wish to stand aside from the waves of consumerism and materialism, and to remain untainted by the power of capital. Obviously, it's an extremely difficult position for anyone to maintain without any socio-political support. In this poem, Yan is calling for an ideological or collective awakening to the overpowering materialism, and for conscious self-distancing at least in the minds of the spiritual workers. The need for "instruction" also reflects Yan's understanding of the dominant role of political powers in China's superstructure. China's stunning economic transformation from planned to market economy was the result of a series of political decisions starting with Deng Xiaoping's "reform and opening up" policy of the late 1970s. The metamorphoses in economic and socio-cultural spaces are dictated, designed, and affected by the political discourse. Without instructions from the Communist party, it has been impossible for contemporary cultural workers to distance

themselves and their works from the logic of market economy and to truly create to meet spiritual needs, not to produce for the politically correct market.

In a word, in this poem Yan has represented the transforming socio-political spaces in the contemporary China, and created a “third space,” to borrow Homi Bhabha’s words, to distance, critique, and resist the other discursive spaces.⁴⁵ Beneath the rational, concise, and self-mocking tone of the poem is the silent suffering of the poet in the no-man’s land. This pain has its root in Yan’s experiences inside and outside of China and comes from his deep concern for China’s development and tradition. In this sense, Yan could be considered as a diasporic poet. The critical spirit, conscientious attitude, and sensible tone of the poem are exactly what those Third Generation poems lack.

Sexuality, the subject of most Third Generation poems, is often touched upon in Yan’s poems as well. Unlike the Lower Body poets who use sex and eroticism to trademark their rebelliousness and idiosyncrasy against the mainstream ideology, Yan acknowledges the irresistible power of sexual power, as he ridicules the rotten effects of the libido-empowered economy. In “Features of Cultural Relics,” Yan juxtaposes the Great Wall and the Statue of Liberty, the cultural symbols of China and the United States respectively.

In my dream, I see the Goddess of Liberty wandering on the Great Wall
 Her long skirt and bra grasp my gaze tacitly
 The protruding part of her body
 Fits neatly into the parts that the Great Wall toppled down
 In my dream, I also see
 Cultural symbols of different political systems
 Yesterday, I collected a brick of the Great Wall
 Today
 I collect the height of the Goddess of Liberty⁴⁶

The Great Wall is regarded in general as the symbol of China, which testifies the long history of China and the courage and wisdom of the ancient Chinese. It is the world's longest human-made structure and the largest human-made structure in terms of surface area and mass. The Great Wall often reminds the Chinese of the thousands of peasants who died building it and of the legend of Meng Jiangnu (孟姜女). Meng, a woman who lived during the Qin dynasty (221-205 b. c.), when the construction of the Great Wall began, came to the Great Wall upon learning of her husband's death. She cried so bitterly that a part of the Great Wall was washed away by her tears, allowing her to recover her husband's body that had been buried beneath it. Since the Great Wall was intended to protect the northern borders of the Chinese Empire, some argue that it doesn't symbolize the national glory but the backwardness and the repression of ancient China. Bearing these historical and cultural legacies of the Great Wall in mind, the intimate match in the poem of the "protruding part" of the Goddess of Liberty's body, which is seductive, aggressive, and liberal, and the Great Wall, which is old, deteriorating, conservative, and full of bitterness, is dense with connotations.

The image of the Goddess of Liberty wandering on the Great Wall in her bra and long skirt is strikingly, if not astonishingly, depicted in the poem written in 2005. Two years later, the Great Wall became the stage of a bizarre fashion show.⁴⁷ (Figure 6)



The *Daily Mail* photograph showing beautiful models walking down the ancient Great Wall's steep slope in revealing clothes and high heels has long been illustrated and expected in Yan's poem. "The global circulation of bodies" which "is facilitated by a capitalist economy of demand and supply"⁴⁸ as we observe in Yan's poem turns into reality. Yan adds to the irony by stating "Yesterday, I collected a brick of the Great Wall/Today/I collect the height of the Goddess of Liberty." Even if the newly obtained, western-originated liberty is a welcome change to China's static status, the cultural loss caused by the mindless shift of discourses is devastating. Sex, with its literary and imagery packaging and as a selling point, has penetrated all boundaries and has been incorporated into the operation of capital in contemporary China.

The world reflected in Yan's poems steeped in sex, capital, and commodities. Instead of simply mirroring the external spaces, Yan tries to distance himself from them, penetrate the surface, and reach for some deep meanings and new directions. The depictions and reflections in his poems are often presented from humanistic, global, and historical perspectives. Rather than diminishing poetic space by employing graphic sexual descriptions and empty signifiers as contemporary Chinese poets do, Yan has created a poetic space, which is charged with grace of dreams and insights of the world.

According to Gaston Bachelard, “Dreams (rêve, m.) and reveries (reverie, f.), dreams (songe, m.) and daydreams (songerie, f.), memories (souvenir, m.) and remembrance (souvenance, f.) are all indications of a need to make everything feminine which is enveloping and soft above and beyond the too simply masculine designations for our states of mind.”⁴⁹ In Yan’s poems, we observe a perfect blending of masculine and feminine elements. Keen observations and reflections are conveyed with both precision and subtlety in images of a refined mixture of dream, reverie, memories and remembrance, representing and provoking dynamic relations between the poem (the thing) and the outer spaces (not-things). The poem thus has an ontological life of its own.

Yan owes his insights to his extensive travels, especially his life in New York. For Yan whose identity cannot be fixed to a single location, the existence of an “other” is a necessity for the constitution of his self. As a citizen in Beijing, he was an avid seeker of western culture and civilization. After many years overseas, Yan consequently becomes a product of globalization, possessing a “flexible citizenship.”⁵⁰ Nevertheless, Yan still seems to link his identity with Beijing. Beijing is “the backdrop of my soul” as he writes in his poem “Cannot Help Loving Beijing.”

Diasporans, according to Abdul JanMohamed, “located in this site are not, so to speak, ‘sitting’ on the border; rather, they are forced to constitute themselves as the border,” as “the border only functions as a mirror, as a site of defining the ‘identity’ and ‘homogeneity’ of the group that has constructed it.”⁵¹ Yan is such a “border intellectual” who, as Abdul JanMohamed notes, are “able to combine elements of the two cultures in order to articulate new syncretic forms and experiences.”⁵² Yan’s global experience has reformulated his identity, which has its roots in Beijing. The “historical inheritance” he

acquired in Beijing converses constantly with his presence in the heterogeneity in terms of space, time, race, culture, language, history and politics. This dialogue consequently makes him a site of cross-cultural negotiation and helps him observe the processes of marketization and globalization in China from a critical distance, when many other Chinese mainland poets are passively affected by globalization, and are ready to cater to westernization (most noticeably misinterpreted as individualism and eroticism) and marketization to distance themselves from the Chinese poetic tradition and conventional values, and to translate their potential cultural capital into real money.

Yan is critical of commodification and globalization. In “Untitled,” Yan takes Coca Cola as a point of departure in talking about the effect of globalization.

I took a picture with Coca Cola.
 Friends say they don't see much compatibility between us
 They all say she is too old, too dark, and full of material arrogance
 Though her marketed image is globally recognizable
 They also say, for the quality of the next generation
 I shouldn't just rate a spouse economically
 With body and soul, I ferment affection once again
 Till I lost my direction in measuring various factors
 Till I lost my advantage of being young to compete with the others
 Till there is only chill and loneliness left in my heart
 Till my repentant cries echo thunderously
 Till I feel like an ice-cube, bobbing about in cola
 Talking about no dream but consumption⁵³

In this poem, Yan personifies Coca Cola and his relationship with it. He takes a picture of himself with Coca Cola. Coca Cola, the symbol of Western culture, is “too old, too dark, and full of material arrogance” for the poet and his friends. Though “friends say they don't see much compatibility between us,” they still urge the poet to pursue it for economic and ecological benefits for the next generation. Adopting his friends' suggestion, the poet “ferment(s) affection once again” “with body and soul.”

Nevertheless, his entire struggle afterward is eventually defeated by the irresistible wave of commercialization and the suffocating culture of consumerism. He becomes a victim of the capitalist economy, “talking about no dream but consumption.”

As we see from this poem, the acceleration of commercialization and globalization have reduced the modern being to a machine-like, soulless consumer, diminishing his or her passion, youth, and morality with numerous and endless economic measures. Fredric Jameson claims

Capitalism, and the modern age, is a period in which, with the extinction of the sacred and the “spiritual,” the deep underlying materiality of all things has finally risen dripping and convulsive into the light of day; and it is clear that culture itself is one of those things whose fundamental materiality is now for us not merely evident but quite inescapable.⁵⁴

What Yan bemoans is exactly the soullessness and entrapment of modern being in the globalized economy and materialism.

The protagonist’s ironic marriage to Coca Cola and the loss of his soul unfolded in an absurd but realist manner. The fable-like, comi-tragic quality of the poem penetrates the deceptive pleasure brought by consumerism and reveals its innate absurdity. Like “Features of Cultural Relics,” this poem has an “in-progress” poetic space, which is planted in outer spaces. In its mixture of dreams, daydreams, memories and remembrance, it makes the absurd realistic, the realistic absurd, the emotional material, and the material emotional. It’s worth noting that this poem was performed at a party in the home of one of Yan’s friends in Shanghai, and aroused heated discussion of China’s present situation.⁵⁵ The performability and warm reception of the poem testify to the ontological nature of poetry and indicate new directions for contemporary Chinese poetry.

As mentioned earlier, Yan is well versed in western and eastern ideologies and cultures and is very concerned about China's social and cultural development. The extra-local elements and the interrelation of cultural symbols from different places that are often found in Yan's poems indicate his trans-local and transcultural mode of thinking and living, which redefine his sense of place against the primordial limitations and remain outside of the overdetermined discourses. "Diaspora," as Benzi Zhang states,

does not merely refer to a wandering journey, since it enacts a process of mutual translation and interaction, in which place has been translated into plural interrelationships that bridge and abridge different cultures. The (a) bridging effects of diaspora require us to examine the spatio-temporal imaginaries of place within a new context, for diaspora informs of the multifaceted complexity of the dialectical negotiation between *here* and *there* – a tension that not only reflects the very nature of diasporic identity but also indicates a salient feature of nonlimited locality.⁵⁶

It is the unlocatability and indeterminacy qualities associate with Yan's poetry that distinguish him from the other poets and bestow his poetry revolutionary potentials. In the global hegemony of capital, what signification does place has on Yan?

In "Can't Help Loving Beijing," Yan writes:

Think of Beijing
 Sanli River
 Bayi Lake
 Erli Ditch
 Think of a string of places
 Marking my experiences and the tone of the 70s
 Think of "In the Heat of the Sun"
 And Fuxing Hospital
 Where I had my lung surgery

No matter where I am
 Beijing will follow me
 Loyal and full-heartedly
 Even when I watched a 1999 Hollywood film
 In New York
 The back of my chair seemed to be the red wall of the Forbidden City
 So, for me, the eventual background of the film

Is Beijing

Think of the pictures on the Chinese currency, and
 The value systems reflected by these pictures
 Think of dating on bikes
 And today's commercialization and
 Beauties who accompanying the millionaire
 As well as stocks and lottery's play of lives
 My background becomes richer and richer

This is my background with blood and meat
 The foreground is my bones and my rationality
 Left or around
 I'm making for Beijing the "me"
 The product distanced by transient history
 No matter what
 At least have a chat with the flames of the Babao Mountain
 Of Beijing's sky
 So
 Beijing still is my soul's background⁵⁷

"Being away or around, I am always making for Beijing the 'me'/the product distanced by a transient history." Yan is confessing that wherever he is, he is creating himself for Beijing, "the background of his soul." When he watches a film in New York, he feels like he's watching it in Beijing. Not quite a reflection on place-in-displacement, one senses from the poem that location for Yan no longer matters as geographical borders have been diminished in his mind. "Outer edge or border," Jacques Derrida observes, "can also be considered an inner fold" which suggests an ambiguous feeling of diasporans who try to find some "seed element" in their identities.⁵⁸ Conjecturing from the co-presence and the coordination of inner and outside worlds in Yan's poem, he seems to have transcended the outside place and pay more attention to his inward "traveling." He becomes a global being, having his root in Beijing, old and new, wherever he is searching for his own identity.

Another factor in this poem that trivializes of the significance of place is that Beijing has changed: it is no longer the Beijing which stands for the “value systems reflected by the pictures” on the Chinese currency and where one went on dates on bikes, but one known for its “commercialization” and “beauties who accompanying the millionaires.” When the poet thinks of Beijing, he recalls a string of places: Sanli River, Bayi Lake, Erli Ditch, Fuxing Hospital and Babao Mountain. These places, still there or not, are not the places people nowadays would mention as landmarks of Beijing. Unlike contemporary landmarks, such as famous shopping centers (the New Dong’an Market 新东安, Oriental Plaza 东方广场, Yansha 燕沙, Guomao 国贸, Huamao 华贸, Dangdai 当代) and monumental buildings (the National Grand Theater, the National Stadium, Chinese Central Television Tower), the names of the places the poet recalls have an earthy smell and relate closely to the geographical features of the places. These places construct a memory-accumulating space for ordinary citizens’ lives. The poet’s memory of his youthful romance, his past illness, and the values of his generation are attached to the names and the imageries of these places. The organic nature of these places contrasts with the “rootlessness” of Beijing’s new landmarks, which are either globally standardized super malls or futuristic architectures designed by international talents showcasing hybridity.

Since commercialization and globalization dictate wherever the protagonist goes, home and abroad, the spatial difference has been diminished. Our collective status as economic beings becomes dominant, overpowering all the other forms of existence. Therefore, the poet experiences a double estrangement from Beijing: spatial and

temporal. Even though the old landmarks are still there, the characteristics of the 1970s have been replaced by those of the twenty-first Century.

As diasporans travel not only in space but also in time, multilocality and contemporality are equally important in the formation of diasporic identity. “Contemporality,” according to Stuart Hall, is “formed at the unstable point where the ‘unspeakable’ stories of subjectivity meet the narratives of history, of a culture.”⁵⁹ The paradox is also noted by Hamid Naficy who maintains, “On the one hand, like Derrida’s ‘undecidables’ they can be ‘both and neither;’” “On the other hand, they could aptly be called, in Rushdie’s words, ‘at once plural and partial.’”⁶⁰ In Yan’s poem, Beijing is not only remembered and enriched in the poet’s imagination in an extra-local and transcultural environment, but also observed in location from a historical viewpoint. The geographically and temporally plural points of view nevertheless result in the “partial” obstinacy of the poet – “No matter what / At least have a chat with the flames of the Babao Mountain / Of Beijing’s sky.” Babao Mountain is the most famous graveyard for revolutionaries in China. The poet’s desire to “have a chat with the flames of the Babao Mountain” reveals his desire to spend his last years in Beijing. As the old Chinese saying states, “the falling leaves return to the root.” Beijing is exactly the “root” that Yan wants to return to, even though the past simple and pure way of life in the city has been replaced by today’s complexity and foulness.

The nostalgia for and the commemoration of the past - be it cultural, historical, or emotional, that are apparent in Yan’s poems are absent from China’s contemporary poetry scene. Yan’s global positioning and his inseparable attachment to Beijing have combined to provide him a vantage point of both an insider and outsider to reflect upon

here and there, past and now, local and global. He is both here and there, now and then. If the young generation poets and writers have found some cutting points at which to start a dialogue with the dominant discourses and become the new discursive languages to promote a mindless consumer society, Yan stands outside of the local (even national) power dynamics and remains a true artist devoted to the creation of poetic space, not a merchant. Though Yan's position on the boundaries results in the lukewarm reception of his poetry in mainland China, diasporans such as Yan "open-up" the notions of place and identity and merge extra-local and trans-local elements in the characterization of locality. The space Yan physically traveled in a sense manifests the psychological, emotional, and intellectual tour of his self-exiled self. It seems that the initial intention of the symbolic exile is to search for a self or some expressions of a self (his inward traveling, his poetic space). His physical traveling awakens him to the hegemonic power of the capital. To survive in such a materialistic and commercial society, it seems necessary to leave one's birthplace in order to understand and transcend the discourses dominated by capital. As a poet first emerged with Menglong poets, Yan has carried the revolutionary spirit to the contemporary. He is among the first group of poets who were unaffected by the fanfares in contemporary poetry and insisted on approaching the essence of poetry.

¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, "To Lou Andreas-Salomé," in Jon Cook ed., *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 36.

² Louis Zukofsky, "A Statement for Poetry," in Jon Cook ed., *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 297.

³ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), p. 39.

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- ⁴ Julia Kristeva, "The Ethnics of Linguistics," in Jon Cook ed., *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 443-444.
- ⁵ Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984), p.181.
- ⁶ For detailed account of Henri Lefebvre's conceptualization of space, see the chapter titled "A City of Disappearance: Trauma, Displacement and Spectral Cityscape in Contemporary Chinese Cinema."
- ⁷ This is also related to Homi Bhabha's notion of the Third Space. For detailed illustration, see the chapter titled "Paradigms of flexible configurations: I-generation and Beijing-punks in Wang Meng, Xu Xing, and Chun Shu."
- ⁸ Julia C. Lin, *Modern Chinese Poetry: An Introduction* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1972), p. 75.
- ⁹ Zhu Guangcan, *Zhongguo shige shi (History of Modern Chinese Poetry 中国诗歌史)* (Shandong: Shandong University Press, 1997), p. 25.
- ¹⁰ Wen Yiduo, *Wen Yiduo Zhuanji* (Complete works of Wen Yiduo 闻一多选集), Chu ed. (Shanghai: Kaiming, 1948).
- ¹¹ Julia C. Lin, *Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. 82.
- ¹² Shen Congwen, "Tan 'Langsong Shi'" (On Poetry Reading 谈“朗诵诗”), *Sing Tao Daily*, Oct. 1-5, 1938.
- ¹³ Julia C. Lin, *Modern Chinese Poetry*, p. 102.
- ¹⁴ Maghiel van Crevel, "Underground Poetry in the 1960s and 1970," in *Modern Chinese Literature*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall 1996): 172.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 179.
- ¹⁶ Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker*, trans. Bonnie S. McDougall (New York: New Directions, 1988), p. 33.
- ¹⁷ Michelle Yeh, "Light a Lamp in a Rock: Experimental Poetry in Contemporary China," *Modern China*, Vol. 18, No. 4. (Oct., 1992): 382.
- ¹⁸ Bei Dao, *The August Sleepwalker*, p. 33.
- ¹⁹ Maghiel van Crevel, "Underground Poetry in the 1960s and 1970," p. 195.
- ²⁰ Michelle Yeh explains "When a new crop of poets emerged around 1986, they called themselves 'the Newborn Generation' or 'the Third Generation.' It was part of the genealogy that they constructed, in which the senior poets who resumed writing after the Cultural Revolution (during which most of them had been persecuted and silenced) were 'the First Generation,' and the Misty Poets – poets in their twenties and early thirties who had mostly been 'educated youth' during the Cultural Revolution and began to publish their works in the late 1970s and early 1980s – were 'the Second Generation.'" Quoted from her "Anxiety & Liberation: Notes on the Recent Chinese Poetry Scene," *China Today* (July-August 2007): 32.
- ²¹ Michelle Yeh, "Light a Lamp in a Rock: Experimental Poetry in Contemporary China," p. 393.
- ²² *Ibid.*, p. 397.
- ²³ *Ibid.*, p. 401.

²⁴ For a comprehensive analysis of the online poetry communities, see Michel Hockx, “Virtual Chinese Literature: A Comparative Case Study of Online Poetry Communities,” *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 183 (Set., 2005): 670-691.

²⁵ Michelle Yeh, “Anxiety and Liberation: Notes on the Recent Chinese Poetry Scene,” p. 31.

²⁶ Represented by Shen Haobo 沈浩波 b. 1976 and Yin Lichuan 尹丽川 b. 1973, graduates from Beijing Normal University and Beijing University respectively.

²⁷ Represented by Xu Xiangchou 徐乡愁.

²⁸ This trend is arguably notorious in “Zhao Lihua incident” 赵丽华事件. Zhao Lihua is a first class national writer in China. Several of her poems were posted online and generated a nationwide heated polemic on the quality of modern Chinese poetry online.

²⁹ Similar dichotomies between the established and the experimental poetry started to take form in the early 1980s. Maghiel van Crevel offered a clear chart of the opposites between “the elevated” and “the earthly” in his “Not Quite Karaoke: Poetry in Contemporary China,” *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 183 (Set., 2005): 644-669.

