5 Critical realism methodology and the study of an artworld

5.1 The polymorphic contemporary artworld in Beijing

In the first session of this book, I have deconstructed various schools of relational spatial conceptualizations, regarding their epistemic forms and postulated properties – based on ontological or epistemological presuppositions, inferential relations and the level of analysis. Subsequently, an a-chronic dialogue is set up between the undercurrents of the European and ancient Chinese relational thinking. From classic Chinese literature and their commentaries, I derive several first-order premises underlying forms of relational thinking, which are different from the Newtonian and Leibnizian ones. The ways in which such premises are mobilized in recontextualizing traveling spatial knowledge in the Chinese discursive field, affecting knowledge circulation and production *in situ*, are discussed in chapter four.

So far, the discussions and analyses have been conducted at a relatively abstract level. Given the elucidated plural conceptualizations of relational space, the remaining core question is how I shall employ them to inform the understanding of a complex empirical phenomenon of my interest – the polymorphic contemporary artword[1] situates in Beijing. I call the artworld polymorphic primarily because, when departing from the notion of *dangdai yishu*[2] (contemporary art), I fail to identify a regular set of institutional rules, social or material bodies being deployed by art community members in *constituting* the events observed. In public discourse,

1 Throughout this work, I call my empirical research subject the 'artworld.' The close compound form of 'artworld' is borrowed from Arther Danto's (1964). Yet, unlike Danto, I do not address the unique value of the art nor deem the artworld as a functional field. For me, the artworld is considered as a relational configuration(s) of actors, objects, rules, joined knowledge, and coordinated practices. Against the background of the artworld, an object can be described as an artwork and an actor as artist. Due to my subscription to CR ontology, I reject the presumed a priori ordering principle (aesthetic, functional, conventional, institutional, nomos etc.) which grants the artworld a transcendental or immanent coherence (see e.g., Becker 1982; Bourdieu 1993).

2 Dangdai-yishu (当代艺术).

the term 'contemporary art' is attributed to a wide range of art forms, programs, practices, and places entailing diverse substantive contents. Nor can I find consistent forms of rules *regulating* the movements and interrelations between the art-related social and material entities. In particular, what the term contemporary art refers to in empirical reality, can overlap with that referred by its counterparts, i.e., *the traditional, tizhi-nei (the orthodoxy* and *official)*, depending on the attributor and the context. In late 2012, soon after I entered the field, I met many actors in Beijing who quote contemporary art as the core source of their social identity but hold disparate political, economic, and aesthetic stakes on many matters. This is inconsistent with the way in which art historians have characterized *contemporary art practices* in Beijing as counterculture activities since the late 1970s, which indicates a shared value among the participants in the artworld. I shall thereby not take the notion '(contemporary) artworld' as a normative or empirical category to begin my research.

Due to its lack of an overt organizational structure and normative coherence, a phenomenon of polymorphic artworld imposes challenges for me in employing a single conceptual framework, i.e., to postulate a fixed boundary for defining and investigating it. To capture its 'complexity,' I chose to apply a plural of lenses on it to reveal the potential multitude of underlying mechanisms. Based on the procedures prescribed in CR (section 1.3.2.3), I further develop the methodological steps for examining each adopted conceptualization of space. Thus, drawing on three notions of space (discussed in chapter 2.4), I depart from three distinct series of 'field constituting events,' which allude to the polysemantic social-spatial representations of the artworld in Beijing. It means that *casing* the phenomenon and describing the demi-regularity of the corresponding observable events, proposing the hypotheses (from the conceptualizations), applying the hypothesis and interpreting the demi-regularities in question, and identifying those that do or do not apply.

With a concrete empirical subject at the center of study, the second section of this book reinforces its three subjects: to discuss the conceptual-empirical relation, to develop an integrated approach of employing the general abstract conceptualizations of space into concrete empirical analysis to identify empirical tendencies, and to reveal effective causal mechanisms. I will put forward a discussion regarding the necessity of having conceptual pluralism and context-sensitive spatial analysis under the condition of 'compress modernity' dynamisms and 'epistemic uncertainty' in the Chinese urban context. Finally, *empirically*, I am interested in knowing how the social-material arrangements of the contemporary artworld in Beijing city transform after the *fin-de- siècle*, and the forms of lived ontologies and epistemologies at work, causing the observable empirical events.