³⁰ Marjorie Perloff paraphrased from Peter Bürger’s *Theory of the Avant-Garde* (German edition, 1974; English translation, 1984) in “Avant-Garde or Endgame,” *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000*, Jon Cook ed. (Blackwell Publishing, 2004), p. 549.

³¹ My translation. See below for the original poem in Chinese.

为什么不再舒服一些

尹丽川

哎 再往上一点再往下一点再往左一点再往右一点

这不是做爱 这是钉钉子

噢 再快一点再慢一点再松一点再紧一点

这不是做爱 这是扫黄或系鞋带

喔 再深一点再浅一点再轻一点再重一点

这不是做爱 这是按摩、写诗、洗头或洗脚

为什么不再舒服一些呢 嗯 再舒服一些嘛

再温柔一点再泼辣一点再知识分子一点再民间一点

为什么不再舒服一些

2000/01/31

³² Sheldon Lu, *Chinese Modern and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2007), p.54.

³³ Michelle Yeh provides profound analyses of the paradoxical phenomenon of the “cult of poetry” in post-Mao China in “The ‘Cult of Poetry’ in Contemporary China.” According to Yeh, the “cult of poetry” “advocates creative freedom and individuality; however, in elevating poetry to the status of a supreme religion, it imposes arbitrary

limits on poetry. It defies the official ideology, yet it is unable to escape entirely the absolutist, Utopian mentality in its worship of the poet and deification of poetry. It resists and detests consumerism, yet it is by no means immune from itself becoming a commodity. When it is perceived by the outside world as ‘dissent literature’ in a totalitarian regime, Chinese avant-garde poetry can easily be turned-or some may say, has already been turned-into a commodity in the international (especially Western) cultural market.” In *The Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 55, No.1. (Feb., 1996): 51-80. For a detailed account of classical Chinese poetry’s position and influence, and the arguments on Chineseness and modernity, see Michelle Yeh, “‘There Are no Camels in the Koran’: What Is Modern about Modern Chinese Poetry?” In *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry*, Christopher Lupke ed. (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008).

³⁴ For a complete account of modern Chinese poets’ identity crisis, see Michelle Yeh’s *Modern Chinese Poetry: Theory and Practice Since 1917* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1991).

³⁵ Maghiel van Crevel, “Not Quite Karaoke: Poetry in Contemporary China,” *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 183 (Sept., 2005): 656.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p 659.

³⁷ Maghiel van Crevel, “Not Quite Karaoke: Poetry in Contemporary China,” p. 644. The quoted line was Yin Lichuan’s comments with which Maghiel Van Crevel agrees.

³⁸ Marjorie Perloff quoted in “Avant-Garde or Endgame,” in Jon Cook ed., *Poetry in Theory: An Anthology 1900-2000* (Malden, Oxford and Victoria: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), pp. 549 -550.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p 651.

⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991).

⁴¹ Marjorie Perloff quoted in “Avant-Garde or Endgame,” pp. 549 -550.

⁴² Paul Manfredi, “Yan Li in the Global City.” In Christopher Lupke ed., *New Perspectives on Contemporary Chinese Poetry* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008), p. 149.

⁴³ As contemporary Chinese poetry scene is crowded by different labels, such as “Lower Body,” “Trash,” “Saliva,” “Feifei,” etc., I use “label poets” to refer to such self-fashioning groups as a whole.

⁴⁴ (All translations of Yan Li’s poems used in this chapter are mine.)

报告和请示

严力

报告！

我向新世纪的长官报告：

前后方都发现了新的情况

把物质看成敌人或朋友的双方

其实都是为了消费

另外还有一个情报：

精神产品中发现了百分之九十以上的塑料
而物质产品中
有着百分之九十以上的利润
请示！
我是否还要埋伏在两者之间？

2005. 5.

⁴⁵ For a detailed account of Homi Bhabha's notion on the Third Space, see the chapter titled "Paradigms of Flexible Configurations: I-Generation and Beijing-Punks in Wang Meng, Xu Xing, and Chun Shu" in the dissertation.

⁴⁶ 文物特征
严力

我梦见自由女神正在长城上闲逛
她的长裙与胸罩与我的目光产生了默契
长城倒塌的那些部分
正好与她凸起的地方相称
我还梦见了
不同政治体制的文物特征
昨天我收藏了长城的一块砖
今天
我收藏了女神的高度

2005.5.

⁴⁷ See *Daily Mail* on 19th October 2007, available online at http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/news/news.html?in_article_id=488595&in_page_id=1770 (accessed December 16, 2007).

⁴⁸ Sheldon Lu, "Introduction: China and the Global Biopolitical Order," *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), p. 7.

⁴⁹ Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. Daniel Russell (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971), p. 29.

⁵⁰ Aihwa Ong, *Flexible Citizenship: The Cultural Logics of Transnationality* (Durham&London: Duke University Press, 1999).

⁵¹ Abdul J. JanMohamed, "Worldliness-without-World, Homelessness-as-Home: Toward a Definition of the Specular Border Intellectual," in Michael Sprinker ed., *Edward Said: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1992), p. 103.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵³ 无题

我与可口可乐合拍了一张影像
 但朋友们都说看不出有甚麽夫妻相
 都说他太老太黑太多物质的狂妄
 虽然百年来他有全球共识的卖相
 朋友们还说为了我那下一代的质量
 绝不能光从经济上考虑配偶的优良
 于是我一次次地把全身心的情感酝酿
 直到我在各种条件的衡量中乱了方向
 直到我再也没有青春的优势与他人较量
 直到我内心只剩下一片天寒地冻的凄凉
 直到我最终把忏悔词喊得山响
 直到如冰块沉浮在可乐中的我
 不再谈论除消费之外的任何理想

2001.7.21

I've consulted Denis Mair's translation of this poem on *Poetry Sky* when I did my own. For Denis Mair's translation, go to <http://poetrysky.com/quarterly/quarterly-1-yanli.html>.

⁵⁴ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p.67.

⁵⁵ Li Yan, "Wode Zuopin Shijian" (The Incident of My Work 我的作品事件), *Huangei Wo: Yan Li Shixuan 1974-2004 (Return To Me: Selected Poems by Li Yan 1974-2004 还给我: 严力诗选1974-2004)* (Australia: Original Land Press 原乡出版社, 2004), pp.218-223.

⁵⁶ Benzi Zhang, "Of Nonlimited Locality/Identity: Chinese Diaspora Poetry in America." *Journal of American Studies* (2006), 40, pp: 133-153.

⁵⁷ 不得不熱愛北京

想起北京
 三里河
 八一湖
 二里溝
 想起一系列帶有我經歷的
 七十年代語氣的地方
 想起“陽光燦爛的日子”
 想起我在那裏作過胃部手術的
 復興醫院

不管我在什麼地方
 北京都會忠誠地無奈地
 沒有餘地的跟著我
 甚至我在紐約觀看一場

1999年的好萊塢電影時
那椅背就像故宮的紅牆
所以這場電影的最終的背景
對我來說還是北京

想起人民幣上的畫面
這些畫面的價值觀念
想起自行車上談戀愛
更想起如今的商業炒作和
傍大款
股票和彩券的人生遊戲
我的背景越來越豐富多彩

這正是我有血有肉的背景啊
前景是我的骨頭我的理性
離開或者沒有離開
我都在為北京製造我這個
因暫時的歷史而拉開了距離的產品
無論好壞
最起碼也要和八寶山的火焰
聊聊北京的天空
所以啊
北京還是我靈魂的背景1999

⁵⁸ Jacques Derrida, "Living On: Border Lines," trans. James Hulbert, in Harold Bloom et al., eds., *Deconstruction and Criticism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 76.

⁵⁹ Stuart Hall, "Minimal Selves," in L. Appignanesi, ed., *Identity: The Real Me*. ICA Documents No. 6 (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987), p. 44.

⁶⁰ Hamid Naficy, "Phobic Spaces and Liminal Panics: Independent Transnational Film Centre," in Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake, eds., *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), p. 125.

Chapter Three Paradigms of Flexible Configurations: I-Generation and Beijing-Punks in Wang Meng, Xu Xing, and Chun Shu

China's dramatic changes since the socio-economic reforms unleashed by Deng Xiaoping serve also as the socio-political background of contemporary Chinese literature as it does for other cultural forms. The increasingly commercialized, monumentalized, and globalized cityscape is one of the most visible demonstrations of these epochal changes. Essential to this explosive urban space is the paradigmatic reconfigurations of self-identity contending and struggling for discursive and intersubjective legitimacy. This chapter will first relate western cultural politics of difference to literary experiments in contemporary China, and then examine the contested drama of the epic quest of self-identity through critical rereading of literary works by three Beijing writers: Wang Meng's (王蒙) *Kite Streamers* (*Fengzheng piaodai* 风筝飘带, 1979), Xu Xing's (徐星) *Variations without a Theme* (*Wuzhuti bianzhou* 无主题变奏, 1985), and Chun Shu's (春树) *Beijing Doll* (*Beijing wawa* 北京娃娃, 2001).

Theoretical Attempts to Break the Binary Ordering of Cultural Differences

According to Edward Soja and Barbara Hooper, "Hegemonic power does not simply manipulate naively given differences between individuals and social groups, it actively *produces and reproduces differences* as a key strategy to create and maintain

modes of social and spatial division that are advantageous to its continued empowerment.”¹ They maintain that the confrontation and compromise between the hegemonic power and those who are subjected to, dominated by, or exploited by the workings of hegemonic power constitute the composite and dynamic spatio-temporal patterning of socially constructed differences. According to them, instead of being assigned to the Other positioning, the act of *choosing marginality* to actively recenter identity and construct a “space of radical openness” as bell hooks proposed in *Yearnings: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*, “reconceptualizes the problematic of subjection by deconstructing both margin and centre, while reconstituting in the restructured (recentred) margins new spaces of opportunity, the new spaces that difference makes.”²

Although this space of radical openness appears to be “simultaneously central and marginal (and purely neither at the same time), a difficult and risky place on the edge, in-between, filled with contradictions and ambiguities, with perils but also new possibilities,”³ its autonomy on the margins does not change the overall binary picture. Despite its active power associated with self-actualization and self-integrity, this process of choosing marginality is innately a compromise to avoid confrontational conflicts in order to gain developmental opportunities.

Trinh T. Minh-ha’s strategy of displacement (as opposed to a strategy of reversal) is fundamentally different from hooks’s notion of choosing marginality. Trinh writes, “Without a certain work of displacement, the margins can easily recomfort the center in goodwill and liberalism.” The margins are “our fighting grounds” but also “their site for pilgrimage...while we turn around and claim them as our exclusive territory, they happily approve, for the divisions between margins and center should be preserved, and as clearly

demarcated as possible, if the two positions are to remain intact in their power relations.” By actively displacing and disordering difference, by insisting that there are “no master territories,” one struggles to prevent “this classifying world” from exerting its ordered, binary, categorical power.⁴

One strategy, as Soja and Hooper suggest, to displace and disorder difference to achieve what Trinh has called “the anarchy of difference” is to break out the rigid territorial confines of our primary, self-chosen “marginal” identities “as feminist, black, radical socialist, anti-colonialist, gay and lesbian activist,” and “seek instead to find more flexible ways of being other than we are while still being ourselves, of becoming open to combinations of radical subjectivities, to a multiplicity of communities of resistance.”⁵ This strategy of displacement and disordering leads to formless forms and indefinable contents. The unfixability in both form and content of the so-called margins thus elude categorical possibilities and become invisible and thus untargetable “strangers” to the hegemonic power, although they are definitely “out there,” a place both inside and outside, in an ambiguous middle zone between the conventional friend/enemy binary.

This idea could be traced back to ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Zi, who opened his *Dao De Jing*, the most influential Taoist text, with the following lines about two thousand years ago:

道可道，非常道。

"The Way that can be described is not the true Way."

名可名，非常名。

"The Name that can be named is not the constant Name."

Tao, which literally means "path" or "way," refers to the "essential nature," "destiny," "principle," or "true path," which is infinite, transcendent, indistinct, and without form. Though both Taoism and the strategy of displacing and disordering difference aim to

break down categories and limits, Taoism seeks the transcendental way that above and beyond nameability, while the latter is a playing with the boundary which is similar to Homi Bhabha's notion of the Third Space.

Bhabha develops the notion of the Third Space from the implication of the "enunciative split":

The linguistic difference that informs any cultural performance is dramatized in the common semiotic account of the disjuncture between the subject of a proposition (énoncé) and the subject of enunciation, which is not represented in the statement but which is the acknowledgement of its discursive embeddedness and address, its cultural positionality, its reference to a present time and a specific space. The pact of interpretation is never simply an act of communication between the I and the You designated in the statement. The production of meaning requires that these places be mobilized in the passage through a Third Space, which represents both the general conditions of language and the specific implication of the utterance in a performative and institutional strategy of which it cannot 'in itself' be conscious.⁶

The indeterminability of the space of the subject(s) of enunciation makes the future an open question with its innovative energy. By extension, the unfixable identity of the subject(s) disturbs the binary ordering of One and the Other by making the boundaries fluid and ephemeral. Bhabha later remarks:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications. What is at issue is the performative nature of differential identities: the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, *contingently*, 'opening out', remaking the boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference – be it class, gender or race. Such assignments of social differences – where difference is neither One nor the Other but *something else besides, in-between* – find their agency in a form of the 'future' where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is, if I may stretch a point, an interstitial future, that emerges *in-between* the claims of the past and the needs of the present.⁷

This chapter will argue that some contemporary Chinese writers, such as Wang Meng and Xu Xing, have creatively employed innovative writing styles, for instance

stream-of-consciousness and confessional and fragmentary writing techniques, to on the one hand posit their oppositional position on indeterminate, unfixable boundaries; on the other hand, dive into readers' hearts to minimize the discrepancy between the subject of a proposition and the subject of enunciation and thus maximize the author's intention to disturb and disorder the difference.

Stream-of-Consciousness as a Means to Displace and Disorder Difference: Wang Meng's *Kite Streamers*

The politics of identity is undeniably also a politics of place. But this is not the proper place of bounded, pre-given essences, it is an unbounded geography of difference and contest.

Jane M. Jacobs, *Edge of Empire*

From the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 through the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, class struggle dominated social spaces and designated cultural difference in China. In that period, Chinese literature was dominated by political messages, glorifying the socialist revolution. From the late 1950s, cities were not only besieged by the countryside, a strategy Mao Zedong proposed in 1930 to win the control of the entire country, but also emptied out its educated urban youth, who were sent to the countryside for reeducation. This rustification started before the Great Leap Forward and ultimately totalled about 10% of China's 1970 urban population.⁸ The ranks of *nong* (peasants) and *gong* (craftsmen) surpassed the rank of *shi* (officials, scholars, intellectuals), and became the latter's models.⁹ Mao Zhedong castigated intellectuals as

Chou laojiu (the Filthy Old Ninth 臭老九) and singled them out for public humiliation during the Cultural Revolution. The reputation and social rank of the intellectuals hit the bottom once again after being ranked the ninth in the Mongol-led Yuan dynasty (1271 – 1368), below prostitutes and only above beggars. Private property and privacy were supplanted by the unconditional collectivism and the unquestionable nationalism.

With the gradual return of those relocated urban youth and the end of the Cultural Revolution, the radical revolutionary craze to create a utopian world was replaced by realistic objectives that had economic development at their core. The social position of *shang* (businessmen) rose from the bottom, conspiring and competing with *shi*, which had been restored its leading position. Chinese literature gradually entered a “new period” in which people contemplated the “scars” and questioned ideological commandments of the immediate past. This introspective mood was followed by literary forays into previously restricted areas of ideology. Different from the dominant tone of exposure and accusation that characterizes “scar” (*shanghen* 伤痕) and “introspective” (*fansi* 反思) fiction, the works of Wang Meng (1934 -) that touched upon the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s and early 1980s employ modernist techniques of stream-of-consciousness, internal monologue, jumping points-of-view, exploring the psychology of the characters to transcend the geographical and temporal limits. Intentionally choosing the margins, Wang’s characters disorder the boundary of difference by relating to different layers of memory, dreams, and realities, and express “a greater concern for the current state of the soul, and a tendency toward philosophical considerations on historical ideas and logic.”¹⁰

Wang Meng, one of the most prominent contemporary authors and minister of culture for three years in the late 1980s, first became popular with his 1953 novel *Springtime Forever* (Qingchun Wansui 青春万岁). His 1956 *The Young Newcomer in the Organization Department* (Zuzhibu laile ge qingnianren 组织部来了个青年人), which depicted an idealistic young Party worker who became frustrated by an inert social reality, was intensely criticized and became one of the major literary targets of the anti-Rightist movement (1957-1959). Wang was exiled as a rightist first to the suburb of Beijing and then to Xinjiang to be reeducated for the next twenty years. Returning to Beijing in 1978, Wang's writing styles became more mature and sophisticated, and rejected some of the conventions of the modern narrative tradition to better reflect the reality. The new writing style that Wang used in "The Eyes of Night (Ye de yan 夜的眼)," "Voices of Spring (Chun zhi sheng 春之声)," "Dreams of the Sea (Hai de meng 海的梦)," "Kite Streamers," and "The Butterfly (Hudie 蝴蝶)," shocked China's literary world like "a set of hand grenades."¹¹

After reviewing Wang's "The Eyes of Night," "Voices of Spring," "Dreams of the Sea," William Tay concludes that "The deemphasis of plot and the focus on inner lives in these three pieces indicate an unprecedented shift from the mimetic to the psychological, a move which is undoubtedly pioneering in the history of PRC fiction."¹² Taking "Kite Streamers" (1979) as an example, I argue that Wang has successfully used "stream of consciousness" to break through geographical and temporal confines, informing the present with both the past and the future through memory and dream, to distant from, mirror, reflect, and transcend the present and places.

Wang begins “*Kite Streamers*” with a description of post-Cultural Revolution

Beijing.

Beside the white-on-red slogan ‘Long Live the Great People’s Republic of China!’, its exclamation mark squeezed tightly against it, towered a two-storey high advertisement for Triangle brand spoons, forks and knives. Together with its neighbours – advertising Xinghai brand pianos, Great Wall travelling cases, Snow Lily cashmere sweaters, Goldfish pencils – it received the meek kisses bestowed by the loyal lights and revealed a glossy, covetous smile. Lean and unyielding willows and two friendly cypresses, one large, the other small, used their random, elegant shadows to console a lawn robbed of its freshness by the west wind. Between the loud billboards and the solitary lawn Fan Susu stood in a relentless early winter night wind.¹³

Commercial billboards towered over the bulletin board bearing political slogan. The

“glossy, covetous” appearance of the former eclipsed the tight, tense air of the latter.

Privatization and marketization had gained legitimacy and superiority in the

representational space of society. Nationalism and the notion of class struggle, as

indicated in the “white-on-red slogan ‘Long Live the Great People’s Republic of China!’”

had not completely retreated from the social space. Signs of Beijing’s notorious

environmental problems were already noticeable. The few miserable trees, which had

survived Mao’s slogan of “Man must conquer Nature” (Ren ding sheng tian 人定胜天),

seemed to be doomed by the rising waves of materialism, which Susu, the female

protagonist of the story, said “all of a sudden sprung into being.”¹⁴

The transformation of social space in Beijing, caused by China’s abandonment of

the class struggle in favor of economic development, conveyed new messages to the

residents of this place. Jiayuan, the male protagonist, said, “The more you look [at the

advertising billboards], the more you think you too could have a piano.”¹⁵ The

hallucinating power of mediated (soft) representations, as Jean Baudrillard pointed out,

replaced the “real” with “the simulacra.”¹⁶ The seductive advertisements of luxury goods

and Beijing's emerging high-rise buildings create a waking dreamworld, dismantling China's selfless collectivism, and replacing it with privatization and materialism.

Though we are inscribed by our places, we can also transgress any inscriptions, because we “possess capacities that enable us to retain, react to, and act upon being inscribed,” which are “memory, creativity, and self-identity.”¹⁷ Recognizing the creative power of memory and dream, Wang Meng was quick to adopt the new technique of “stream of consciousness” writing. In so doing, Wang wove together memory, creativity and self-identity, and plunged into the multiplicity and the complexity of his characters' psychological movements to transcend the heavily coded and surveilled spaces by creating fresh paradigms of identities.

Implicit in Wang's approach to the past is the role of memory, which is often conveyed through narrated and interior monologues, features of Wang's works, such as “The Eyes of Night,” “Voices of Spring,” “Dreams of the Sea,” and *Bolshevik Salute* (Buli 布礼, 1979).¹⁸ The spatial transformation of Beijing we see in the opening paragraph of the story did not erase the past. The memory of the city's “glorious” past remained fresh. Through Susu's memory of being “thrown out” of the city, Wang Meng foregrounded the protagonist's consciousness and juxtaposed the not-faraway “red” Beijing with the emerging material new Beijing:

When the city had thrown her out, she had only been sixteen. To say “thrown out” is not exactly fair. Salvoes of firecrackers had been set off, and brass bugles sounded to summon her to the vast countryside. In addition, there were red flags, red books, red armbands, red hearts and red oceans, a red world to be built. All the nine hundred million people in this world, from eight to eighty, formed a circle and recited quotations from Chairman Mao in unison shouting, “Kill to the left! Kill to the right! Kill! Kill! Kill!” Her longing for this kind of world had been stronger even than her earlier desire for a kite with two bells.¹⁹

In addition to this collective utopian dream of Socialism, this irrational revolutionary zeal instilled a deep-rooted sense of class struggle into people's hearts. At that time, individual property, rights, and interests were denied and demonized. Communities were exclusive and people distrusted strangers. Such social milieu did not change immediately with the transformation of the social space at the end of the Cultural Revolution. When Jiayuan helped an injured old woman home, instead of being thanked, the old woman's family, neighbors, and the old woman accused him of having been the one who injured her.

the old woman's family and neighbours had all come out and surrounded him, thinking he was the culprit. And that dim-sighted old woman, egged on and bombarded with questions, had insisted that it was Jiayuan who had run her down. Was it the confusion of old age? Was she driven by some negative intuition that regards all strangers as enemies? When he told the whole story, explaining that all he had done was to offer his help, a woman had shouted in a creaking voice, "Are you trying to tell us that you are a 'Lei Feng' sort of person?" A guffaw burst from the crowd.²⁰

According to Wang Meng's explanation, "That had happened in 1975, when everyone had studied Xunzi and believed that human nature was fundamentally bad."²¹ In such a paranoid environment, Jiayuan was punished for his kindness. "Lei Feng," the once highly respected idol, became a social laughingstock. The old woman whom Jiayuan helped took all his money and grain coupons away, with "row upon row of watchers," who were there because "it was free and more novel than the theatre and cinema, where all you heard was 'soaring to the heavens,' 'soaring to the empyrean' or 'conquer the heavens,' 'shooting through the clouds and sky.'"²²

In such a small scene, Wang Meng depicted the discrepancy between ideology and reality by shifting points-of-view (Susu's, Jiayuan's, the old woman's, and the crowd's) and plural temporal layers. The inconsistency created a dangerous void that

nurtured this deep distrust and antagonism. The numb onlookers described by Wang Meng are reminiscent of Lu Xun's well-known depiction of those mindless Chinese onlookers that he saw in a newsreel watching the Japanese invaders execute their countrymen gleefully. Just as Lu Xun was intrigued by the sight to give up his medical study in Japan and picked up the pen to save the soul of the Chinese, Wang Meng observed an urgent need to restore the educational system and people's respect for knowledge in light of privatization and materialism, to guide people who were still lost in the spiritual void and confusion caused by the Cultural Revolution.

In the story, Susu was one of those people who were confused by reality. Rather than being amused by the accident, Susu "felt a thorn picking at her heart and wanted to vomit. She stumbled away, hoping that King Solomon was not chasing after her."²³ Just as Susu could not explain why "Presenting flowers, congratulations, straight A grades, extraordinary good news, trains, cars, parades, tears of joy, Red Guards brandishing leather belts against class enemies, recitations of 'the highest instructions', green and maroon horses, the look on the production team leader's face" all "aimed at a plate containing three ounce of fried dough," her job as a waitress in a Muslim canteen in Beijing,²⁴ the majority could not comprehend the enormous gap between the past collectivism and the present privatization, and between the past spirituality and the present materialism. When cultural spaces were still dominated by outdated propaganda and the educational system had been destroyed by the Cultural Revolution, people were left to their own resources to deal with the sudden turn to privatization and marketization. Without ideological guidance from the government, Chinese society used the friend/foe

binary that it had inherited from the class struggle, and gravitated to the selfish, the amoral, and the materialistic. Social mistrust spread.

Instead of making out his message explicit as he had in *The Young Newcomer in the Organization Department*, Wang Meng blurred his oppositional position by employing stream-of-consciousness to stitch together unexplained but interconnected juxtapositions, and filtered the present through the past and the future, and dream and hope. The present moment/space/self is enriched by the past, and the past is enriched by the present. In this short story, Wang Meng's startling formal experiment in *Bolshevik Salute*, his abandonment of linear, chronological narration that had for long dominated Chinese narration, is in full display. Stitching reality to dreams and moving back and forth in time, Wang Meng conveyed that possessions cannot bypass materialism, but knowledge can. When an ambiguous ideology is overshadowed by a straightforward materialism, the spiritual void needs to be filled immediately.

Standing alone against the crowd was Jiayuan, who had just returned from the north. Instead of succumbing to disillusionment, Jiayuan, who was assigned to learn how to repair umbrellas, spent all his time in the libraries, preparing for graduate study should the educational system ever be restored. Wang Meng reconfigured the image of the *Chou laojiu* and made him the model of the ideal citizen. Jiayuan was willing to "serve the people" even if all he did was repair their umbrellas. When the old woman that he had helped took all his money and grain coupons, he forgave her because she "needed money and grain coupons badly."²⁵ Inspired by Jiayuan's enthusiasm for studying, Susu joined him to "learn something useful" while they were still young. The long disappeared kite, the symbol of hope, flew again in Susu's rekindled dreams.

This romantic, constructive, and future-oriented union between Susu and Jiayuan faced another layer of reality, which was tied to the immediate past. Though Jiayuan and Susu work, study, and serve hard, their society did not appreciate them. Susu's parents, director, the group leader and the instructor meddled in their relationship. Questions they were concerned about were:

What's his name, his original name, any other names he's ever used? His family background, his own background? What was their economic situation before and after land reform. His personal history since he was three months old? His political record? Are there any members of his family or immediate relatives who were sentenced to death or imprisonment, put under surveillance, or were landlords, rich peasants, counter-revolutionaries, bad elements, Rightists? When were they labeled as Rightist? And when were the labels removed? How did he act in past political movements? His and his family members' incomes and expenditures, bank deposits and balances...?

As Susu retorted, these questions were aimed to find a counter-revolutionary, not a friend. Though society started to recognize the right to private property, it was not ready to allow private spiritual or physical spaces. Resentment of these lovers was also shown in the fact that they could not find a place to sit and talk in the city.

For three years now they had spent their weekends looking for somewhere to sit down. They kept on looking and whole evenings disappeared. Oh, my boundless sky and vast land, on which tiny piece of you may young people court, embrace and kiss? All we need is a small, small place. You can hold great heroes, earth-shaking rebels, vicious destroyers and dissolute scoundrels. You can hold battlefields, demolition sites, city squares, meeting halls, execution grounds... why can't you find a place for Susu, 1.6 metres tall and 48 kilos in weight, and for Jiayuan, just under 1.7 metres and 54 kilos, who are head over heels in love?²⁶

No space in the city seemed to be free of loudspeakers, policemen, and aggressive and insensitive crowds. Susu and Jiayuan were laughed at, cursed and stoned by children playing in the small lanes, and were threatened by residents in a high-rise where they sought shelter from dust and rain. These two hard workers were refused a flat by the Housing Administration Department, as "there are people who've been married for

several years and have kids that still don't have a place."²⁷ Ironically, Susu's classmate from elementary school, who had saved them from the hostile residences of the high-rise, lived alone in a luxurious flat that his father had obtained for him, looking for a girl to marry. The lack of private space of the two protagonists reflected the climate of distrust and hostility that had resulted from the Cultural Revolution, and the rising atmosphere of materialism and selfishness that came with privatization and marketization. At the same time, it showed Wang Meng's willingness to depict marginal characters and give them autonomy in their own rights.²⁸ Only in dreams, in their shared dreaming of a kite, do Wang Meng's two marginalized and repressed protagonists maintain their own autonomy.

Critical responses to Wang Meng's technical experiments have been mixed.²⁹ Some Chinese scholars have asserted that Wang Meng's innovative writing style is derived completely from the western stream-of-consciousness style. Wendy Larson has pointed out that after the publication of *Bolshevik Salute*,

The similarity between the fate of Zhong Yicheng and that of Wang Meng has led some critics to call the novella autobiographical; at the same time, the political difficulty of reconciling Wang's high status as a patriotic if innovative writer with the criticism of literary modernism as a decadent Western import has led others to represent his work as realism, or as a type of distinctly Chinese modernism that uses modernist techniques but maintains a focus on social and political affairs more characteristic of realism."³⁰

Cao Wenxuan maintains that China's stream-of-consciousness novels in the 1980s are different from the western stream-of-consciousness which focuses on "pan-sexism" and ignores outside reality by exaggerating one's instincts.³¹ Though "stream-of-consciousness" was not used by western writers as to convey the inner world of a character who is completely detached from the outside world, as some Chinese critics

claimed, they are correct in observing that Wang Meng's use of the technique conveys more apparent intentional inner designs. This results mostly from Chinese readers' familiarity with the social context in which Wang's stories are set, and from the brevity of these stream-of-consciousness stories that Wang wrote in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Nevertheless, most stream-of-consciousness writings from the west are carefully structured. For example, the scenes, characters, and images in many of Virginia Woolf's novels might seem to have been selected randomly, but they are always revealed to be pieces of the hidden pattern, as Jeanne Shulkind argued in her introduction to Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being*:

During the day of Mrs Dalloway's party not only do the scenes in the minds of the major characters suggest patterns of significance built up over a lifetime, of which only fragments are brought to the surface, but the sharp differences between Clarissa Dalloway and Septimus Warren Smith, reinforced by the implausible juxtapositions of scenes from their respective lives, are shown, by the revelation of this other reality – to be merely superficial. Similarly, in *To the Lighthouse* two passages of time separated by an interval of ten years and seemingly selected at random are ultimately locked in a pattern of significant moments in the minds of several of the characters.³²

Shulkind added that Woolf's emphasis on the change and continuity of personal identity applied “only to the self that inhabits the finite world of physical and social existence.

During moments of being, this self is transcended and the individual consciousness becomes an undifferentiated part of a greater whole. Thus, just as the outer limits of personality are blurred and unstable because of the responsiveness of the self to the forces of the present moment, so the boundaries of the inner self are vaguer and, at moments, non-existent.”³³ Recognizing the potential revolutionary power embedded in the fluctuating personal identity of stream-of-consciousness writings, Wang Meng uses

memory and dream to probe the unconscious world of desire to reflect upon the present by disordering the difference, and to stimulate hope.

As Wang Meng maintains that his modernist work is influenced by both Western modernism and Chinese literary tradition,³⁴ some scholars argue that Wang Meng's style of free association (*ziyou lianxiang ti* 自由联想体) is more closely related to China's literary convention, especially the literary concept of *xing* 兴, which with the concept of *fu* 赋 and *bi* 比 have exerted enormous influence on Chinese poetic theory in particular and the whole Chinese literary tradition.³⁵ Though the idea is provocative, few have proven that Wang Meng's writings are related to *xing*, and most view *fu*, *bi*, *xing* as separable modes of expression. In "*Fu-Bi-Xing: A Metatheory of Poetry-Making*," Ming Dong Gu subjected *fu-bi-xing* to a linguistic, psychological and discourse analysis, and argued that "the literary theory of *fu-bi-xing* by ancient Chinese scholars, despite its lack of systematic rigor, constitutes a metatheory of poetry-making in which *fu*, *bi*, and *xing* represent three intertwined and overlapping states of a deepening poetic process."³⁶

According to Gu,

a *bi* may be equivalent to the Western concept of metaphor, but a *xing* is larger than metonymy or metaphor. A *xing* complex may consist of one or more metaphors and metonymies. It may be a metonymy radiating out to become a metaphor or a metaphor serving as the nodal point of a few disparate categories.... In other words, *bi* is a static, single metaphor, while *xing* is a dynamic, total, totalizing metaphor.... *Xing* is a spontaneous act of making connection between the (un)consciousness of the poet and the external world, which presupposes his/her sensitive perception of and (un)conscious response to external phenomena, the psycholinguistic transformation of his perceptions and emotions, and the potential power of a finished poem to inspire the reader.³⁷

Gu maintained that *bi* and *xing* are essentially one and the same, depending on the way of *fu* (exposition or presentation) and on the depth of mental process.³⁸ Analyzing several poems from *Shi jing*, Gu showed that

in poetic Chinese, formal absence of predication is a false impression. Implied predication is provided by the unique Chinese way of juxtaposition... Since the inherent working processes operate unseen in the mind of the poet or reader, juxtaposition in Chinese poetry is not a simple formal concept. It is essentially a psycho-linguistic concept. *Bi* and *xing* are but the surface manifestations of such a concept. Like the tip of an iceberg, what we see in the formal discourse of the poem is only a small part of the poet's psyche and of poetic creation.³⁹

As stated in the previous analysis of Wang's story, this "implied predication" "provided by the unique Chinese way of juxtaposition" links Wang Meng's writings, which were inspired by the western stream-of-consciousness, to *fu-bi-xing*. We see many similarities between stream-of-consciousness and *fu-bi-xing*. The seemingly random and fragmentary representation of consciousness which is locked in certain hidden patterns by sub/unconsciousness of stream-of-consciousness is similar to the juxtaposition of selected signifiers in *fu-bi-xing*, which may be similar, different, or even opposite to each other, but share some inherent qualities. Though Wang Meng was clearly influenced by Taoism and by Li Shangyin's poetry, his writing style is derived more from a conscious employment of stream-of-consciousness than from *fu-bi-xing*.

After analyzing the "Guan Ju" 雉鳩 poem⁴⁰, Gu concludes that, juxtaposition is not simply a formal presentation or representation. It is a complete cognitive process in which the external reality of the natural world, the psychic reality in the poet's mind's eye, and the perceived reality in the poem by the reader converge on a nodal point and are brought into a relational and hermeneutic circle. The process is made possible precisely through psychic juxtaposition which involves the processes of "condensation" (metaphor), "displacement" (metonymy), and "consideration of representability" (presentation).⁴¹

"Condensation,"⁴² "displacement,"⁴³ "considerations of representability," and "secondary revision," according to Freud, are the four major techniques employed by the dream work of the psychic apparatus to distort the psychic content to produce the pictographic script of the dream.⁴⁴ Gu, drawing upon Lacan's postulation that the two fundamental laws of

the psyche, “condensation” and “displacement,” operate in the same way as everyday discourse, mainly to argue that “Lacan’s theory of metaphor [the replacement of one word for another, which is linked to the Freudian concept of “condensation”] and metonymy [the connection of word-to-word, which is linked to the Freudian concept of “displacement”] comes close to my [Gu’s] proposition that *bi* and *xing* are essentially the same depending on how *fu* operates.”⁴⁵

Though this innovative and inspiring reinterpretation of Freud’s ideas of “condensation” and “displacement” in terms of Saussure’s linguistic model of signification and Jakobson’s theory of metaphor and metonymy is powerful in proving Gu’s thesis, the intertwined multiple layers of temporality that are innate to Freud’s psychic apparatus seem to have been washed out or even lost completely in the translation. The concepts of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing*, the three organic components of a holistic process of poetry making, are interconnected more on a linear cognitive plane rather than on a vertical axis of temporality. Memory, which is essential in stream-of-consciousness, does not play an obvious role in *fu-bi-xing*. Wang Meng’s writing style, with its penetration of temporal and geographical barriers, is thus more similar to stream-of-consciousness. Nevertheless, *fu-bi-xing* is also capable of creating an ambiguous and dynamic space with potential powers to disturb or disorder the difference. The conceptual blank that the *fu-bi-xing* leaves creates a large potential space for interpretation, which enabled Confucian moralists to twist the clearly erotic poems in *Shi jing* into moral allegories.

Although the underlying cynicism and critique of social corruption and decadence conveyed in Wang Meng’s story were diluted by his poetic prose of stream-of-

consciousness, it actually displaced and disordered the ambiguous and inexplicable discrepancy between China's governing Marxist ideology and its capitalist practice. By simultaneously emphasizing both the change and continuity of the individual identity and Beijing's social space, Wang contrasted the past with the present, the transforming space with the unguided subjects that occupied the space, and the "lost" souls with the inspired souls in an implicit but effective way, to reflect upon both past and present and build hope for the future. If the simple but beautiful kite Wang Meng flew in the young couple's dreams was hard to reach, then for contemporary urban dwellers, it seemed to be a fairytale.

Wu wei as the Road to "the Anarchy of Difference": Xu Xing's Variations without a Theme

Following "Misty Poetry" in the late 1970s, new literary trends emerged in the 1980s. "Scar" and "introspective" literature written by "educated youth" began to stagnate in the mid-1980s, while two trends, the "root-seeking literature" (*xungen wenxue* 寻根文学) and "modernist" literature, started to take hold. The "root-seeking" writers, as Hong Zicheng pointed out, gave "prominence to the significance of 'culture' in literature (and oppose literature as a carrier of socio-political concepts)" and "attempted to give impetus to the deepening of 'introspective literature', to unearth and reconstitute the spirit of national culture, and to make this the foundation for the development of literature."⁴⁶ While "modernist" literature, represented by Liu Suola's "You Have No Choice" (Ni biewu xuanze 你别无选择) and Xu Xing's "Variations without a Theme," focused on

exploring selfhood and individuality. Departing from previous literary trends with their sporadic, loose, and even absurd narrative styles, they reveal a clear existentialist tendency in their search for meaning in their lives and their selfhood.

Xu Xing (1956-) was born in Beijing. His father, an engineer in the Ministry of Forestry, was persecuted during the Anti-Rightist Movement (1957) and the Cultural Revolution. His mother, a gynecologist, went to Gansu province to be reeducated when Xu Xing was eleven years old. His older siblings were sent to work in the countryside. After finishing high school in 1975, he worked with peasants for two years in Yan'an, Shaanxi province and then joined the army. He returned to Beijing in 1981 and was assigned to work in a Peking-duck restaurant, from which he was dismissed due to his frequent absenteeism. He remained unemployed until he secured a temporary job at the Lu Xun Academy of Art in 1987. He also became the editor of the journal *Huaren shijie* (Chinese World). Several of his short stories have been published in major literary journals since the early 1980s, including *Renmin wenxue* (The People's Literature). At the invitation of the West Berlin Academy of Arts, he visited Germany in November 1989, where he participated in the re-launch of the literary journal *Jintian* (Today 今天). Since returning to China in 1993, he has lived in Beijing.⁴⁷

Xu Xing's "Variations without a Theme" is a landmark of avant-garde literature in the 1980s. This autobiographical short story is a literary assemblage of slices of life, observation, and idiosyncratic thoughts of a Beijing youth. Though fragmentary in form, the story revolves around the narrator/protagonist's ceaseless pursuit of an authentic individual expression indifferent to social norms. By positioning his protagonist on the

boundaries, Xu Xing created an unfixable “other” to the official discourses of collective uniformity and cognitive rationality that still dominated in the 1980s.

Like Wang Meng’s protagonists in “Kite’s Streamers” who dared to be true to themselves, Xu Xing’s protagonist sought his own identity and refused to conform. If Wang’s protagonists still dreamed of being successful in some conventional sense (of possessions and social position), Xu’s protagonist did not. Xu’s protagonist was a twenty-year-old college dropout who worked as a waiter in a well-known Peking-duck restaurant. Though a waiter’s job was not prestigious, the narrator enjoyed his work and had no interest in a “better career.” He considered his job as “art.”

Whenever I spread a starched white tablecloth on the table, line up different sized sparkling long-stem glasses, pour different coloured wines, and then wait for customers to arrive, I always proudly admire the masterpieces created by the winemakers. Against the snow-white tablecloth beneath the magnificent large crystal chandelier, the colours of all the different wines glitter, sparkling and translucent. It was said that there was a great oil painter who had searched his whole life for this kind of colour effect, but he died before he could see my wine under the chandelier.

Carrying a stainless steel tray, I walk back and forth on the soft carpet, the reflection from the tray flashing all over the ceiling. At times like this the one-room restaurant is so quiet, and it seems as though this reflection is my good companion, as though it has come to whisper secretly to me so I won’t feel lonely. Before the customers arrive, I feel in my heart that life is elegant, magnificent and glorious.⁴⁸

His contentment contrasted with the pursuit of a better economic and social position. The artistry of working as a waiter was attached to its quietness. “Once the customers are seated, before they have even taken up their chopsticks, they almost instantly completely destroy my ‘art.’”⁴⁹ Therefore, solitude is necessary to maintain and enjoy one’s individualism.