5.2 Threefold research on Beijing's artworld under Critical Realist principles

5.2.1 Critical realism principles and explications of the artworld

In Chapter 2, I have elucidated three main relational spatial perspectives from David Harvey, Martina Löw, and Nigel Thrift, discussed how they differ in postulated causal agents, mode of inference and level of analysis. I have analyzed them in detail, concerning their distinct ontological and epistemological presuppositions, which are the historical materialist and positivistic epistemology; the ontology of repetitive human doing and interpretive epistemology; and the flat material-social ontology and weak (situated) epistemology. I have also explained on the abstract level, how the social and material entity, forms of relationalities are preconceived and associated causally, in line with the premises of their underlying epistemic framework. Altogether they constitute the *conceptual* toolbox from which I draw as *initial theories* to redescribe the empirical tendencies of the events, occurred in Beijing's artworld. Departing from these three theoretical lenses, I collect 'transitive empirical data' from a multitude of sources on Beijing's artworld, 'case' them in the form of 'field constituting events,' and explore the underlying plural forms of generative mechanisms and their interactions in the real domain.

Before mapping out the *methodological steps* developed following CR principles, I find it necessary to briefly and straightforwardly recap the core concepts and causal agents prescribed in the three relational space conceptualizations. For David Harvey, space (the space of political-economic system) is produced by the political-economic structure as a whole. On the ontological level, a wholistic social-economic structure is conceived as given, which orders the social class division – the social actors' possession of material resources and knowledge. Social actors are conceived to be motivated for accumulating capital, while various material resources (land, capital, etc.) are conceived to entail differentiated inherent circulative attributes. As a result, social actors' knowledge and agency are inherent to and congruent with their positions in the social-economic structure. On the epistemological level, the researcher is deemed an impartial observer who can grasp the structure as a whole through detecting the divisions of knowledge, materiality, and productive practices held by the social groups. Therefore, the principle of accumulation and differential material circularity are prescribed as causal agents to explain the forms of space being produced.

For Martina Löw, the form of relational space (the space of everyday life) arises in the social actor's habitual perception of the symbolic whole (synthesis) and manifests materially as an arrangement of moving social bodies and goods. Ontologically, the 'repetitive human doing' is taken of causal primacy. Epistemologically, the symbolic forms in everyday life are deemed known and internalized by social

actors through the 'repetitive human doings.' The socialized 'synthesis' forms the basis for social actors' (re)constructing of social reality in practices. To elaborate on this point, the day-to-day practice is conceived as intrinsically recursive, formed in the enduring processes of internalizing and externalizing social structure – embodying the experienced rules and resources. Relational space is firstly formed in social actors' ingrained perceptions – coalescing the symbolic relationalities between social beings and goods as a whole, and then in a set of actualized constants moving bodies and space and between them. Researchers are assumed to be the targeted social actors' close interpreters who try to disclose the symbolic-social origin, capture the process and materialized result of the everyday constitution of space. The researchers, through employing a deep understanding and various bracketing techniques, shall make their interpretations closely resemble what appears in the social actors' subjective perspectives.

Finally, in non-representational theory[3] (NRT), Nigel Thrift conceives social actors and things to be on the same ontological footing. Epistemologically, Thrift conceives the entities' agencies to lie partly in their predefined or pre-existing capacities, partly arise from the interactions. NRT shares a practical basis with Löw's constitution of relational space in addressing the expressive power of human actors, their understanding of what is possible to associate and enact. It emphasizes the spontaneously formulated relations. Thus, in comparison, NRT builds on a weaker or situated epistemology to explain the constitution of relational space, addresses both the 'repetitive human doings' and the 'emergent properties in the interaction between the perceiver and the perceived.' It deliberately avoids the *a priori* reduction of social-spatial relations and processes to one or a set of fixed forms. In addition, Thrift assumes the experiencing social actors' way of perceiving and knowing to be differently unraveled from that of the researchers, from one particular context to the other. Therefore, 'space (relational-perceptual)' emerges, and 'assemblage (relational-material)' results from the more or less contingent, recursive, yet never-ending interactions between actors and things. Both can manifest differently in the eyes of experiencing social actors and that of the observers.

To conclude: the three spatial conceptual frameworks make very different proposals about the *properties of social and material entities*, *forms of relations* that a researcher should attend to in casing the empirical materials regarding the constitution of space, and *how they can be known*. The causal agents are attributed to the political-economic structure, repetitive practice, and orders emergent from social

3 Nigel Thrift has consciously clarified what he means by 'theory' in *Spatial Formation* **?**. He explains that, by adopting 'style' instead of 'theory' as a way of theoretical writing, he wants to avoid "a theory centered style which continually avoids the taint of particularity" as well as to point out the "perpetually inadequate (but not thereby unnecessary) powers of theory" (ibid., 30).

and material interactions, respectively. Overall, I find that the three theoretical perspectives' analytical strength lies respectively in the *material-structural*, *perceptual-practice*, and *interactive-affective levels*. When employing them one by one in a manner of retroduction, the phenomenon of the artworld is 'cased' into very different events. Different empirical transitive knowledge is selected, coded by different 'initial theories,' and provisionally interpreted by presupposed causal agents in the corresponding epistemic frameworks.

Inextricably, each conceptualization has also brought forth claims/patches to enhance the general explanatory purchase in the entangled analytical levels and dimensions. For example, Harvey argues that the neo-liberal structure encounters concrete social realities in a creative-destructive manner (2016 [2006], 23–24). He emphasizes the constraining effect of *pre-existing local institutional and cultural contexts* to explain *away* the divergence between the theoretical prediction and the actualized, empirically observable social-political practices and material arrangements. I exclude such claims in re-describing the empirical materials but follow only the claims coherent with the causal structure of the conceptual framework.

In carrying out empirical investigations in sections 5.3, 5.4 and 5.5 under CR principles, I follow the retroductive logic. Concretely, it means that I firstly sample and organize my empirical data (transitive knowledge gathered in the empirical domain) according to the three analytical levels the three spatial theories instruct me to look at. They are the transitive and institutionalized social-spatial representations – the political-economic norms and rules of the artworld; the recursive everyday practices enacted by actors/actor groups and their narratives about that; the inter-and intra-group social-material interactions observed in Caochangdi village, and the interpretations made by the participating social actors. Two types of data are included and examined at each level: first, the data gathered around the immediately visible and fragmented aspects of the empirical events, and second, additional data I identify through following the selective lenses of the 'initial theories.' The complex social-spatial phenomenon of the artworld, is thereby broken down and extended into three groups of component events in the actual domain. The three groups of 'field configuring events,' are "different but complementary data on the same topic" (Morse 1991, 122).

My data sampling and sorting processes are also entangled with what Bhaskar termed as 're-description.' This is a process of re-describing the events in theoretically meaningful ways, and of "taking some unexplained phenomenon and propose hypothetical mechanisms that, if they existed, would generate or cause that which is to be explained" (Mingers 2014, 20). In this process, I first derive at demi-regularities found in the empirics and then try out the causal agents conceived in the initial theories as potentially legitimate ones which, if they did indeed exist, would account for the observed events. As an indicator for confirming the feasibility and fallibility of a theory, a proposed explanatory mechanism "must survive an empiri-

cal test…where survival is indicated by the observation of evidence consistent with what the theory predicts" (Lee and Hubona 2009, 246).

In section 5.3, I look at the contemporary artworld from the structural level, coding the norm-related events in line with the (relational) space of political economics proposed by Harvey. I look at the *events* that take place with reference to already established *political-economic norms* prevalent in the artworld, redescribe the events through *patterns of relationships between social groups, division of resources and knowledge*, *modes of production*, *modes of material circulation* and so forth. Under examination are norm-constituting discourses, the descriptions about how social actors deploy these norms in social practices, the observable material arrangements directly linked to the productive or consumptive practices, from the empirical domain. These norms include *tizhi-nei* (inside-the-institution or the official system) and *tizhi-wai*' (outside-the-institution or the official system); *yishuqu* (art district), *gonggong yishu* (the public art) *and duli-yishu* (independent art). These transitive norms are widely deployed by art critics, artists, art merchants and regulators, and governors in conversations and in print. Finally, I will discuss whether/to what extent the postulated causal agent in Harvey's conceptualization is compatible with the events observed in Beijing's artworld.