The protagonist’s relationship with his girlfriend, Q, shows that the process of relating to others often leads to the disintegration of the self. The protagonist initially

regarded Q as his soul mate, as she appeared to be as liberal as he is. They met by chance at a concert. “That evening, before I knew her name was Q, we climbed up the Mount Everest of ‘love’ at equal speed. ‘I’m called Q,’ she told me flatly, then said slowly, as she fastened her bra, ‘It seems as though you can’t begin to talk about understanding one another until after you’ve got to this stage, isn’t that right?’”⁵⁰ When the protagonist told her about his job, she said, “People work to make a living. Since whatever you do is to earn money, then you may as well do the easiest work possible.”⁵¹ However, Q’s touching understanding did not last long. She soon started to urge the protagonist to find a real career.

It seemed as though Q wouldn’t let be until she had dragged me up to a certain level; she was determined to turn me into someone like all the others, what I mean is, all those pursuing a “career.” All those who dress tastefully, whose manner is not at all vulgar, whose speaking is refined, who wear glasses, or whatever. However that may be, it wasn’t that I didn’t understand what was involved in the work such people do, but I just wasn’t interested in any of it. You could say that I didn’t like anything I understood...⁵²

Trying to compensate, the protagonist reluctantly went to take the college entrance exam, even though he knew that “there was no way my worth could find expression at university.”⁵³ Although he was well read, he ruined his chance to re-enroll in a college by making fun of those abstract and meaningless questions on the entrance exam after he saw how two college lecturers had ridiculed a student’s application. For him, college could only produce rubbish like Present Tense and Puppet Regime (the protagonist’s vain and pretentious college roommates). His intense dislike of such characters seemed to be the reason why he had dropped out of college.⁵⁴

In tone with Xu’s sarcastic criticism of conventional educational system, he painted a ridiculously “glamorous” cultural scene of the mid-1980s.

Occasionally, I used to go to concerts.

The men were loudly showing off, and the women were being coy. They really looked like models in a fashion parade. The choice of the concert hall grounds as a place for social intercourse before the concert was just right. All the way from the grounds to the concert hall door was the smell of powder and perfume. I dare say that in this group of people, there were only a few who understood music, but they were all putting on an act, posing as lovers of culture. And in order to pose as lovers of culture they only needed to clap enthusiastically at the end.⁵⁵

This shimmering cultural scene is just a microcosm of Beijing's urban space, decorated by such pleasant-looking rubbish as the protagonist's college roommates who

were always immaculately dressed, quite striking in appearance. But when Present Tense used to take off his shoes, which were so shiny you could see your reflection in them, everyone in the dormitory would get ready to flee, because he never washed his feet.⁵⁶

A hick like Short Blue Chinese Jacket would be looked down upon by lecturers. The eminent people in the literary field that Q had introduced to the protagonist turned out to be pretentious and covetous. The shining surface of the city disguises its decadence. All depths, as Fredric Jameson has demonstrated, are reduced to surfaces. What prevails in contemporary China is no longer "good wine is never afraid of being buried in a deep lane," but the significance of packaging. As long as you have a smart "bottle," there is no need to worry about the quality of the "wine." Therefore, the protagonist who refuses to conform to social standards is not "absurd" or mad, but the world he lives in is.

Realizing that relating to others led to the disintegration of the self, the protagonist rejected conventional knowledge and cultural discourse, and engaged in the pursuit of his own identity and the meaning of life. Q thought his attitude to life was on the downslide, while he thought that "I looked as if I was gently and slowly drifting downwards, but in my soul there was something rising, sublime. There are many things in life which can inspire me."⁵⁷ As Maria Galikowski and Lin Min have pointed out,

The deconstruction of the old self in Xu Xing's stories does not mean the total destruction of the self, but the re-creation of the authentic self, based on a rejection of the Cartesian subject consisting of the rational totality of coherent life experience.⁵⁸

The re-creational process of the authentic self, therefore, appears to be a deconstructive process on the surface. Under this layer, nevertheless, lays Xu's dissenting voices, his "authentic self," if this "self" still possesses recognizable forms or boundaries. The indeterminacy of this authentic self/selfless gives it an unfixable status on the boundaries, and makes it more powerful and threatening than those directly posited on the opposite. His refusal to conform brought to an end his relationship with Q, the only acceptable other present in the story.

His estrangement from "others" intensified his loneliness and isolation. When everyone else rushed to make money, he roamed the streets and waited for nothing. "I casually strolled out into the street. It was extremely busy, a boundless universe crowded with cars and people. But I felt terribly lonely."⁵⁹ He experienced not only the confrontation between the crowd and the artist, as Kafka's and Hoffman's protagonists did, but also their strong sense of alienation. Ironically, alienation, the inevitable result of capitalism in Marx's theory, becomes a natural product of Chinese socialism, which similarly detaches people from their human nature and deprives their control of their lives and selves. While we could still perceive a union between Susu and Jiayuan in Wang Meng's *Kite Streamers* in the late 1970s, Xu Xing's protagonist was doomed to be deserted even by his "soul mate" in mid-1980s, when China was ready to launch its marketization and privatization.

The narrator's isolation and identity are characterized in terms of *wu wei*, non-action, confitured as the only way to transcend socially imposed conventions. The

narrator's self-content and lack of desire are reminiscent of the motto of the protagonist in "Story of a City": "If you do nothing (*wu wei* 无为), you're on the wrong road, and if you do something (*you wei* 有为), damn it, you're also on the wrong road."⁶⁰ Maria Galikowski and Lin Min have observed that Xu Xing's interpretation of the Taoist concept *wu wei* is closer to Zhuang Zi's philosophical ideas:

Zhuang Zi's ideal person should be defined in terms of a "non-existent" (*wu*) realm. With regard to spiritual consciousness, this ideal person is "selfless" (*wu ji*), a "non-achiever" (*wu gong*), and pursues "no fame" (*wu ming*); his life and conduct is characterized by "non-willed action" (*wu wei*), "waiting for nothing" (*wu dai*), and "uselessness" (*wu yong*); "selflessness" and "non-willed action" form the centre of a character model whose internal world is marked by "selflessness" and whose eternal world is marked by "non-willed action."⁶¹

According to Maria Galikowski and Lin Min,

Zhuang Zi's 'selflessness' should not be interpreted as the complete elimination or negation of the individual self (subjectivity). Instead, what Zhang Zi means by 'selflessness' is actually the pursuit and discovery of the 'authentic self' which transcends the conventional or mundane distortions and constraints imposed on the 'pseudo-self' during normal existence. Therefore, Zhuang Zi's "the selfless", like the Existentialists' "authentic self", should be conceived as the highest stage of human individuality, the most ideal state of human existence, where one is free of all forms of alienation from the external world. It is also a perfect realm where one is able to go beyond all limits and constrains to attain real personal freedom and individual subjectivity.⁶²

In other words, they believe that "the selfless" in Zhuang Zi's philosophy indicates "authentic self" rather than "complete elimination or negation of the individual self."

Though their emphasize on authenticity echoes with Zhuang Zi's pursuit of the "true path" (*Tao* 道), they nevertheless confines its formless, all transcending power in the boundaries of the "authentic self," which automatically presuppose an unauthentic self and an other. They further point out that Xu Xing's stories combine the traditional Chinese philosophical understanding of human individuality with an existentialist interpretation of the "authentic self," though, unlike the Existentialists, Xu believes that

the way to achieve personal freedom and authentic selfhood is not through “choice,” but through abandoning conventional pursuits.⁶³ What they failed to recognize is that “abandoning conventional pursuits” is a choice by itself, which belongs to *you wei* (do something) and is far away from *wu wei* (do nothing), the true intention of Xu’s protagonist. The reason why Xu’s protagonist prefers to be *wu wei* is that any kind of *you wei* has been integrated into the overarching social discourses, which are despicable in his eyes. The only way to transcend socially imposed conventions seems to be *wu wei*. This also explains why the protagonist insists on staying in a mental hospital where he wouldn’t have to be responsible for anything.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, he is not a “superfluous” man as some critics have claimed.⁶⁵ His position on the boundary between the intellectual and the laborer resulted from his retreat from conventional pursuits. He leaves college, but never stops his self-education. He ridicules eminent literary figures, but never stops writing. He rejects the conventional sense of a “proper” career, but does not mind working as a waiter and enjoys being needed. Instead of being a “superfluous” man, this uncategorizable character (*wu wei*) poses himself as an untargetable stranger to the dominant social discourses, disordering the established with his hybridity and indifferentiality.

In contrast to the splendid urban space, Xu offered a glimpse of alley life in Beijing when the protagonist paid a visit to Old Wei, the only person that the protagonist respected in college.

I hurried along towards a place which wound round and round but was called Straight as a Ramrod Lane and found the large compound I was looking for. As soon as I walked through the gate I saw a tap with a rubber pipe over it; an old hunchback was wiping his back with a towel that was so dirty you couldn’t tell what colour it was, splashing water everywhere as he did so. Young children crying and shouting, adults affectionately cursing and the sound of a fiddle, sad

enough to pull at your heart strings, all combined to form a large and lively chorus. Although the compound was big, squeezed into it were all kinds of little kitchens, making it appear extremely crowded. A small path which encircled these little houses put forth little fingers to each household, so that whichever house you wanted to go to from the compound gate you had to walk on this maze-like path. Often, a man wearing nothing but undershorts and waving a huge cattail leaf fan would walk past, the backs of his shoes trodden down, or a woman, wearing no more on top than a singlet, would walk to the tap to throw away some dirty water. Brightly coloured fashionable clothes were drying on an iron wire, and water from the clothes dripped down onto a row of old chamber pots, now used as plant pots, from which grew little flowers and plants that even a botanist might not necessarily be able to name. They were growing quite luxuriantly too...⁶⁶

This kind of small lane and compound life that had been featured in Lao She's novel *Camel Xiangzi* (1936) and play *Dragon Beard Ditch* (1950) was not only alive in the 1980s Beijing, but appeared to be more vivid than the fake cultural scene. Interestingly enough, Old Wei, the rare survivor of China's pernicious educational system, lived in such a traditional courtyard. In Old Wei's room, the protagonist failed to find Old Wei but Puppet Regime with a young girl whom Puppet Regime claimed to be his wife. The couple obviously felt embarrassed by the protagonist's unannounced visit. Puppet Regime admitted that he had rented Old Wei's place at 35 *yuan* a month. It seems that intrusive commercialization has ruined the tiny marginal space that had supposedly been characterized by Old Wei's honesty and sincerity.

If Old Wei still had a room whose window was pasted over with issues of *Reference News*, then strangely enough, there is hardly any description of the protagonist's personal space in the short story. Despite the protagonist's determination to live for the present, nourishing his individuality and wanting nothing special, he was mercilessly thrown to the margin by an impatient society. His detachment was captured in the late afternoon scene:

After work, I walked haltingly towards the old destination – the place where we had first met. It wasn't that I was tired, I was just absentmindedly thinking my own thoughts, colourful thoughts that appeared one after another. I was looking, but not really seeing anything, listening, but not really hearing anything, listless, as though in a dream. Bus drivers were hooting their horns for all they were worth, and the bells of bicycles joined in the chorus. Policemen in their police boxes at the crossroads were surrounded by a swirling chaos. People eating ice-llollies were carrying all kinds of bags on their backs and in their hands. No-one else it seems was like me, stupidly grinning, casually glancing here and there, empty-headed.

Nevertheless, the dislocated self of the narrator in the story is far from a disintegrated or decentered one. On the contrary, his alienation and loneliness are rooted in his quest for transcendence, which the society could not provide. The city space of Beijing is less human but more ambitious and pretentious. It leaves almost no space for alternative being that differs from the dominant mainstream type. On the boundaries between the mainstream discourses and the margins, Xu's protagonist asserts his differed existence.

Xu's fragmentary writing technique reflects with his protagonist's uncategorizable character:

Every day I think of something and write it down. There is no theme and no coherence. When I have written a whole lot of pages, I just put them together and, hey presto, it's done. It's called a pack-of-cards novel. It's just life. You can look at it however you want, but you can't explain it.⁶⁷

This scattered way of writing, instead of being a dissident challenge to China's social absurdities, creates an unnamable "other", a meta-writing that deny the center and disturbs the difference. Just as what Maria Galikowski and Lin Min have noted, Xu "does not moralize, and his work does not convey an overt political message, though at the same time it is neither ideologically neutral nor devoid of social criticism."⁶⁸ Though Taoist transcendence may be impractical in real life, the enormous influence of the story testifies at least to its effectiveness as a literary device for breaking down categories and

disordering difference. Xu has found a flexible way “of being other than we are while still being ourselves.” Previously unquestionable social systems, collective uniformity, and cognitive rationality gradually yield to rising individualism. Along with Liu Suola, Xu Xing was a pioneer of the avant-garde literature that appeared toward the mid-1980s. His experimental spirit in theme, language, and form influenced the avant-gardists Ma Yuan, Hong Feng, Yu Hua, Su Tong, and Ye Zhaoyan.

From Margin to Center Rather than from Margin to Margin: Chun Shu’s *Beijing Doll*

Disillusionment with the grand utopian vision characterizes both Wang Meng’s and Xu Xing’s characters. The Cultural Revolution poisoned their adolescence. The utopian ideal for which they have sacrificed their youth had been relegated to history and philosophical books, and left them alone to face the utterly material world. However, the sense of being on the margins does not belong to this generation alone. The generation of the 1970s, which has no recollection and experience of the Culture Revolution and embraces the material world, seems no less bewildered and lost than its predecessors.

In the late 1990s, the Chinese literary scene was assaulted by a group “beauty writers” (*meinü zuojia* 美女作家): female writers who were presumably beautiful. Their writing style is called “body writing” (*shenti xiezu* 身体写作), because they write about their body, exploiting female sexuality and sensuality unabashedly and unprecedentedly. The internet and Chinese government censorship were largely responsible for their initial popularity (or notoriety). At the frontier are two Shanghai-born women writers, Mian

Mian 棉棉 and Wei Hui 卫慧, whose novels are extremely popular with China's Generation X (*xin xin renlei* 新新人类, lit. "new new human beings") readers.⁶⁹

Analyzing works of "beauty writers," Sheldon Lu has insightfully pointed out that

what is showcased here is the politics of the body – namely, biopolitics, in Michel Foucault's term. On the one hand, this is the politics of liberation and excess in the Chinese experience of modernity, an existential condition that has rarely existed, especially for women and women writers. On the other, the phenomenon bespeaks the logic of cultural commercialization, namely, the self-packaging of the body for media effects. By posing to be sexual, young, beautiful, amoral, rebellious, and anti-intellectual, the female writer aspires to create a media reaction and become a celebrity.⁷⁰

Though Shanghai "beauty writers" took the lead, the wave quickly swept into Beijing where the young Chun Shu (1983-) stirred the scene in 2002 with her *Beijing Doll* (*Beijing wawa*), an obvious allusion to Wei Hui's *Shanghai Baby* (*Shanghai baobei* 上海宝贝).

The "politics of liberation and excess" that this tide of woman writers enacts entered China's literary scene at the beginning of the twentieth century. It can even be traced to the agendas of "liberation of the self" and "freedom of marriage" that woman writers, such as Bing Xin, Lu Yin (卢隐), Ling Shuhua, and Ding Ling, advanced during the May Fourth period. Though political discourses overwrote gender discourse from the founding of PRC in 1949 to the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, with the social and cultural rediscovery of the female gender and the increasing literary liberty in the 1980s, female writers such as Zhang Jie (张洁), Zhang Xinxin (张辛欣), and Tie Ning (铁凝) revived women's writing in Beijing, reexamining the past tragedies of history through a humanistic lens. The most direct catalyst for the emergence of "beauty writers" is the trend of "individuated writing" (*geren hua xiezuo*, 个人化写作) around 1990,

represented by Lin Bai (林白, 1958 -) and Chen Ran (陈染, 1962 -), whose works feature explorations of their private lives and exploration and expression of female sexuality and gender attitudes. “Beauty writers” take the cue of “individualization” and exploit taboo areas of the female body for fame and profit. Rather than furthering the literary exploration of gender, these “beauty writers” addict to portray sluts in their mostly autobiographical works, magnifying their internalized male gaze upon female bodies. The underage writer/character Chun Shu 春树 (who was only 17 when she wrote *Beijing Doll*, based on her experience from the age of fourteen) is very different from Mian Mian and Wei Hui, though her *Beijing Doll* was also “banned in China for its candid exploration of a young girl’s sexual awakening,” according to the comments on the back cover of the English edition. Ironically, by positioning herself on the margins, Chun Shu has not only become an unselfconscious victim of the adult-male dominated cultural discourse, but also has been unintentionally converted to a player of the politics of the body in the torrent of China’s commercialization of the libidinal.

Chun Shu (lit. “Spring tree” and also the kanji of Murakami Haruki), the writer and the I-narrator of *Beijing Doll*, belongs to the post-1980s generation of writers. Born a decade after Shanghai’s Wei Hui and Mian Mian, Chun Shu has become a spokesperson of China’s urban youth culture. This generation grew up with Deng Xiaoping’s opening up policy and is exposed to and tantalized by western culture to an unmatched degree. They live in the gap between Chinese conventions, which are cherished by the older generations, and western values. As the target consumer of local and global industries, this generation has been ambushed by the powerful invasion of globalization. Their

subordinate social status and unguarded willingness to cater to the fast materialization of their lives have unwittingly made them the victims of the global capitalism.

Despite the huge cast of characters, the plot of *Beijing Baby* is linear and simple. At the beginning of the novel, Chun Shu was fourteen years old and approaching the end of her middle school study. She was enrolled in a vocational high school near the Summer Palace. Boring classes and the school's authoritarianism, along with her sexual relationships with some itinerant artists, led to her drop out of school. After working for a magazine for six months, she reenrolled as a junior student. Several months later, she left again and started to write her first novel.

Interwoven in the story line are her precarious emotions, sexual life, and the rock 'n' roll subculture in Beijing. The cultural scenes in contemporary Beijing are fraught with promiscuous sex and the rock 'n' roll subculture and provide almost no nurture and nourishment for the soul of Beijing's youth. We witness how the fourteen-year-old typical Beijing girl Chun Shu was bewildered and exploited sexually and spiritually in the shopping malls of values, cultures, commodities, sex, and illusions. As a high school dropout indulging in casual sex and associated with decadent rock musicians and punks, Chun Shu quickly becomes the voice of the generation born in the 1980s that has to deal with their parents' obsession with high education, while being distracted by the diverse and shifting values caused by China's commercialization and the influx of western cultures.

Chun Shu is a marginal character from the outset. Stubborn and headstrong, with dyed hair and strange clothes, she is frequently truant, breaks curfew, and is sexually involved with other marginal figures obviously too old for her.

Adult men's immoral exploitation of Chun Shu's body and emotion, the main cause of her leaving school, ironically backfires and contributes to her return to the mainstream. Li Qi, a student at the Lu Xun Art Academy who later became a known Lower Body poet, picked up Chun Shu's address from her "Seeking Friends" notice in a music magazine. After sending her a short letter, Li obtained the phone number of the "model Young Pioneer." Just one call, Li had arranged to meet her at his place. At their first meeting, Li had taken Chun Shu's virginity before she could fully understand the situation. It was only after intercourse that Li saw the blood on the bed and asked her.

"Blood," I said to him.

"Oh." He wiped it clean with some toilet paper, which he tossed on the floor. "How old are you?" he asked, as if it had just then occurred to him.

"Sixteen," I lied. Without saying a word, he lit a cigarette. He looked spent.

"Do you have a girlfriend?" I asked casually.

"Yes."

That blew me away.⁷¹

To make it clear that he just wanted to have sex with her, Li intentionally displayed his affection to his girlfriend who was working in Guangzhou in front of Chun Shu while rebuffing her.

We went back to his place after eating, with me hanging naturally on his arm, feeling that since we'd become what we were, it was the thing to do. But he frowned slightly, so I jerked my arm back, embarrassed. And sort of at a loss.⁷²

Chun Shu, the self-proclaimed rebel, was caught unexpectedly in the exploitation of the marginal world. Her submission to Li lasted until she had a better understanding of her body, men, and sex. Li's aura as a marginal artist gradually faded and exposed his innate irresponsibility and immorality. Chun Shu finally reached a rational stage and broke off the relationship with him.

From the moment this pathetic hoodlum [Li Qi] showed up on the streets of Beijing, all sorts of good-hearted people helped him out. In the heart of our motherland's artistic circles, his family paid his rent, his pals pitched in with food. The country was populated by girls who had been tricked into falling for his phony idealism and hung around waiting for him... With his bourgeois mentality and proletarian identity, this heartless self-styled artiste never did anything worthwhile except eat and wait for the sun to set. How did he have the guts to go on living?

Though it seems that Chun Shu had seen through Li Qi, she was taken advantage of by several other musicians. Her intention to play with the gender policy before fully understanding it explains her repeated mistakes. Chun Shu disclosed her dreamy state at several places in the novel. Her inability to distinguish surface from essence leads to her victimization. When her boyfriend, G, called her a formalist, she retorted, "Form is content."⁷³ Though she is partially right, she ignored the dynamic relations between form and content and gave form much more weight than content. Mistaking the superficial marks as the essence, she had put all trappings of a rebel (promiscuous sex, loud hair, radical attitude), and turned a deaf ear to well-intentioned advice. She rebelled against all restrictions without distinction, and longed for a kind of total freedom.

Freedom freedom freedom freedom. Freedom to eat, freedom to sleep, freedom to speak, freedom to sing, freedom to make money, freedom to turn on the lights, freedom to kill yourself, freedom to read, freedom to listen to music, freedom to make love, freedom to give up, freedom to go home, freedom to quit school, freedom to run away, freedom to spend money, freedom to cry, freedom to curse someone, freedom to leave home, freedom to speak, freedom to make choices, freedom freedom freedom freedom...⁷⁴

Her desire for total freedom pushed her to nihilism. As the old saying goes, "things will develop in the opposite direction when they become extreme." By leaving school, Chun Shu got rid of her "extremely ill-informed" classmates, but also her sense of superiority to them. Her mother thought her decision to study German was frivolous and refused to pay for it. Lost all self-respect, Chun consequently quit her continuation and study

classes. Her desire to having her own band came to nothing. Having no money, no pals, no associations, she found herself ready to return to school rather than to enjoy her status as a “successful” rebel.

The survivors of the “pernicious” educational system she met also contributed to her return. Z, a journalist who had studied in England, became the first man Chun Shu had ever met that rebuffed her advances, much to her surprise.

I went looking for Y and Z at their dorm. Z was there...

We sat in the common room with the TV on, and I looked at Z out of the corner of my eye as I flipped through a magazine. He was taking on the phone in a low, soft voice, laughing every once in a while, gentle yet sort of shady sounding. From time to time he'd interrupt the conversation with a long, unbroken stream of English, as easy on the ears as a rippling brook. What arrogance.

I walked into the bedroom he shared with Y, saw a bottle of CK cologne, and breathed in the seductive fragrance. All of a sudden, and to my astonishment, Z turned nasty.

“When are you going home? It’s almost ten, and I have to go to work tomorrow. I need my sleep.”

I didn’t know what to say, and in that brief moment, despair grabbed hold of me. The world was every bit as cruel as people said. It was a struggle, but I walked up and laid my hand on his shoulder. He pulled back. What I really wanted was to sit in his lap, but he stopped me. “Have you been hurt in the past?” he asked with a studied look in his eyes.

“What?” I felt like laughing.

Somberly, he said, “You lack sincerity.”

I lowered my head. Okay, fine, I lack sincerity. Then...screw him. I said I was leaving, and he got up to see me out. At the door he grinned and said, “You little hooligan...you’re a wild one, all right, the *new new* generation!”⁷⁵

Z seemed to be the first refined man Chun Shu had ever met. Though Chun Shu felt humiliated, she saw the good intention of Z. Z, a representative of the refined world, appealed to Chun Shu and showed her another window to the world.

The immediate reason for Chun Shu’s return to school is Louise, an editor of a magazine called *Gen X*.

The first person I met was an editor named Louise, who was about my age. She came to the regular Monday meeting wearing an elegant pink dress, which heightened the glow of her cheeks and made her incredibly bewitching. The dress was a bit much for my taste, but it looked great on her, and I guess that meant she had more expensive tastes than I. She was writing a book that would probably be published in a few months.

“You make a cute couple,” she said to G and me. “I like you two.”⁷⁶

Louise's beauty and success impressed Chun Shu, if not belittled her at the same time.

Later in the novel, Chun Shu offered another description of Louise, which pushed her directly back to school.

I spotted Louise outside the magazine offices. She seemed elated in her blue-lens shades, and no wonder: She had understanding parents, a rich boyfriend, and the pleasant nonchalance of a typical Libra, with everything going her way.

I don't know why, but I suddenly felt the urge to go back to school, even if that meant repeating my junior year.⁷⁷

Louise seemed to be the person that Chun Shu wanted to be: beautiful, attractive, talented, and successful. Louise made her realize that being a rebel had shut all the doors to what she really wanted. She would result in being nobody, the exact opposite of what she wanted.

Returning to the vocational high school, Chun Shu found her old classmate Du Yuan, who complained behind the teachers' backs with the other students, had become the head of the literature and art section of the student club and the "school flower" (xiao hua 校花), while she, the once only mighty competitor of the class "star," was a junior. Though Chun Shu tried her best to abide by school rules, her inconsistent and repulsive nature drove her out of school again. At this point, shopping started to play a significant role in her life. Her desire for materials eventually terminated her relationship with G, the first man she really loved and who really cherished her. At the end of the story, writing her first novel to gain money and fame, Chun Shu was ready to dump T (Mint), a music critic that she left G for, for somebody who could offer either money or love.

Though the novel exposes unhealthy educational systems, adult-dominated atmospheres, and sexual abuse of children, Chun Shu's critique is undercut by its own

ambiguity and final compromise. Instead of blaming society and her blind pursuit for total freedom for her lost innocence, she wrote:

I now loathed that innocent me. I despised that unsophisticated me. I hated those innocent years. Innocence was bullshit! Innocence was nothing and could never be anything. I felt so pressured. I hadn't done anything and didn't know how to do anything. What about my future? My tomorrow? Who'd care? I didn't want to go on like this any longer.⁷⁸

Ironically, her present sophistication and freedom, gained at the expense of her innocence and youth, only heightened her sense of being lost, and readied her to conform to society.

Though, unlike the rebellious characters in Wang Meng and Xu Xing's works, Chun Shu's absolute oppositional position led to her eventual compromise with society, she, as a marginal character, shared the sense of alienation with the previously discussed characters in Wang and Xu's works. Her parents did not understand her. She was talented but unsuited to China's educational system. She was drawn to rock and roll music but was victimized by the musicians she befriended. She was tempted by the commodities but had no money to buy them. She was lonely, bewildered, lost, and spiritually bereft. She did not know what she wanted, since besides sex and commodities this metropolis offered her nothing.

Chun Shu, as a writer, benefited from the attention she gained in the West, which caused the government lifted its ban on her book. Starting from the periphery and then going back to the mainstream, Chun Shu never completely breaks from the dominant ideologies. The idiosyncrasies and the rebelliousness exhibited in *Beijing Doll* become trademarks that promise the previously unknown author fame and wealth.

However, it is hard to say if Chun Shu has benefited from or been victimized by Beijing's intellectual or artistic atmosphere. Although determined to be famous, Chun

Shu lacks the skill and experience of a writer. Her ambition and vanity to play up the politics of age and body fuel her unguarded openness to everything. The blatant sexual exploitation disclosed in the novel stunned Chinese readers. Nevertheless, the prize Chun Shu paid for her fame is way too high. In the novel, the character Chun Shu dropped out of high school, never attended her dream university, was disillusioned about love, and was broke. In real life, after the publication of *Beijing Doll*, Chun Shu's later works, such as *A Pleasure That Lasted Half a Day* (*Changda bantian de huanle* 长达半天的欢乐) and *Look Up and See the North Star* (*Taitou wangjian beidou xing* 抬头望见北斗星), disappointed even her fans. She seems to be no different from the characters created by Qiu Huadong (丘华栋) who exhaust themselves in the hope of becoming successful in Beijing. Paradoxically, Chun Shu's unreserved openness and rebellion only make her complicit in postmodern consumer society. Despite her audacious pose as a rebellious teenage funk, her life is reduced to a receptive text selling whatever sells, suggesting to us that her flamboyant "I-generation" is actually a generation without a soul, a generation of airheads born from cross-cultural encounters and a consumer society.

In conclusion, the definition and configuration of the self in these three authors' works have shifted gradually from uniform, static, and collective, to hybrid, dynamic, and individualized ones. Wang Meng's protagonists occupy a liminal space between their individual dreams and the tarnished collective ideals in the late 1970s. The groundbreaking technique of "stream of consciousness" that he ushered in illustrates an irremediable disruption leading from a repressive ideology to an unconscious world of personal desires. Xu Xing's protagonist is forever wandering the streets of a ghostly city, positioning himself on the margin of Beijing's social space. His unfixable identity creates

a detached perspective, observing a schizophrenic space on the one hand and empowers subjectivity's critical engagement with the 1980s culture on the other. Like Wang Meng's "stream of consciousness," Xu Xing's fragmentary style of writing helps to disturb and disorder the difference between an unreliable center and an authentic if peripheralized self. Chun Shu, the icon of the so-called *New New Human Being* in the twenty-first century of Beijing, longs for luxurious living space and celebrates the electronic euphoria, but has been mercilessly reduced to a cybernetic punk of post-modern consumerism and post-socialist nihilism.

¹ Edward W. Soja and Barbara Hooper, "The Spaces That Difference Makes: Some Notes on the Geographical Margins of the New Cultural Politics," in Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty eds., *The Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography*, (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), p. 379.

² *Ibid.*, p. 383.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Trinh, T. Minh-Ha, *When the Moon Waxes Red: Representation, Gender and Cultural Politics* (New York: Routledge, 1991), p. 120.

⁵ Edward W. Soja and Barbara Hooper, "The Spaces That Difference Makes," p. 385.

⁶ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), p. 53.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁸ See the following quote from <http://www.iisg.nl/~landsberger/xf.html> (accessed July 8, 2008): "From December 1968 onward, millions of educated urban youth (zhishi qingnian, 知识青年), consisting of secondary school graduates and students, were mobilized and sent "up to the mountains and down to the villages" (上山下乡, shangshan xiaxiang), i.e. to rural villages and to frontier settlements. In these areas, they had to build up and take root, in order to be reeducated by the poor and lower-middle peasants. This relocation program was practiced first on a limited scale before the Great Leap Forward Movement, resumed in the early 1960s, and accelerated sharply by the late 1960s. While some 1.2 million urban youths were sent to the countryside between 1956 and 1966, no less than 12 million were relocated in the period 1968-1975; this amounts to an estimated 10% of the 1970 urban population. In principle, the program called for lifelong resettlement in the rural areas, but toward the end of, and in particular after the Cultural Revolution, many were finally able to find jobs or to be transferred back to the cities. A great number of them, however, had resigned themselves to their fate and decided to remain."

⁹ “*Shi* (officials, scholars) *nong* (peasants) *gong* (craftsmen) *shang* (businessmen)” are the four categories of ancient Chinese citizens, with *shi* ranks the first, and *shang* the last. See my illustration in the chapter titled “A City of Disappearance: Trauma, Displacement and Spectral Cityscape in Contemporary Chinese Cinema.”

¹⁰ Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 301.

¹¹ For a survey and discussion of the controversy over Wang Meng’s short stories, see William Tay, “Wang Meng, Stream-of-consciousness, and the Controversy over Modernism,” *Modern Chinese Literature*, 1 (1984): 7-24.

¹² William Tay, “Modernism and Socialist Realism: The Case of Wang Meng,” *World Literature Today*, 65:3 (1992: Summer): 411.

¹³ Wang Meng, *The Butterfly and Other Stories* (Panda Books: Chinese Literature, 1983), p. 155.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press), p. 1-42.

¹⁷ Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty, “Emplaced Bodies, Embodied Selves,” In Michael J. Dear and Steven Flusty eds., *The Spaces of Postmodernity: Readings in Human Geography* (Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers Inc., 2002), p. 304.

¹⁸ For a detailed illustration of Wang Meng’s use of narrated monologue in these stories, see William Tay, “Modernism and Socialist Realism: The Case of Wang Meng,” *World Literature Today*, 65:3 (1992: Summer): 411.

¹⁹ Wang Meng, *The Butterfly and Other Stories*, p. 157.

²⁰ Ibid, p. 156.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid, p. 160.

²³ Ibid, p. 161.

²⁴ Ibid. p. 159.

²⁵ Ibid. p. 162.

²⁶ Ibid. p. 173.

²⁷ Ibid. p. 175.

²⁸ Wang Meng’s penchant for using allegories to reflect socio-political realities is evident again in the controversy over his short story “Hard Thin Gruel.” For a comprehensive overview of the controversy, see Anne Sytske Keyser, “Wang Meng’s Story ‘Hard Thin Gruel’: A Socio-Political Satire,” *China Information* 7, 2 (Autumn 1992): 1-11; Geremie Barmé, “A Storm in a Rice Bowl: Wang Meng and Fictional Chinese Politics,” *China Information* 7, 2 (Autumn 1992): 12-19.

²⁹ See William Tay, “Modernism and Socialist Realism: The Case of Wang Meng,” *World Literature Today*, 65:3 (1992: Summer): 412-413; Wendy Larson, “Wang Meng and the Modernist Controversy in Contemporary China,” *Bolshevik Salute: A Modernist Chinese Novel*, trans. Wendy Larson (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1989), pp. xiii-xx.

³⁰ Wendy Larson, "Wang Meng and the Modernist Controversy in Contemporary China," pp. xvi-xvii. Also see Li Tuo, "Realism and Stream-of-Consciousness" (Xianshi zhuyi he yishiliu), *Shiyue*, April 1980: 239-44.

³¹ Cao Wenxuan 曹文轩, *Zhongguo bashi niandai wenxue xianxiang yanjiu* (Analyses of China's Cultural Phenomena in the 80s 中国八十年代文学现象研究) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 1988), pp. 116-117.

³² See Jeanne Schulkind's introduction to Virginia Woolf's *Moments of Being*. In Virginia Woolf, *Moments of Being* (New York and London: Harcourt, Inc., 1985), p. 21.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁴ Wang Meng, "*Wo zai xunzhao shenma?*" (What Am I Seeking? 我在寻找什么?) (*Wang Meng xiaoshuo chuangxin ziliao* (Materials on the Fiction and Recent Work of Wang Meng 王蒙小说创新资料) (Beijing: Remin daxue chubanshe, 1980), p. 105; originally published in *Wenyi bao*, October 1980: 42-22.

³⁵ For instance, see Guo Baoliang 郭宝亮, *The Literary Style of Wang's Novels* (Wang Meng Xiaoshuo Wenti Yanjiu 王蒙小说文体研究) (Beijing: Beijing University Press, 2006), pp. 109-115. There are many controversial interpretations of the concepts of *fu*, *bi*, and *xing*, especially *xing*. For a comprehensive review and critique of these thoughts, see Ming Dong Gu, "Fu-Bi-Xing: A Metatheory of Poetry-Making," *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR), Vol. 19 (Dec. 1997): 1- 22.

³⁶ Ming Dong Gu, "Fu-Bi-Xing: A Metatheory of Poetry-Making," in *Chinese Literature: Essays, Articles, Reviews* (CLEAR), Vol. 19 (Dec. 1997): 22.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 11.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

⁴⁰ The first poem of *Shi jing* in Chinese:

关关雎鸠，在河之洲。窈窕淑女，君子好逑。
参差荇菜，左右流之。窈窕淑女，寤寐求之。
求之不得，寤寐思服。悠哉悠哉。辗转反侧。
参差荇菜，左右采之。窈窕淑女，琴瑟友之。
参差荇菜，左右毛之。窈窕淑女。钟鼓乐之。

⁴¹ Ming Dong Gu, "Fu-Bi-Xing: A Metatheory of Poetry-Making," pp. 15-16.

⁴² Freud viewed condensation as "an inclination to form fresh unities out of elements which in our waking thoughts we should certainly have kept separate. As a consequence of this, a single element of the manifest dream often stands for a whole number of latent dream-thoughts, as though it were a combined allusion to all of them." See Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-analysis*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1973). Ch. 5.

⁴³ Freud's notion of displacement can be seen in the following: "there has occurred in the process of dream-formation a *transference and displacement of the psychic intensities* of the individual elements, from which results the textual difference between the dream-content and the thought-content. The process which we here assume to be operative is actually the most essential part of the dream-work; it may fitly be called *dream-displacement*." See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994), Ch.6.

- ⁴⁴ Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A.A. Brill (New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1994), pp. 311-373, 526-546.
- ⁴⁵ Ming Dong Gu, "Fu-Bi-Xing: A Metatheory of Poetry-Making," p. 18.
- ⁴⁶ Hong Zicheng, *A History of Contemporary Chinese Literature*, trans. Michael M. Day (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), p. 281.
- ⁴⁷ This bio is informed by Maria Galikowski and Lin Min's introduction, "Fragmentation and Heterogeneity: Xu Xing's Literary Treatment of the Contemporary Human Condition," to Xu Xing's *"Variations Without a Theme" and Other Stories*, trans. Maria Galikowski and Lin Min (Canberra: Wild Peony, University of Sydney East Asian Series Number 11, 1997), pp. 1-2.
- ⁴⁸ Xu Xing, *"Variations Without a Theme" and Other Stories*, trans. Maria Galikowski and Lin Min (Canberra: Wild Peony, University of Sydney East Asian Series Number 11, 1997), p. 58.
- ⁴⁹ Ibid.
- ⁵⁰ Ibid., p. 57.
- ⁵¹ Ibid.
- ⁵² Ibid., p. 67.
- ⁵³ Ibid., p. 74.
- ⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 52.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 68.
- ⁵⁷ Ibid.
- ⁵⁸ See Maria Galikowski and Lin Min's "Fragmentation and Heterogeneity: Xu Xing's Literary Treatment of the Contemporary Human Condition," p. 8.
- ⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 51.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 81.
- ⁶¹ Liu Huiying, "Xianqin rujia he daojia de lixiang renge," in *Xinhua wenzhai*, Vol.1, No.1: 159.
- ⁶² See Maria Galikowski and Lin Min's "Fragmentation and Heterogeneity: Xu Xing's Literary Treatment of the Contemporary Human Condition," pp. 9-10.
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 10.
- ⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 73.
- ⁶⁵ For instance, He Xing has labeled Xu Xing's characters as "'superfluous men' in China of the 1980s." See He Xing, "Dangdai wenxue zhong de huangmiugan yu duoyuzhe," in *Du Shu*, 11, 1985: 3-13.
- ⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 62.
- ⁶⁷ Xu Xing, *"Variations Without a Theme" and Other Stories*, trans. Maria Galikowski and Lin Min (Canberra: Wild Peony, University of Sydney East Asian Series Number 11, 1997), p. 67.
- ⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 2.
- ⁶⁹ For detailed analyses of Mian Mian and Wei Hui's novels, see Sheldon Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics: Studies in Literature and Visual Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), pp. 53-67.
- ⁷⁰ Sheldon Lu, *Chinese Modernity and Global Biopolitics*, pp. 53-67.

⁷¹ Chun Shu, *Beijing Doll*, trans. Howard Goldblatt (New York: Riverhead Books, 2004), p. 11.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 185.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-117.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

Chaptr Four Staging Spatial Conflicts and Affect in Emotional Post-Socialism:

Meng Jinghui's Theater

With the accelerated processes of modernization, urbanization, and marketization in China, the confrontations between the homogeneous power of globalization and the indigenous local culture are increasingly manifested in spatial conflicts. The process of “de-differentiation” and the operation of “emotional capitalism” in post-socialist China become new concerns of China’s cultural scene. This chapter will first provide a brief review of theatrical movements related to Beijing after the founding of People’s Republic China in 1949, and then analyze Meng Jinghui’s stagings of *Gossip Street* and *Rhinoceros in Love*. It argues that these plays broke the invisible “fourth wall” between actors and audiences, and incorporated the space that audiences occupy in the theater into the theatrical representational space. By treating the off-stage space as an organic component of the overall theatrical space, Meng not only extends the sphere of representation of space in theater from the static and limited performing stage to the porous open space that the audience inhabit, but also makes the stage an alternative space on the boundaries aiming to transform the off-stage space. Both plays have represented an alternative space which contemplates, critiques, and parodies the post-socialist space which is dominated by consumerism, materialism, and emotional capitalism.