In section 5.4, I focus on forms of everyday social practices carried out by the artworld's key insiders. With data collected through participatory observation and interviews in the art community's everyday scenarios, I characterize and redescribe the events under three categories: 'art-making,' 'studio-living,' and 'exhibiting.' I follow the analytical dimensions proposed by Löw in coding them, looking at the forms of 'recursive practices' unfold in concretely timed social-material contexts, the 'entrenched meaning' ascribed by the acting subjects. I derive the forms of cultivated dispositions from sampled artists' biographical experiences. By analyzing how 'rules and resources,' 'habitus,' 'routinary practices' and 'materialization of everyday life spaces' actually unfolds in these events, I will discuss *if or to* what extent some typical social-material configurations in the artworld, such as the 'loft studio,' the 'art village,' and the 'exhibition' can be seen as resultant from actors' habitus and recursive practices.

In section 5.5, I bring the social-spatial transformations of a specific art village called Caochangdi into focus. It has been briefly mentioned in the introduction: Caochangdi accommodates both the most established art organizations, individuals and a wealth of hybrid non-art-related social actors and artifacts. It seems to me, a perfect locus to uncover the condensed ways in which plural mechanisms occur in Beijing's artworld, give forms to its dynamic social-material configurations. Self-understandingly, the plural, co-existent generative mechanisms reject a single, linear explanation. I thereby employ all three conceptual frameworks of space to redescribe the constitutive events of Caochangdi village on different levels

and at different phases. The empirical data are separate to describe processes that occur at 'regular times' and 'disruptive times.'

5.2.2 Multiple qualitative research methods

I gathered the empirical material included in this chapter through books and articles written by art critics and artists themselves, as well as interviews and participatory observations I conducted during my field trips in Beijing. The total period of field trips stretched from September 2013 to February 2017[4]. The focused field trips took place mainly in October 2015 to December 2015 and October 2016 to February 2017, for a total number of seven months. Prior to the dissertation project, I wrote my master thesis (finished in June 2014) on the correlation between the social network structure (indicated by nodal centrality, clustering coefficient, conductance) and the physical geometrical structure (indicated by nodal centrality, edge conductance, and network clustering coefficient) among art institutions in Caochangdi art village. From October 2013 to April 2014, I undertook a part-time position in a local gallery to gather the data needed. I was immersed in the artworld for one to two days per week for six consecutive months. Despite the quantitative method and a different conceptual focus of the previous work, the information I obtained from the previous field trips remains valuable for this work.

Overall, I have conducted and documented 30 formal interviews, many informal interviews (list attached in appendix), and participatory observations on various occasions, such as artist talks, studio visits, art critics and historian conferences, art fairs, biennials, exhibition openings, after-parties, and so on. By formal interview, I mean one-to-one conversations with actors around a list of pre-structured questions. The interview proceedings were either jotted down or recorded on site, and interviewees were informed beforehand that their names are kept anonymous and their answers would contribute to my dissertation research project. The interview typically began from biographical questions, followed by a set of open-ended questions regarding their experiences of career milestones, their everyday routine as an artist/curator/gallerist, and subsequently, a series of 'why' questions. In this setting, interviewees draw on their memories to answer my question. The answers are inevitably refabricated and detached from the original context under which the events and activities occurred.

While working in the field, I gain tacit knowledge about the artworld through informal interviews or casual chats with the acting subjects, amidst the occurrence

4 My last field trip took place actually in December 2018. However, due to the rapid pace of urban change in Beijing, the events noted in the later visits are not thoroughly documented nor analyzed, hence not included into this book. The COVID-19 induced impacts on the artworld are also not covered in this current chapters.

of 'field-constituting events.' The two interview instruments are complementary. The first captures the actors' ideas, selected and reprocessed from memory, expectations, and imaginations, whereas the second can better capture the more intuitive ideas and instantaneous perceptions that emerged *in-situ*. In other words, the structured interview is biased towards 'here and now,' as the actors have consciously or unconsciously developed or designed the narrative that they find *appropriate* to tell an unknown other. Therefore, these answers are likely to be *selective*, addressing mainly the *actualized* events with an ex-post *legitimation*. For example, artists love to talk endlessly about their genius ideas, relentless efforts, and limited resources involved in an actualized, successful exhibition, but not many are keen on recalling those that are deemed failed. Likewise, gallerists like expressing how their aesthetic taste. and publicity strategies have helped to ensure the collaborating artists' success, but not about how they make money, i.e., their clandestine selling tactics. The informal interview and observation are necessary to reveal the sensual, perceptual structures that become only visible in the presence of practices. I could only discover the hidden layer of meaning in some seemingly ordinary practices when I worked as an insider in the gallery, i.e., the artist residency – inviting foreign artists to fly-in and produce artwork arduously on-site in a short timeframe – as a tactic to elude the high tax on importing artwork. In the western context, this is a usual practice for art-collecting agencies like foundations, but not art-selling agencies like commercial galleries. Such tactics are never brought up in formal interviews, artists' talks, exhibition introductions, and catalogs.