When we talk about Beijing theater, it is impossible not to mention Lao She (老舍, 1899-1966). Lao She, arguably the best well-known Chinese playwright in the West, was born in Beijing. He wrote several Beijing-flavored plays, such as *Dragon Beard Ditch* (Longxugou 龙须沟, 1950) and *Teahouse* (Chaguan 茶馆, 1957), which captured the dialect, mannerisms, and customs of Beijing natives.¹ In these two realistic plays, Lao She explored grand socio-political and historical issues by depicting the lives of residences in restricted spaces (an alley and a teahouse, respectively).

After Lao She's success, the genre of Beijing-flavored plays was furthered by Su Shuyang (苏叔阳)'s *Neighborhood* (zuolin youshe 左邻右舍, 1980), Li Longyun's (李龙云, 1948-) *There's a Small Courtyard* (You zheyang yige xiaoyuan 有这样一个小院) and *Small Well Lane* (小井胡同, 1980), and He Jiping's (何冀平, 1951-) *The World's Top Restaurant* (天下第一楼, 1988). Following Lao She's model, these plays are either set on some typical Beijing *hutong* (alley) or in a public gathering space like a teahouse. Following the long tradition of the *Sitanni tixi* (Stanislavsky method 斯坦尼拉夫斯基体系) in Chinese spoken drama, the theatrical space of these Beijing-flavored plays are microcosms of the socio-political realities in the outer space.²

The assimilation of the theatrical space and the outer socio-political space was gradually disturbed in the 1980s. Influenced by Western modernist and postmodernist dramatic forms, especially Absurdist Theater, Chinese experimental plays challenged the traditional realistic mode of grand narrative (hongda xushi 宏大叙事) and call for diversity and multiplicity in both content and form. Represented by *Hot Currents Outside the House* (Wuwai you reliu 屋外有热流, 1980), *Signal Alarm* (Juedui xin hao 绝对信号,

1982), *Bus Stop* (Chezhan 车站, 1983), *A Visit From A Dead* (Yige sizhe dui yige shengzhe de fangwen 一个死者对一个生者的访问, 1985), and *Wild Men* (Yeren 野人, 1985), experimental plays proliferated in the 1980s. *Signal Alarm*, written by Gao Xiangjian, a playwright for the Beijing People's Art Theater (BPAT) at that time and the 2000 Nobel Laureate in literature, established the Small Theater movement (xiaojuchang yundong 小剧场运动) in China. Plays are performed, literally, in small theaters, sometimes just in meeting rooms, rather than in 1,500-seat auditoriums. Gao's absurdist drama *Bus Stop* was inspired by Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Though it is rich in political overtones, it was staged in the small theater of BPAT with Lin Zhaohua's (林兆华) help and pushed the Small Theater movement to popularity.

Beijing became the center of experimental theater movement in the 1990s. Directors such as Lin Zhaohua, Mou Sen (牟森), and Meng Jinghui (孟京辉), the "Three Musketeers of Beijing Theater" (Beijing jutan sanjianke 北京剧坛三剑客) began to experiment with foreign forms, such as surrealism, absurdism, expressionism, and existentialism. Many independent studios appeared outside of the state-controlled theater system. Their marginal position allows them more creative freedom and space.

Mou Shen established the Frog Experimental Theater (Wa shiyan jutuan 蛙试验剧团), the first independent theater studio in 1987, which produced Ionesco's *Rhinoceros*, and Stravinsky's *A Soldier's Story* and O'Neill's *Great God Brown*. When the Frog Experimental Theater Troup was disbanded in 1992, Mou formed *Garage Theater* (Xiju chejian 戏剧车间) in 1993, which produced plays such as *A Discussion about Chinese Grammar on the Other Shore* (Guanyu "bi'an" de hanyu yufa taolun 关于

“彼岸”的汉语语法讨论), *File Zero* (Ling dangan 零档案), and *Related to AIDS* (Yu aizi youguan 与爱滋有关).

Lin Zhaohua, the former Vice President of BPAT and the head of the Theater Department of Beijing University, established the Lin Zhaohua Theater Performance Research Studio (Lin Zhaohua xiju gongzuoshi 林兆华戏剧工作室) in 1989. As a leading figure of the experimental theatre movement, Lin produced Gao's *Absolute Signal*, *Bus Stop* and *Wild Man* during the 1980s, and directed Guo Shixing's (过士行) “idlers' trilogy” (Xianren sanbuqu 闲人三部曲): *Anglers* (Yuren 渔人), *Birdmen* (Niaoren 鸟人), and *Chessmen* (Qiren 棋人) during the 1990s, pushing the experimental movement of Chinese theater to a new level. Spatial conflict is a central theme of the trilogy, which explores the culture of Beijingers' interests in fishing, raising birds, and playing chess respectively.

Meng Jinghui (1965-) was born in Changchun. He received his B.A. from Beijing Capital Normal University in Chinese and his M.A. from Beijing Central Drama Academy in directing, then established the *Chuanbang* (Accidental Exposure 穿帮) Theater in 1992.³ He gained popularity by directing *Si Fan* (Longing for the Secular World/ The Nun and the Monk 思凡, Central Experimental Theater (CET), 1993 and 1998), *I Love XXX* (我爱XXX, 1994), *Gossip Street* (坏话一条街, CET, 1998), and *Rhinoceros in Love* (恋爱中的犀牛, Beijing Contemporary Culture Consulting Company, 1999).⁴ The chapter will then examine *Gossip Street* and *Rhinoceros in Love* closely to illustrate Meng's innovative reconstitution of theatrical space to represent, resist, critique,

and parody the homogeneous power of globalization and the practice of emotional capitalism in contemporary China.

Horizontal *Hutong* in the Shadow of the Phallocratic High-rise: *Gossip Street*

(Huaihua yitiaojie, 坏话一条街, Dir. Meng Jinghui, 1998)

Body and space have always been central to any discussion of theater. Before discussing the theatrical body and space, it is necessary to consider first the relationship between these two. Henri Lefebvre explored the question in his groundbreaking *The Production of Space*:

...there is an immediate relationship between the body and its space, between the body's deployment in space and its occupation of space. Before *producing* effects in the material realm (tools and objects), before *producing itself* by drawing nourishment from that realm, and before *reproducing itself* by generating other bodies, each living body *is* space and *has* its space: it produces itself in space and it also produces that space. This is a truly remarkable relationship: the body with the energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space; conversely, the laws of space, which is to say the laws of discrimination in space, also govern the living body and the deployment of its energies.⁵

Lefebvre not only confirmed that bodies are spatialized entities, but also pointed out that spaces and bodies reciprocally (re)produce one another. Lefebvre considered the spatial body as a "machine," which is "two-sided: one side is run by massive supplies of energy (from alimentary and metabolic sources), the other side by refined and minute energies (sense data)."⁶ According to Lefebvre, "This machine's devices for the emission and reception of small-scale energies lie in the sensory organs, the afferent and efferent nerve pathways, and the brain."⁷ To justify this statement, Lefebvre detailed the complex and subtle relationships that the sensory realms (such as smells, rhythms, and gestures) have

with spaces. We will see later in this chapter that Meng Jinghui have effectively used these sensory strategies in the representational space of his theater to affect and involve the audience, engendering a different and ambiguous theatrical space to deconstruct the dominant social space and restore the abstract modern life to its organic live state.

Lefebvre pointed out two logics associated with space: a logic of visualization and a logic of metaphor. In discussing strategies involved in the logic of visualization, Lefebvre analyzed the significance of skyscrapers, the representative modern architecture. For Lefebvre, “The arrogant verticality of skyscrapers, and especially of public and state buildings, introduces a phallic or more precisely a phallogocratic element into the visual realm; the purpose of this display, of this need to impress, is to convey an impression of authority to each spectator.”⁸ Skyscrapers also visually make “the spectator-cum-tenants grasp the relationship between part and whole directly” and “recognize themselves in that relationship.”⁹

By constantly expanding the scale of things, this movement serves to compensate for the pathetically small size of each set of living-quarters; it posits, presupposes and imposes homogeneity in the subdivision of space; and, ultimately, it takes on the aspect of pure logic – and hence of tautology: space contains space, the visible contains the visible – and boxes fit into boxes.¹⁰

This “pure logic” is a “a logic (and strategy) of metaphor”:

The second ‘logic’ embodied in this spatialization is a logic (and strategy) of metaphor – or, rather, of constant metaphorization. Living bodies, the bodies of ‘users’ – are caught up not only in the toils of parcellized space, but also in the web of that philosophers call ‘analogons’: images, signs and symbols. These bodies are transported out of themselves, transferred and emptied out, as it were, via the eyes: every kind of appeal, incitement and seduction is mobilized to tempt them with doubles of themselves in prettified, smiling and happy poses; and this campaign to void them succeeds exactly to the degree that the images proposed correspond to ‘needs’ that those same images have helped fashion. So it is that a massive influx of information, of messages, runs head on into an inverse flow constituted by the evacuation from the innermost body of all life and desire.¹¹

The skyscrapers thus for Lefebvre are symbols of the dismantling power that social forces have on spatial body in the (post)modern society, depriving individuality and heterogeneity, and imposing uniformity and homogeneity. “Dominated by overpowering forces, including a variety of brutal techniques and an extreme emphasis on visualization, the body fragments, abdicates responsibility for itself – in a word, disappropriates itself.”¹² Nevertheless, the body is not completely hopeless in its defeat. Lefebvre added that

The way for physical space, for the practico-sensory realm, to restore or reconstitute itself is therefore by struggling against the *ex post facto* projections of an accomplished intellect, against the reductionism to which knowledge is prone. ... An uprising of the body, in short, against the signs of non-body... Its exploratory activity is not directed towards some kind of ‘return to nature’, nor is it conducted under the banner of an imagined ‘spontaneity’. Its object is ‘lived experience’ – an experience that has been drained of all content by the mechanisms of diversion, reduction/extrapolation, figures of speech, analogy, tautology, and so on.¹³

Keenly aware of the brutal deconstructive power that China’s transformed urban space has put on the body, Meng enacted in his theater the beauty of “lived experience” in revolt. The playwright of *Gossip Street*, Guo Shixing (1952-), was born in Beijing. He is well known for his “idlers’ trilogy” (Xianren sanbuqu), which masterfully captures and portrays the essence of “leisure” people’s hobbies. Personal and communal space and its conflicts with other spaces are the central themes of these plays.¹⁴ Though written after the trilogy, *Gossip Street* shares the spatial concern prevalent in Guo’s previous plays.

Gossip Street was premiered by the CET in 1998, directed by Meng Jinghui. The story follows two outsiders’ temporary stay on a small lane: Ercong, a young woman with a tape recorder to collect folklore (minyao 民谣); and Muming, a young man with binoculars to watch the flowers of Chinese scholar tree (huaihua 槐花, which puns with

“gossip” in Chinese). A mysterious man came to the place with them, suspecting that the two newcomers worked for some construction company that planned to demolish the place. The entire play revolved around the two outsiders’ interactions with the residents of the small lane, presenting live conventions and calling for preservation of spaces that host cultural legacies.

The play is set in a small *hutong* called *Huaihua* (槐花, Chinese Scholar Tree Flower). In the play script, *Huaihua jie* is a small lane full of bare trees. It is juxtaposed with rows of newly built high-rises, which have flower-boxes on their balconies. On the stage, a gigantic shadow of something resembling a prison watchtower was constantly cast over the small lane, indicating the looming threat of nearby skyscrapers (Figure 7). Slanting tile-covered rooftops stretched the entire width of the stage and joined directly to the foreground, where a telephone booth is set at far left, indicative of the entrance to the *hutong*. A table and several stools are set at far right of the stage, implying a Beijing courtyard (*siheyuan* 四合院). The entire play was unfolded in this simultaneously realistic and symbolic representation of space.



Meng Jinghui only used a gigantic shadow on stage to indicate the endangered existence of the small lane in face of the growing concrete forest around it. Nevertheless the contrast between spaces, the horizontal traditional architectures on stage *versus* the implied vertical modern high-rises, is unmistakable. The audience whose body space has been fully prescribed by China’s urbanization process makes the space they occupy in the theater a substantial extension of the high-rises, overshadowing the space unfolding on

stage. Contrary to the “parcellized space” that one occupies in a skyscraper - an isolated, resembling space, as Lefebvre has argued, which trivializes its own autonomy to highlight its affiliated relation to the whole, the horizontal, open architecture of *hutong* provides no privacy, but mysteriously manages to preserve the significance of lived organic experience in its all-pervasive interbodily space.

The magic power of the architecture of *hutong* is induced from the special interpersonal relationships in this space, which is engendered and enacted by the unique language forms it hosts. The play provides a feast of language. The diversity and density of language forms it incorporates are unprecedented. Beijing slang, colloquial expressions, traditional poetries, proverbs, idioms, children’s rhymes, folk legends, historical stories, mythology, doggerel, riddles, bandit jargon or code words used fifty years ago by gang members are all fused in the language games played onstage. They constitute the main body of the play, fascinating and confusing its audiences at the same time.

As the title of the play implies, the small lane is steeped in gossip. Neighbors spread rumors, spy and bad-mouth each other. Numerous heads often unexpectedly pop out above the rooftops, signifying the omnipresent surveillance of the neighborhood. Nothing here can be kept secret. No wonder Auntie Deng said that “there’s no man on the street, but there are mouths everywhere, gossiping.” Rather than settling on the usual negative connotation of the word “gossip,” the play imbues it with a fresh dialectal significance. A close examination of the gossip spread in the small lane reveals that there are two types: one is rooted in China’s folk culture and the other stems from China’s past political practice.

The first type is delivered through diverse language forms rooted in traditional Chinese culture: folklore (minyao 民谣), puns (shuangguan 双关), tongue twisters (raokouling 绕口令), *shuanghuang* (双簧, a story-telling form similar to a two-person comic show), *xiehouyu* (歇後語, a two-part expression whose last part is omitted; a tag line),¹⁵ *qiaopihua* (俏皮话, jokes, curses, or sometimes insults), and *kuaiban shu* (快板书, a kind of rhythmic storytelling to clapper accompaniment). The vast variety of language forms reminds one of Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of heteroglossia which refers to the coexistence of distinct varieties within a single linguistic code.¹⁶ Playfulness is an important characteristic of this type of gossip. Therefore, although this type of rumors spread in the small lane may be baseless, they are not malicious. For instance, when Ercong and Muming first arrive, people suspect that they are a couple. So the children call them *duxia* (prawn couple, alluding to an intimate relationship) and make the pun rhyme in their sentence just for fun.¹⁷

In some cases, dialogues are pure wordplay, with the significance of the content completely deprived. In the play, *White Beard and Residence Ding* played in such language games twice: when White Beard was looking for his cat and when Ding tried to sell White Beard a bottle of vinegar. The witty and skillful *duanzi* (段子, pieces of artistic language games) delivered at these two places overwhelmed the viewers with the superb aesthetics of these language forms and won prolonged applause. These language games consist of *xiehouyu*, tongue twisters, *shuanghuang*, folk legends, *qiaopihua*, traditional poems, proverbs, and idioms. Although the content of these language games is not closely related to these people's daily life, they enjoy testing each other's knowledge of these cultural legacies and have fun in delivering them performatively. As White Beard

remarked, “You think I’m speaking nonsense and I’m speaking nonsense. I love to exercise my tongue when I have nothing else to do.”¹⁸

These sequences indicate that language games are integral parts of these people’s real lives, enriching and coloring the lives of these characters in their seeming meaninglessness, and challenging the frameworks of meaning. They serve either as a communicative form to spread information and make comments (in the case of *duxia*), or as socializing games to connect and entertain people (in the case of White Beard and Ding). Without them, life will be striped to its bones, boring and suffocating, as implied by the giant shadow over the small lane. When the fake White Beard, animated by the mysterious man failed to criticize the cleaner when she swept the dirt down the sewage drain as White Beard always did, she asked him, “I’m sweeping the dirt down the sewage drain again. Aren’t you going to criticize me?”¹⁹ When the fake White Beard showed no interest, she said “How boring.”²⁰ Immediately following the bit, the two naughty children started teasing the fake White Beard and shot at him with water pistols. The fake White Beard’s failure to respond made the children retreat unsatisfied. These sequences show that any interruption to the accustomed communicative patterns in the small lane immediately manifests its own foreignness.

These “gossips” are actually cultural signs and symbols that combine and demarcate people. After a few rounds of language games, Residence Ding, the vendor of vinegar, immediately knew that the fake White Beard was no match for him even in his drunkenness. Ercong is drawn to White Beard, the folklore expert, because of her interest in collecting folklore. Contrary to Ercong’s smooth adaptation to the small lane culture,

Muming remains separated from the community mainly because of his incomprehension of these language forms and games.

All malicious gossips in the play belong to the second type, which stems from the Cultural Revolution. This ugly aspect of language was shown in the sequence that the neighborhood residents chant slogans attacking Auntie Zheng. Words such as “forced occupation” (qianzhan 强占) and “confiscated properties” (chaojia 抄家) used here are reminiscent of the Culture Revolution. However, no specific slogans were shouted out directly. Instead, rhythmic exclamation sound accompanied by abstract gestures of the chorus filled in the space of the missing lines, subtly conveying the physical power of the absent language. In a later sequence, when the neighborhood residents tried to catch the mysterious man who cured Niuzi, they shouted, “We must grasp the primary direction of our struggle fast. Catch them!”²¹ - a line straight from the class struggle. When the mysterious man reproached them, saying “There’s no hatred between us. What possible benefit could you gain by catching us?” they answered, “It doesn’t matter if it will benefit us. As long as you don’t benefit, we’ll do it.”²² The suspicious, mistrustful, and hostile atmosphere of the Cultural Revolution period was clearly hinted at and criticized.

To convey the maliciousness of this type of gossip without compromising the aesthetics of the play, Meng Jinghui used rhythmic explosive sounds and abstract gestures rather than languages to engender the theatrical space. Lefebvre has analyzed the concepts of rhythm and gesture, and their relations with spaces. According to him,

The organ has a rhythm, but the rhythm does not have, nor is it, an organ; rather, it is an interaction. A rhythm invests places, but is not itself a place; it is not a thing, nor an aggregation of things, nor yet a simple flow. It embodies its own law, its own regularity, which it derives from space – from its own space – and from a relationship between space and time.

...

Through the mediation of rhythms (in all three senses of ‘mediation’: means, medium, intermediary), an animated space comes into being which is an extension of the space of bodies.²³

As for gestures, Lefebvre maintained that:

Organized gestures, which is to say ritualized and codified gestures, are not simply performed in ‘physical’ space, in the space of bodies. Bodies themselves generate spaces, which are produced by and for their gestures. The linking of gestures corresponds to the articulation and linking of well-defined spatial segments, segments which repeat, but whose repetition gives rise to novelty. ... Many such social spaces are given rhythm by the gestures which are produced within them, and which produce them (and they are accordingly often measured in paces, cubits, feet, palms or thumbs).

Being keenly aware of the power that rhythms and gestures have upon space, Meng Jinghui incorporated them to engender the theatrical space and enforce the affect of the performance. In the previously discussed attack scene, the residents’ forceful rhythmic utterances and threatening gestures created a striking audio-visual effect. The threatening and tense atmosphere they created on stage immediately evoked the audience’s memory of the Cultural Revolution, which effortlessly filled in the omitted line. This performance treatment not only achieved emotional communication with the audience without specific verbal expressions or comments, but also affirmed the audience’s active participation in the play by sharing with them an unexplained acquiescence.

It’s like the painting technique of *liubai* (留白, leaving blank space). In the context of Chinese painting, the blank spaces are not empty, but are put in dynamic relations with the compositional space. Rather than disregard the spaces that the audience occupies in the theater like the conventional theater does, Meng’s theater always incorporates the audience into its representational space and into its representation of space. Creative, theatrical *liubai* is one of the means Meng used to break down the fourth

wall between the actors and the audience, to manifest and maximize the affect of the play by engaging, penetrating, deconstructing, and reconstituting the spaces that the audience occupies.

It is true that rhythms and gestures, as constitutive parts of performance, are no strangers to theater. They are, however, often treated as elements of the form, for example in the realistic, expressive, or absurdist theater, which could be separated from the content. What we observe in Meng's theater is that they have outgrown their previous status as form and become content. Besides of occasionally replacing languages - the kind of theatrical *liubai* discussed above, rhythms and gestures are also innovatively employed in the play to accompany language utterance to affect spaces through multiple

layers. When Ercong tried to persuade the mysterious man to stay at Auntie Zheng's place, they acted as if they were playing offence and defense in a basketball game (Figure 8). Their performance is abstract, following the Chinese tradition of *xie yi* (写意,



literally, “writing-meaning”), which tries to capture the essence of a thing by the free stroke of a brush on paper, not caring for the details. Just like Mei Lanfang's performance of the river-boat scene, only representative signs are exaggeratedly performed on stage to signify the actors' movements and no real basketball was used.²⁴ The audience has to figure out the signification of the actors' movements and relate them to their dialogues. The juxtaposition of verbal language and body language from two different categories links the emotional game between men and women to a contest on sports fields. This theatrical representation of China's conventional poetic technique *xing* 兴 engages the

audience by leaving spaces for them to fill in, and innovatively creates a humoristic effect.²⁵

Beneath the complicated and ambiguous surface phenomena evolving around gossip lays Guo Shixing's dialectic interpretations of local/folk culture and conventional cultural space. Gossip, of course, hurts, but it also cures and entertains. Although White Beard and Auntie Zheng often gossiped about each other, White Beard tried his best to shield Auntie Zheng from the neighborhood residents' unreasonable verbal attack, and cheer her up afterward by reciting funny lines. As the opening song of the play ran: "Gossip is just the surface of the phenomenon. Men, women, the old and the young all have their own thoughts."²⁶ For people living here, gossip is a means of communication, expression, and comment. It is a characteristic of the small lane, a natural product of the horizontal and open architectures, and a necessary ingredient of life. When Ercong thought life like this is meaningless, Auntie Zheng said:

You must think a lonely old woman like me has nothing to live for and has nobody to talk to in such a big courtyard, gossiped about and bullied daily by neighbors. Just think about the crickets for a moment. They come out in summer and die in autumn, living for just one hundred days. What are they busying themselves with, chirping so rhythmically? I do have nothing to do. Being itself is my business. I'm different from you. For you, being means playing games.²⁷

The process of living is meaningful in itself to Auntie Zheng. These people, the physical space of the small lane and the courtyards, the daily languages games, and the entangled relationships among them are all indispensable natural ingredients of the local culture.

Without the other constitutive elements, the folklore that Ercong collected on tapes would be deprived of their essence. This is why the mysterious man wanted to protect the small lane, which was built in Ming Dynasty. According to the mysterious man, "To analyze is to dismantle. When reassembled together, it's no longer the original one. When I was

young, I took a Swiss watch apart. When I reassembled it, it couldn't even match the domestically made watches in accuracy."²⁸

When languages are carried out of their parole, they lose the essence of the indigenous culture they originally constitute.²⁹ Symbols of a certain culture cannot be equated with the natural being of a culture. To preserve the liveliness, intelligence, and cultural legacies of language, one must protect the nurturing and nourishing space that generates, practices, and circulates such language, the small lane. Otherwise, people would all move into the high-rises and lose their identity, speaking only the standard official language and being ignorant of a part of their own culture. Language and culture would not distinguish and group people like it did in this play, and language homogeneity would be unavoidable. Everyone will become like Muming who had no idea of what words such as *duixia* 对虾, *pahui* (扒灰, alluding to incest), *baishu* (白薯, yam, alluding to stupidity), *chaibaidang* (拆白档, swindler), *paohuoer* (刨活儿, stealing or sabotaging someone else's business) mean.

The significance of preserving the natural state of culture rather than producing cultural products is captured in the opening song:

“Where were the flowers on the tree? They've been made into honey; where were people on the streets? They've all been taken into pictures; where were those birds flying on the sky? They've been hidden in memories; where were those songs in people's hearts? They've been displayed in windows.”³⁰

The accelerated process of commercialization in contemporary China has reduced everything with life to products. The distance between cultural product and commodity is much shortened, if not completely erased. The merging of culture and economy, as Fredric Jameson keenly observed in the postmodern society,³¹ has deprived culture of its natural existence in the post-socialist China. With all the joy of living become packaged

and produced, human beings increasingly lose their identities and become material slaves in the factory of modernity.

The mysterious man, the “mad” man who opposed rebuilding the Great Wall to preserve its historicity and authenticity, seems to be the only sane character in the play. He delivers many salient comments on contemporary society of China, criticizing and ridiculing social corruption and commercialization. Instead of being didactic, these satires are humorous. The comical effect is often caused by “absurd” associations of two seemingly different things; in other words, by using *xing* theatrically. For instance, when Ercong was impressed by his knowledge of bandit jargon, he proposed to open a tourist resort, showcasing the gangster culture; and when Ercong fell in love with him, he asked her if she was a virgin, to “protect his face as a hooligan.” Post-modern society’s absurd deprivation of depths and capitalization on surfaces are ironically delivered.³² The ironic overtone resonates with the audience’s unvoiced observation of contemporary China: their seeing-through of the marketization process and their voluntary participation in it. The people who destroyed national cultural legacies for personal gain were openly ridiculed:

The Great Wall was taken apart by people. Do you believe the collapse of the Great Wall was caused by natural erosion? You should go to the deserted parts of *hexi zoulang* (corridor of the river west) to have a look. The wall made in Han dynasty still stands there; while here, the bricks of the Great Wall had been taken by people to repair their pigpens.... You don’t understand people. People don’t mind being bothered.³³

The last line drew knowing laughs from the audience. The mysterious man seems to be the only character that cares more about China’s culture and history than for personal gain. His mysterious existence on stage (above the telephone booth and on the rooftop) literally gives him a better vantage point of the entire picture of the small lane, physically,

culturally and historically. He knew very well that some residents would sacrifice the small lane for immediate benefits, which is matched by White Beard's desire to move into a bigger and better new apartment to which he could "bring a date home."

Though the play advocates the preservation of the small lane by presenting it as a unique and lovely place in contrast to the dark shadows of the high-rises, it provides dialectic views of both spaces. Problems, such as malicious rumors, lack of privacy, and cramped living spaces, are revealed and juxtaposed with the beauty of cultural legacies associated with the small lane. The isolated parcellized space in the high-rise, on the other hand, could provide more living space and convenience. The decision to preserve or to destroy the small lane is left to the audience. The audience, whose homogeneous social space has been contrasted to the representational space on stage, is awakened to an alternative heterogeneous space. Their role as a constituting part of the representation of space in the theater makes them self-conscious of the socio-political space that prescribes their body space. Instead of being a realistical mirror of some social phenomenon as the traditional realistic theater did, the play mysteriously staged a magic mirror and made the audience see themselves through a mirror of their opposite. As the ending song of the play summarizes:

One day, I walk by the lane of the Chinese Scholar Tree Flower Street.
Folklore spread, reasons clarified, stories misinterpreted, reasons disrupted,
eyes opened, lives changed, it's not meaningless. It has happened before. Did
we talk too little? Did we do too much? ... No matter what you've done, start
to reconsider life now.³⁴

Love in the Simulacrum of Non-Body: *Rhinoceros in Love* (恋爱中的犀牛, written by Liao Yimei 廖一梅, dir. Meng Jinghui 1999)

Rhinoceros in Love, written by Liao Yimei (Meng's wife) and directed by Meng Jinghui, was first staged by CET in 1999. Its enormous popularity led to restagings in 2003, 2004, and 2008. It is called the "love bible" (aiqing shengjing 爱情圣经) of the young generation. Though love is a primary theme of the play, I argue that it is just a representative form of authentic, intensive, and private emotions to contemplate, resist, and subvert the accelerated "emotional capitalism," to borrow Eva Illouz's phrase, that dominate contemporary China. The play's innovative, in-depth exploration and activation of the complicated relationships between affect and space, inside and outside of the theater, have effectively engaged the audience emotionally while maintaining their awareness of the illusionary nature of the theatre and of the realistic world outside.

Just like Fredric Jameson observes a gradual interfusion of culture and economy in postmodern society, Illouz recognizes an increasing bond between emotion and economy. According to Illouz, "Emotional capitalism is a culture in which emotional and economic discourses and practices mutually shape each other, thus producing what I view as a broad, sweeping movement in which affect is made an essential aspect of economic behavior and in which emotional life- especially that of the middle classes – follows the logic of economic relations and exchange."³⁵ Therefore, despite the dynamic interactions between emotional and economic discourses, emotional capitalism is mainly used to address the gradual transformation of the emotional into the economic. Although this is an astute observation, Illouz did not define *affect* in *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* and failed to demarcate the differences between *affect* and *emotion*. It is nevertheless important to distinguish the two concepts to understand the

operation of emotional capitalism, and enable the possible employment of affect to achieve theatrical effects.

Illouz could profitably be read with Brian Massumi's meticulous examinations of these notions in *Parables For the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Massumi equaled *affect* with *intensity*.³⁶

Intensity is embodied in purely autonomic reactions most directly manifested in the skin – at the surface of the body, at its interface with things. ... Intensity is beside that loop [a conscious-autonomic mix], a nonconscious, never-to-be-conscious autonomic remainder. It is outside expectation and adaptation, as it is from vital function. It is narratively delocalized, spreading over the generalized body surface like a lateral backwash from the function-meaning interloops that travel the vertical path between head and heart.³⁷

Affect/intensity is thus an automatic, latent energy source based in the body, which is beyond regulations of all discourses and free of all prescriptions. Nevertheless, the definition runs into the trap of binary dualism and singles out the semantic and semiotic discourse as the opposite to the involuntary and nonconscious realm of affect. Massumi's semiotic tendency is further manifested in the distinctions he made between *affect* and *emotion*. Massumi maintains "emotion and affect – if affect is intensity - follow different logics and pertain to different orders."³⁸

An emotion is a subjective content, the sociolinguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal. Emotion is qualified intensity, the conventional, consensual point of insertion of intensity into semantically and semiotically formed progressions, into narrativizable action-reaction circuits, into function and meaning. It is intensity owned and recognized.³⁹

Can emotion exist beyond the sociolinguistic framework? Though the answer is beyond the scope of this chapter, it makes us aware that Massumi makes a seemingly clear distinction between affect and emotion under the theoretical framework of semiotics which confines emotion in a conscious, indexical discourse. Massumi also illustrates a

single-direction movement from affect to emotion, from the non-conscious to the conscious. If this is the only relationship between affect and emotion, then it would be impossible for the capitalist economic discourse to make the completely unmanageable affect an essential aspect of economic behavior, and there would not have been an emotional capitalism. Could emotion retrospectively generate affect? Let's first examine how emotional capitalism came into being according to Illouz.

Instilling a panoply of procedures to manage emotions and to substitute for them adequate and standard speech patterns implies that emotions are increasingly disembedded and disentangled from concrete and particular actions and relationships. The precondition to "communication" is, paradoxically, the *suspension of one's emotional entanglements in a social relationship*. To communicate means to disengage from my position in a concrete and particular relationship and to take the position of an abstract speaker, affirming my autonomy or understanding. Ultimately, communicating means to suspend or bracket the emotional glue that binds us to others. Yet, at the same time, these neutral and rational procedures of speech are accompanied by an intensely subjectivist way of legitimating one's sentiments.

In other words, affect is not the only way to generate emotion (which is "intensity owned and recognized"). Emotion could be produced and managed by other means to render affect. A specific manipulative procedure highlighted by Illouz here is "adequate and standard speech patterns." This procedure is nothing new to the effete western and eastern elites. It has been practiced in political and cultural discourses as cultural capitals or canonized jargon. In China, official talk (guanhua 官话) and Eight-Part Essay (baguwen 八股文) existed for more than a thousand years.⁴⁰ However, not until the breakdown of the barriers between the high and low cultures in postmodern society and the merging of culture and economy in the globalization that the procedure became tightly integrated with economy and was practiced by common people as emotional capital for everyday survival. As "One's emotional attitudes and style, like one's cultural

taste, define one's social identity"⁴¹ in the "connexionist" capitalism,⁴² the procedure is disseminated to generate affect for economic ends. At the same time, the infinite duplication and overuse of the procedure not only inevitably dilute the intensity of the generated affect, but also dislocate emotion from the body and alienate subjects from their inner feelings.

The paradoxical phenomenon (subjective delivery vs. objective calculation) produced by economic capitalism has made the body what Massumi calls "the body without an image":

an accumulation of relative perspectives and the passages between them, an additive space of utter receptivity retaining and combining past movements, in intensity, extracted from their actual terms. It is less a space in the empirical sense than a gap in space that is also a suspension of the normal unfolding of time. Still, it can be understood as having a spatiotemporal order of its own.⁴³

The body without an image is thus a self-animated entity existing in a spatiotemporal black hole. In the operation of emotional capitalism, the body, like the body without an image, is not only suspended in social and psychological terms, as Illouz notes, but also in spatiotemporal dimensions. Massumi understands the spatiality of the body without an image as an effect of *proprioception*, which he defined as "the sensibility proper to the muscles and ligaments as opposed to tactile sensibility (which is "exteroceptive") and visceral sensibility (which is "interoceptive")."⁴⁴ Proprioception, borrowing from Massumi, "effects a double translation of the subject and the object into the body, at a medium depth where the body is only body, having nothing of the putative profundity of the self nor of the superficiality of external encounter. This asubjective and nonobjective medium depth is one of the strata proper to the corporeal; it is a dimension of the *flesh*."⁴⁵

The practice of emotional capitalism generates similar asubjective and nonobjective effect, which transforms *the body* to *the body without an image*, a dimension of the *flesh* capable of *self-affection*. Self-affection is a talent Massumi assigned to the actor Ronald Reagan (who was the fortieth President of the United States), which refers to “susceptibility to possession [which is verbally manifested in the automation mouthing of prescribed words] and ventriloquism.”⁴⁶ Through self-affection, emotion can therefore be generated through linguistic means by the body without an image to render intensity, which in its turn becomes owned and recognized, and further enhances the “authenticity” of the emotion. Therefore, for the body without an image, the relationship between affect and emotion is far more complex and dynamic than the one-directional one (from intensity to emotion) that Massumi previously depicted. Emotional capitalism leads to the substitution of the *body* with *the body without an image*, transferring every subject into an actor/actress in the emotional orchestra tailored for economy.

How do actors manage to accumulate affect and unleash emotion on stage?

According to Massumi:

The activity of the actor is less to imitate a character in a script than to mimic in the flesh the incorporeality of the event. Blank mimicry is supplemented seeming (acting injected with real passion and yielding real change) and seeming supplemental (the attainment of real passion and real change through the staging of the body in suspended animation). The rig, the order-word, the question-response, induction, possession, ventriloquism, the development of an emotionally charged ideal of unity and the quest to reach that ideal – all of these are technologies for *making seeming being*, for making a life of acting, for making something unified of supplementarity, something central of liminality, for filling the fractal rim to make a (w)hole.⁴⁷

In the practice of economic capitalism, the theatrical technologies for “making seeming being” have been adopted by common people in their everyday lives and transferred into markers of social identity.

Rhinoceros in Love reflects, critiques, and challenges the accelerated operation of emotional capitalism in contemporary post-socialist China. To penetrate the seemingly convenient complicity between emotional and economic discourses and expose the underlying self-alienation, love, in its extreme emotional form, is chosen to reveal the oppression and controversies caused by emotional capitalism. At the turn of the millennium, the aggressiveness of emotional capitalism is manifested in the form of “love training classes” on stage by a “love professor” who taught urban youth how to find a lover in the most efficient manner (Figure 9).



Love Professor: ...today, we'll study how to pour out our inner feelings. It's very important especially when you're in love. The ability to express oneself has become one of the most crucial surviving skills of modern society. You'd better love a person one percent and reveal ten percent of your emotion than you love him/her ten percent and can only reveal one percent. ...To train you, I've listed the classic books and lyrics. Remember there are three key points to expression: first, you need to choose the right sentiment to reveal your emotion. If you can shift among several sentiments with ease, you are on a higher level then. Second, you must believe in the credibility of your confession, as to give it the strength to influence others. Third, you must choose a suitable surrounding. Inappropriate situation can make the best confession stupid.⁴⁸

These lines highlight the significance of expression and the need to acquire and run a rational and blatant “production line” of efficient expression in contemporary society. This conscious internalization of and active participation in what Michael Silverstein calls “language ideology” produce emotional hierarchies which favor rationality over

compassion; reduce interpersonal and emotional relationships to pragmatic diplomatic plays; temporarily disengage or suspend one from concrete and particular indexical specificities; and alienate one from one's self.

The coldness and objectivization of the training are further illustrated in the play by a subsequent lesson in "how to dump your lover." This lesson, according to the "love professor," was designed to standardize and professionalize love to avoid unnecessary personal sacrifice and pain. These manipulative and self-deceptive strategies to express and exchange emotions replaced genuine, organic subjectivity with objective playacting and superficiality, and testified to Fredric Jameson's observation that, in the postmodernism, "depth is replaced by surfaces or by multiple surfaces."⁴⁹ This "depthlessness," which has manifested in various aspects of life in post-socialist China, is represented in the play by Malu's friends in numerous hilarious sequences that intertwine with and juxtapose against the emotionally charged sequences of Malu's love for Mingming.

These hilarious sequences are always enacted by a group of "smart" people, who have mastered the logics of emotional capitalism and know exactly how to make full use of emotional capital to benefit themselves. In one sequence, Yashua (Toothbrush), a dramatic, quick-talking salesman, tried to sell Malu and his friends some toothbrushes. Yashua claimed "if you buy one toothbrush, you get two free." But Malu and his two other friends "only want the two free ones!" Observing the tense atmosphere, Yashua burst into tears and cried, "I have my eighty-year old mother at home." Yashua's unexpected sudden emotion outburst defused the tension immediately and successfully

won the other parties' sympathy. Malu's friends then invited the salesman to play cards with them.

Though the effusive display of emotion broke the deadlock on the stage, Yashua's line actually elicited involuntary laughter instead of sympathy from the audience, as the line had been overused in classic Chinese novels and plays, and its sudden use in an everyday life situation seemed absurdly funny. In the laughter, the discrepancy between semiotic and emotional discourse is revealed and the absurdity of the operation of emotional capitalism is parodied. In Liao Yimei's script of the play, Yashua actually turned out to be a smart player and won the pot of money. Malu's friend Heizi asked, "You're pretty good. Did you fake the silliness you displayed just now?" Yashua answered, "Just self-protection. Just self-protection." Yashua's outburst was after all a survival strategy. In the show, the linguistic articulation was deleted, as Yashua's dramatic, sudden body movement along with a loud, desperate, and yet clichéd cry had already clearly and sarcastically displayed his feigned vulnerability.

In another episode, Yashua invited two actresses (played by two of Malu's friends) to "cure Malu's illness."⁵⁰ The two actresses each acted out a soap opera to represent a possible solution to Malu's "madness." Though Malu was fed up by the cliché soaps, he realized eventually that real life did imitate cheap TV soaps when Honghong, one of the two actresses, revealed that Mingming had slept with her married boss for material benefits. Just as Jean Baudrillard observes, the hallucinating power of mediated (soft) representations replace the "real" with "the simulacra."⁵¹ The line between the real and the representational becomes increasingly fuzzy and transparent. The real has been progressively emptied out its depths and replaced by multiple surfaces.

The depthlessness is not only represented in the contents of these sequences, but also in the forms in which they are performed. In contrast to the solo emotional scenes by Malu and Mingming, these sequences are delivered by a group of people's amazing collaborations. They often mix voices with movement rhythm games, employ trendy languages and subjects, and pastiche characteristic and hack lines and gestures from poetry, prose, traditional Chinese opera, advertising slogans, live music, and songs. Their highly cooperative, emotion-deprived, and exaggerated performances are the epitome of connexionist capitalism: the superficial connectedness and phony closeness. This comical mixture of fragments exaggerates the realistic space outside the theater in insightful yet self-parodying superficial means. It provides the audience with self-reflective and critical perspectives on on-going materialism, progressivism, consumerism, and emotional capitalism in laughter and maintained their awareness of the theatrical illusion of the event at the same time.

These sequences also pose a strong contrast to Malu's romantic and devotional love for Mingming. Their intertwinement with the emotionally charged sequences of Malu's love constantly shifts audiences' sentiments and points of view between the following poles: objective vs. subjective, mind vs. body, superficiality vs. sincerity, surface vs. depth, vision vs. blindness, brightness vs. darkness, connection vs. loneliness/isolation, and chronologicality vs. suspense. The audience identified simultaneously with Malu's pragmatic friends and Malu. If the former is laughed at, then the later is sympathized with. The audience switched constantly between self-ridicule and self-pity. These multifaceted plural representational strategies posit Malu's persistent pursuit of his true feelings against a magnified realistic background of contemporary

China, highlight the preciousness and the beauty of Malu's deep, sincere devotion to his love in innovatively engaging ways.