Participatory observation is the other main instrument I have employed in collecting data. My experiences as a gallery intern have primarily prepared me with the know-what(s) and know-how(s) of the typical roles, terms, practices, artifacts in the artworld, and what they generally mean for gallerists, artists and buyers. Such knowledge was gained through all kinds of formal and miscellaneous tasks, such as communicating with the contractors who are responsible for shipping and installing artwork, reading and archiving the artists' selling records and catalogs, catering and communicating with the visiting collectors and facilitating the sales, preparing for the opening dinner, and so on. Over time, I also befriended many young artists and curators, which created further learning about their professional practices outside Beijing. During the 2017 *Documenta*, my home in Berlin hosted many art pilgrims that had traveled from Beijing to Germany. Many missing pieces of the puzzle were found through my long-term, close socializing with these art insiders and my observation of their practices in distinct contexts.

5.2.3 Multiple role-taking and bridges in the field

As I have just mentioned, I have been in touch with the artworld for over four years. When I entered the field for the first time in 2013, I told the gallery colleagues up

front that my goal of working there was to map out the art related social network manifested in Caochangdi village. With my employer and colleagues' consent, I assumed the identity of a gallery intern and a researcher. In the beginning, my knowledge of the artworld was minimal, and I was not entirely clear about the relevant elements that define the contemporary artworld from the insiders' perspectives. My colleagues, the earliest informants of this research, have generously shared their personal experiences, disclosed how their lives unfold within and beyond the professional field. It is only out of such trusted relationships that I know the affordances and constraints the art graduates, artists, curators, critics, and gallerists experience all together in the artworld.

Just as McCall has warned, the roles that ethnographers adopt in their fieldwork are "perhaps the single most important determinant of what he [or she] will be able to learn" (McCall 1969, 29). During my subsequent field trips, finding new suitable roles to connect with actors of interest becomes a pressing issue. When I tried to step outside the friend circle, I had built, I realized that the identity of a Ph.D. candidate-researcher is far from necessary to access and approach informants occupying different social positionalities. Due to the lack of civil society infrastructure, many issues (like land-use plans) I try to investigate are not openly or formally accessible. I needed to find thereby an identity that appeals to my informants as an insider role. The types of roles (like art professors, museum directors, curators, critics, gallerists) one can take determines not only one's access to the artworld, but also the answers to one's questions.

Inspired by some friends who write reviews for art exhibitions as side jobs, I also adopted an identity of freelancing art critic, targeting international art journals. It was doable for me mainly because of contemporary art's marginalized position in the field of cultural production in China. Firstly, there is a lack of professionally trained contemporary art critics in China, as contemporary art is itself an imported good since the 1980s. Thus, in practice, the discussions of contemporary art in China are carried out by individuals from different professional backgrounds in social and literary science. Then, the discussions about contemporary art are only sporadically published in journals issued by domestic academia, which are endorsed by the national bureau of news and publishing and accredited as valid scientific achievements in the academic system. In contrast, they are mostly published on international art media. Yet, although the cultural currency granted by international journals are internationally valid, these journals, webpages have small circulation, their meager pay can attract only very few authors. Due to these two reasons, I managed to enter the field again by reviewing contemporary artworks.

After publishing two reviews on films, one report on a biennial, and a review of an art conference on several established media platforms, I officially acquired a critic/art journalist's status – an identity that opened many doors for me in the artworld. Artists, the directors of art institutions, and curators would open the door

for me because I might bring their work to public attention. The editors would open their doors for me because of my potential contribution. In addition, I also got access to conferences, public lectures, exhibition openings, and artist parties, especially when accompanied by other mediators. Practical concerns also necessitate the researcher to have an insider identity. Time and energy are precious resources for everyone, particularly true for the freelancing art community members, who do not benefit from institutional support while living at the edge of a vast city.