To challenge and subvert the operation of emotional capitalism in society, *Rhinoceros in Love* made love — the purest, most passionate, and extreme emotion — a central theme to enact “an uprising of the body ... against the signs of non-body.” Body or ‘lived experience’ is emphasized in Malu's unconsummated love for his neighbor, a young woman called Mingming, who was in love with a cynical artist.

As the title of the play – “Rhinoceros in Love” - implies, Malu, a rhinoceros keeper at the zoo, is identified with Tula, his rhinoceros. One distinctive feature that Malu and Tula share is that both have weak sight but a strong sense of smell. Malu could tell a lot about a person from his or her smell: his/her profession, where he or she has been, and what he or she has eaten. The odor of Mingming is singled out as her key attribute. Malu's progressive infatuation with Mingming is manifested from his recognition of her smells: first that of a printer, then of her orange-flavored chewing gum, and lastly the fragrance of her body. As articulated in the play, society imposes no specific requirement to one's smell as it often does to one's eyesight and hearing ability. In other words, Malu's gift of a sensitive nose is not marketable in the pragmatic world. The juxtaposition of vision with olfaction is also interesting in the sense that vision stops on the surface, while smell travels freely in all porous spaces. The weak eyesight of Malu and Tula marks them out of the imagery-dominated contemporary world that stresses only surfaces,⁵² and connects the two deep in. This is why Malu's sequences were always cast in dim lighting, and why Malu and Mingming constantly used clothing to cover their eyes when they were acting (Figure 10). It seems that only by shutting one's eyes,

blocking the world's ubiquitous visual indications, that one could "see" one's inner world clearly. This emphasis on the inside and essence is closely associated with the stubbornness shared by Malu and Tula, a proposition that is despised by modern society.



Stubbornness, a deep emotional fixation rooted in the body, is considered a "disease" in modern society. It prevents one from being functionally engaged in the overarching discourses. In the play, though all the other rhinoceroses had been moved to the new, spacious, and bright new place, Tula refused to leave. The zoo officials had waited for a month for Tula to get into the cage full of apples and bananas and threatened to use anesthesia to move him. Malu not only showed sympathy and understanding to Tula's obstinate attachment to its familiar living environment, but also compared himself with Tula. Just like Tula who missed the wild African grasslands it grew up and didn't want to tease Tala, a female rhinoceros in the zoo, as the newly arrived male rhinoceros did, Malu is too true to his self to conform to prevailing social superficiality, pragmatism, and rationality. Their closeness to their inner selves ironically distances and isolates them from others in the connexionist post-socialist society.

Poor Tula. I know you have nothing in common with others. Just like I stay with Daxiang, Yashua and others just to kill time. Now, they all think I'm crazy and stay away from me. You should submit to your fate just like all the other rhinoceroses, so you wouldn't be this sullen. Is it this hard to submit to one's fate? Most people would do so naturally. You simply do whatever the others do. We are not welcomed and will therefore be treated with anesthetic drugs.⁵³

Refusing to submit to their fates, Malu and Tula were doomed to be outcasts of their societies, in which their genuine emotions were considered inferior to rationality and

redundant, if not harmful. The others regarded them as either the madmen or as loners. Malu could very well join his friends and make use of the techniques the “love professor” taught them in the “love training lessons” to preserve himself and find a lover. But he refused to yield, as he chose to stay true to his own feelings and to his view of the world.

According to his confession, the matter at hand is no longer simply love but a competition between his self and everything else. If he gave up, he would forever lose his free will and his sense of self, and consequently lead a “normal” but meaningless life.

What can assure me that I am still I? – This is no longer an issue of love, but a competition – not between her and me, but between me and everything else. I’ve done nothing important - this is not important. But if I lose this time and submit with a dropping head, I’ll submit to life forever and be a normal person in your eyes, gaining some easy things from life and having some fun in shadows. These have no meaning for me. I’d rather have nothing.⁵⁴

Refusing to be reduced to surface by self-alienating emotional capitalism, Malu heroically waged a war against it by embracing his sensations and loneliness, the exact qualities that he recognized in Mingming. Mingming is as persistent and lonely as Ma Lu in her pursuit of her unpromising love to her never materialized artist lover. The similarities between the two protagonists are made apparent when Mingming recited a part of Malu’s monologue to Tula:

There’re many times I want to give up, but it has left a painful feeling in some part of my body. I’m afraid it’ll pain me there forever and change my attitude consequently to everything. Love her/him is the best thing I’ve ever done.

The body seems to have its own memory independent of the brain. The intensity registered in the corporeal revolts against oppressive emotional capitalism, seeking release and recognition.

How could this centuries old romantic heroism appeal to the sophisticated modern audience that has been fully inscribed by the objectivization process in the outer spaces?

Why were most audiences moved to tears and end up siding with Malu's sentimental position rather than with his friends' more familiar pragmatism? Just as Liao Yimei commented in an interview, "It's a simple story. A man falls in love with a woman, and does everything he possibly can to win her love. And I'm sure that some of the audience will consider this man to be a fool. These days, people are really practical and smart. They know how to find the most suitable place for themselves in society, a secure position where they can't get hurt too badly or be ridiculed, and can easily avoid conflict."⁵⁵ This social milieu is illustrated in the opening song of the play, which is interwoven in the play for several times.

This is a time overloaded with materials,
 This is a time overloaded with emotions,
 This is a time overloaded with knowledge,
 This is a time overloaded with information,
 This is an intelligent and rational time,
 This is a down-to-earth time.

We've got too many things to do,
 We've got too many things to learn,
 We've got too many sounds to listen to,
 We've got too many desires to satisfy.

In such a pragmatic and demanding time, people are driven by materialistic goals and involuntarily turn themselves into machines to survive the intense competition in society.

Love becomes a luxury that no one can afford.

Love is a candle which gives you light,
 In a brief wind is extinguished.
 Love is a bird in flight, adorning the sky
 At the weather's first turn, away it flies.
 Love is a fresh flower, sweet and touching,
 Withering promptly at the dawn of May.
 Love is a rainbow, profuse and magnificent,
 A momentary hoax, evaporated into nothing by the sun.

Love is so beautiful, and felled by the gentlest blow.

Love is so beautiful, and felled by the gentlest blow.⁵⁶

Ma Lu is the “fool” who dares to pursue “pure” love, which has long been considered dangerous and schizophrenic. The beauty of the passion rests in its madly uncontrollable power and energy, rebellious to all possible limits. Deleuze and Guattari maintain, “Schizophrenia is like love: there is no specifically schizophrenic phenomenon or entity; schizophrenia is the universe of productive and reproductive desiring machines, universal primary production as ‘the essential reality of man and nature.’”⁵⁷ Similar to schizophrenia, love “escape[s] coding, scramble[s] the codes, and flee[s] in all directions...[they are]: orphans (no daddy-mommy-me), atheists (no beliefs), and nomads (no habits, no territories).”⁵⁸ Deleuze and Guattari associate the schizoid's ability to scramble and decode with contemporary capitalism. They maintain,

schizophrenia is the exterior limit of capitalism itself or the conclusion of its deepest tendency, but that capitalism only functions on condition that it inhibit this tendency, or that it push back or displace this limit....Hence schizophrenia is not the identity of capitalism, but on the contrary its difference, its divergence, and its death.⁵⁹

As Jonah Peretti has summarized, Deleuze and Guattari “see the schizophrenic as capitalism’s exterminating angle,” and for them, “the schizo is a radical, revolutionary, nomadic wonderer who resists all forms of oppressive power.”⁶⁰ The sweepingly subversive power of the schizophrenic was released in the play in the disguise of passionate love to evoke the radical biopolitics of desire as a means to shake off the suffocating post-socialist yoke. Malu’s schizophrenic love replaced dominant socio-political and economical discourses with a radical form of productive desire and awakened the schizophrenic potential in everyone to resist the power of despotic signifiers.

A grand state of freedom was depicted in the natural utopian picture Malu illustrated for Tula before he took its life:

Don't be afraid, Tula. I'll take you away. Above the marsh, above the deep and secluded valley, across mountains and forests, beyond the other side of the sun, beyond the light clouds, beyond the boundless limit of the starry sky, and above life, there's the endless African plateau where the setting sun hangs on the long neck of giraffe and everything is relived upon the arrival of the raining season.⁶¹

This picture embraces the natural beauty of freedom and free will, in strong contrast to the cage Tula stays in and the confining, materialistic society in which Malu lives.

Toward the end of the play, all actors joined Malu in his singing for pure love. The song of love by the chorus replaced the pessimistic ending originally written by Liao Yimei in which Malu was taken away by the policemen, and pushed the contagious power of love to its summit.

The body's theatrical triumph in the play is partly due to the actors' amazing self-affective capability, and partly due to Liao Yimei's creative use of poetic and subjective languages. In contrary to the exaggerated pretentious body movements of Malu's friends, Malu (played by Guo Tao 郭涛) and Mingming (played by Wu Yue 吴越)'s performances overflowed with passion, desire, and torment. Their energetic and emotionally charged gestures accompanied by subjective utterance of poetic lines strongly affected the audience's eyes and ears and reconstituted the theatrical space. Various visual and audio means were also innovatively employed to enhance the emotional contagiousness of the theatrical space. For instance, when Malu approached Mingming, his frantic heartbeats were visually and audially



magnified by an actress jumping rope in the background (Figure 11). Malu's loneliness and longing for Mingming were sung out by Guo Tao live with his guitar. The lyrical dreamlike lines, combined with Guo's vocal and musical talents, imbued the character of Malu with charming poetic and romantic propositions. Guo sang:

I lie on bed quietly,
 My days hung in my closet.
 I lie on bed quietly,
 My evenings rest on walls.
 I lie on bed quietly,
 My childhood hid under my bed.
 I lie on bed quietly,
 Your warmth left on the seat.

The cup holds water, holds longings
 The curtain wraps wind, wraps wishes
 Every footstep steps on my heart
 Turning me to a leaf in wind
 Shivering in the quivering air

I'll use all my patience and compassion,
 I'll use all my life
 To think of you, wait for you, my love.⁶²

The song beautifully conveys Malu's loneliness, his longing for love, and his nostalgia for his childhood. All these sentiments run parallel to Tula's suffocating isolation in the zoo, and its longing for a suitable mate and its birthplace. Both Malu and Tula are out of tune with their surroundings. Loneliness, the characteristic of modern beings, tied the audience to Malu secretly deep down. Against an emotionally deprived material background, pure love was dazzling represented on the other shore in front of the audience's eyes as an intimate stranger glaring back at them with stunning intensity. As Massumi pointed out,

Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and the state is static – temporal and narrative noise. It is a state of suspense, potentially of disruption. It is like a temporal sink, a hole in time, as we conceive of it and narrativize it. It is not

exactly passivity, because it is filled with motion, vibratory motion, resonance. And it is not yet activity, because the motion is not of the kind that can be directed (if only symbolically) toward practical ends in a world of constituted objects and aims (if only on screen).⁶³

Pure love, with its stunning intensity and universal appeal, silenced every voice that was irrelevant to the body in “a hole in time,” and formed an unchallengeable effect of collective proprioception, transforming the theatrical space to an alternative space full of potential energies, contesting and resisting the outside consumerism and emotional capitalism.

Props are also creatively used to visually encode the representational space in theater. A huge eye-shaped door is set at the back of the stage, implying the vision-dominated contemporary world. An over-sized abstract clock implying Salvador Dali’s “Drooping Watch” was used in the play as a card table, indicating the flow of chronological time in the objective world. It was constantly set on the verge of the stage and actors acted in reaching distance from the viewers to intensify the congruity of the represented material world on stage with the audience’s space, and magnify the affect of the performance. When the lottery winner was being drawn, the actors drew a large piece of clothes with a jumping dice on the top unexpectedly from the audience sections to the stage and induced their enormous excitement and participatory attitudes (Figure 12). Many



songs, including some chorus interludes, sung by the actors in the play not only recapped the situation through transcendental musical and lyrical experiences but also charmed the audience with the actors’ multiple talents. For instance, besides of the above quoted song

“Orange” sung by Guo Tao, Yu Yiran sang “Rhinoceros in Love” with keyboard, and one actress sang Elvis Presley’s “Love Me Tender” in English and many other songs. The actors’ virtuosos overwhelmed the viewers, giving them an uplifting artistic experience and provoking them to probe the in-depth meaning of the play. The traditional “fourth wall,” which statically marks the separation and indifference between performers and audience, is replaced by a dynamic relationship. No wonder that this play was extremely popular in the summer of 1999 and was frequently restaged afterward. Theatre, the once endangered art genre, became topical again. Meng Jinghui had nurtured a group of enthusiastic followers of his plays.

Paradoxically, vision domination and emotional capitalism, the central counter-themes of the play, were fully and exaggeratedly used in the play to magnify its theatrical affect. They are the primary reason for the play’s popularity. Some think Meng intentionally pastiches various forms in his plays to entertain audience, and the popularity of Meng’s plays have undermined their experimental nature, catering to popular culture and rampant commercialism. Meng retorted that a play can be both entertaining and experimental and the two are not necessarily in conflict. “Commercial plays aim to win box office. We’re not. We prioritize expression. We incorporate some commercial operation to attract more people and thus influence them artistically. From this perspective, I’ll maintain my experimental spirit; emphasize visual and audio spectacles and effects, communication and impact.”⁶⁴ The paradoxical situation that Meng’s theater faces seems to testify to what Fredric Jameson acknowledges as the “universal triumph of what Sloterdijk calls ‘cynical reason’ in the omnipresent consumerism of the postmodern today.”⁶⁵ It is ironic to see “in the age of disenchantment and postmodern cynicism, love

is very much the sole remaining source of ethical heroism and transcendence.”⁶⁶

Nevertheless, Meng’s creative reconfiguration of theatrical space and innovative use of the discourse of affect have not only critically engaged the contemporary theater with current socio-political and cultural issues and enacted an alternative, resistant space to the dominant discourses in post-socialist China, but also pushed China’s theater into a new era.

All translations used in this chapter are mine if not otherwise noted.

¹ Lao She 老舍, *Dragon Beard Ditch* 龙须沟, 1950 (staged in 1951, Beijing People’s Art Theater 北京人民艺术剧院, dir. Jiao Juyin 焦菊隐); *Teahouse* 茶馆, 1957 (staged constantly).

² The illusionist theater, which presupposes realistic performances and is characterized by the invisible fourth wall between audience and players, was first employed in China by Hu Shi in his first spoken drama *The Main Event of One’s Life* (*Rensheng dashi* 人生大事). Konstantin Stanislavsky’s theory of acting (Stanislavsky method) furthered the realistic mode of theatrical representation in China, which had dominated Chinese theatrical practices for years, until the upsurge of modernist theatrical experiments. See Xiaomei Chen, *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama in Contemporary China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), pp. 292-3.

³ *Chuanbang* is Beijing slang for “you’re caught” or “gotcha.”

⁴ *Rhinoceros in Love* (恋爱中的犀牛, 北京时事文化咨询公司、穿帮剧团, 1999).

Meng Jinghui is also the director of *Chicken Poets* (Xiang jimaoyi yang fei 像鸡毛一样飞, 2002).

⁵ Henri Lefevre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Malden, Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1991), p.170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 166.

¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 200-1.

¹⁴ *Bird Men* has been examined through many other perspectives. See Xiaomei Chen’s *Acting the Right Part: Political Theater and Popular Drama* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2002), pp. 324-330; and Claire Conceison’s *Significant Other: Staging the American in China* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 2004), pp.120-136.

¹⁵ Definition of Xiehouyu from Wikipedia: Xiehouyu (Chinese: 歇後語 "a saying with the latter-part suspended") is a kind of Chinese proverb consisting of two elements: the

former segment presents a novel scenario while the latter provides the rationale thereof. One would often only state the first part, expecting the listener to know the second. Pun is sometimes invoked in a xiehouyu, thus a xiehouyu in one dialect can be unintelligible to a listener speaking another. Valuable linguistic data can sometimes be gleaned from ancient xiehouyu. Available online at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiehouyu> (accessed February 20, 2007).

¹⁶ See Mikhail M. Bakhtin, *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays*, trans. Vern W. McGee, Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist eds. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1986).

¹⁷ The original line in the play is: 对虾, 对虾, 一块两毛八.

¹⁸ Guo Shixing, *Gossip Street: Guo Shixing's Plays* (Beijing: China's International Broadcasting Press, 1999), p. 250.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 247.

²⁰ Ibid., P. 248.

²¹ Ibid., P.304.

²² Ibid.

²³ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, pp. 206-207.

²⁴ For a detailed analyses of the river-boat scene performed by Mei Lanfang, see Erika Fischer-Lichte, Josephine Riley, Michael Gissenwehler, eds., *The Dramatic Touch of Difference: theatre, own and foreign* (Tübingen: Narr, 1990), p. 156.

²⁵ For detailed illustration of *xing*, see the chapter titled "Paradigms of Flexible Configurations: I-Generation and Beijing-Punks in Wang Meng, Xu Xing, and Chun Shu" in the dissertation.

²⁶ *Gossip Street*, Dir. Meng Jinghui, performed by Central Experimental Theater 中央实验话剧院, September 1998.

²⁷ Guo Shixing, *Gossip Street*, p. 301.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 251.

²⁹ For detailed illustration of *minjian wenhua* (folk culture), see Chen Sihe's *Zhongguo Dangdai Wenxue Shi* (History of Contemporary Chinese Literature), available online at <http://www.eduzhai.net/wenxue/ddwx/zgdd/index.html> (accessed February 23, 2009).

³⁰ *Gossip Street*, *ibid.*

³¹ Fredric Jameson, "Notes on Globalization as a Philosophical Issue," in Fredric Jameson and Masao Miyoshi eds., *The Cultures of Globalization* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), p. 70.

³² Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), p. 12.

³³ Guo Shixing, *Gossip Street*, p. 271.

³⁴ *Gossip Street*, *ibid.*

³⁵ Iva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), p. 5.

³⁶ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2002), p. 27.

³⁷ Ibid., P. 25.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 27.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 28.

⁴⁰ *Baguwen* (Eight-Part Essay) refers to a style of Chinese traditional writings specifically for imperial examinations in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), which requires four couples of parallel sentences with each sentence in accordance with tonal patterns and rhyme schemes. See http://www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_artqa/2003-09/24/content_41754.htm (accessed on January 6, 2009).

⁴¹ To the extent that cultural capital, at least in the Bourdieusian sense, means access to an established corpus of artistic creations identified as “high culture,” emotional intelligence does not qualify as a subspecies of cultural capital.

⁴² Luc Boltanski and Eve Chapiello, *Le Nouvel Esprit du Capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999), p. 176.

⁴³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p. 57.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁴⁸ Meng Jinghui, ed., *Xianfeng Xiju Dangan* (Avant-garde Theater Archives 先锋戏剧档案) (Beijing: Writers' Press, 2000), p. 292.

⁴⁹ Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, p. 12.

⁵⁰ Meng Jinghui, *Xianfeng Xiju Dangan*, p.310

⁵¹ Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1994), pp. 1-42.

⁵² Guy Debord observes in *The Society of the Spectacle* that authentic social life in a modern society has been replaced with its representation. See Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1995).

⁵³ Meng Jinghui, *Xianfeng Xiju Dangan*, pp. 322-323.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

⁵⁵ Christopher Barden, “Experimental Drama Comes of Age: Meng Jinghui's new production plays to packed houses,” available online at <http://www.beijingscene.com/V05I017/feature/feature.htm> (accessed on January 31, 2008)

⁵⁶ Meng Jinghui. It's Barden's translation used here with only some changes on the format to keep the form of the original Chinese text.

⁵⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lane (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. 5.

⁵⁸ Mark Seem, Introduction, in *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Deleuze and Guattari (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p. xxi.

⁵⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1983), p.246.

⁶⁰ Jonah Peretti, “Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Contemporary Visual Culture and the Acceleration of Identity,” *Negations*, available online at http://www.datawranglers.com/negations/issues/96w/96w_peretti.html (accessed on January 10, 2009).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.325.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 290.

⁶³ Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p. 26.

⁶⁴ “Miandui Zhiyi Meng Jinghui Jushou Fayan” (Meng Jinghui Faces Questionings 面对质疑 孟京辉举手发言), available online at <http://ent.sina.com.cn/r/m/29857.html> (accessed on April 4, 2008).

⁶⁵ Sharon Stanley, “Retreat from politics: the cynic in modern times,” available online at http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-34708282_ITM (accessed on January 8, 2009).

⁶⁶ Lee Haiyan, “Introduction,” *Positions* 16:2 (2008): 266.

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