However, an art insider role is not a panacea to all access problems. Till the end of my field trip, I did not manage to access many administrators. As a journalist of a sort, it is challenging to approach state representatives and receive straight and unpolished answers. People tend to reveal partial truths to unknown researchers or untrusted interviewers because of their fear of trouble in a nebulous political climate. I was told that being interviewed is not part of their daily job, and they personally would not want to get involved with media journalists or researchers. Some interviews failed due to a lack of trust. For example, my interview with one administrative of 798 art district only achieved pre-scripted, propaganda-like answers, leaving subjectivities and historical factual details absent. I reflect on the consequence of the lack of administrative perspective in my research outcomes in section 5.5.5. Regarding my essential role as a researcher, despite being a Chinese person researching phenomenon in China, I deeply agree with Todorov's (1999 [1982]) idea in *The Conquest of America* that interviewing as a process is to turn others into subjects so that their words can be appropriated for the benefit of the researcher. Hence, I choose not to 'push' for answers in my field trips. Overall, my access to the field and my knowledge acquisition were achieved by constructing fitting identities to various social networks.

5.3 Artworld as a space of political economy

If someone wants to visit the contemporary *art spaces* in Beijing at weekends, art guides like artron.net[5] provide many options. In the city center, one is likely to encounter grandiose group shows titled under the theme of 'Sino-X cultural exchange,' juxtaposing artworks created by renowned artists from China and abroad. Such exhibitions are presented with lengthy introductions, well-printed catalogs and a long list of prominent international collaborating institutions. They take place most likely in grand state-owned museums, such as the National Art Museum of China (NAMOC, est. 1962). Across the street from NAMOC is the newly inaugurated Guardian Art Centre (est. 2018), where artworks are categorized and presented with evident meticulous professionalism, clear and precise value-based aesthetic

5 Artron. net is the biggest online art portal in mainland China.

directives, rules of bidding, paying and shipping in spacious, exquisitely decorated rooms. For a combined art and gourmet experience, you may encounter Beijing Parkview Green, a high-end shopping-hotel-office complex (est. 2012), where 500 pieces of Salvador Dali's sculptures and other visually powerful artworks from top-priced contemporary Chinese artists are on display. These artworks are displayed scattered and approachable, not on pedestals, but simply in various corners of the mall, as if they are just part of the interior, imposing no particular rules for visitors to follow. They await guests who know the cultural etiquette by heart. Located equally in Beijing's central area, many tiny off-spaces are established in former traditional courtyard housings in the hutong alleys. They are often young (most have opened after 2010), funded privately or by foreign art foundations, surrounded by bars, bistros, and flows of everyday lives of old and young locals.

In the northeast direction of the city, especially in the outskirts, around the fifth ring road, an extensive art quarter named 798-art district has filled the once-abandoned military electronics factory buildings since the late 1990s. The buildings, previously rented to private artists, used as studios or storage space, are now refilled by white-cube galleries, not-for-profit art institutions, designer boutiques, and architectural firms. This quarter is now known to both experienced art connoisseurs and regular tourists since 2008. Ten minutes' driving distance away, two villages-in-the-city next to Beijing's fifth ring road, are crowded with studios, alternative art spaces, design offices, and private museums since the 2000s. The art spaces juxtaposed with local peasants' self-built housings and typical make-shift amenities found nowhere else within the fifth ring. People would probably not go there unless guided by an art insider, as their existence at Beijing's urban-rural interface remains hard to find and reach. By the time I started my research in 2014, several new high-end residential, commercial, and office projects' construction sites have already loomed in the vicinity. They could be seen when standing at the villages' entrances. Similarly, several agglomerations of private museums, artist studios, and artist-run spaces are located at the southwest and west verges of the city. These remote places are known to art insiders, including Yanjiao, Songzhuang, each requiring a two to three-hour drive from downtown.

The above-described art scenes in today's Beijing show that sites designated for contemporary art are plural in number and form. Such scenes seem to resonate with Hito Seyerl's criticism, who argues that "contemporary art is a brand name without a brand, ready to be slapped onto almost anything […] most closely linked to post-Fordist speculation, with bling, boom, and bust" (Steyerl 2010). Despite the lack of official census data, many indicators show Beijing is the hub for Chinese contemporary art. I was repeatedly told that Beijing's art scene is more vibrant and diverse than anywhere else in China. The insiders I met during my field trips have confirmed this point by the votes of their feet. Most of them were not born in Beijing city, nor did they grow up there, but they choose to live and

work there as an artist, art historian, dealer, critic, and so forth. The city hosts an immense number of artists, including the most significant individuals. In 2014, when I sorted the art events by 'city' on artron.org, the number of events that took place annually in Beijing outnumbered the other cities in total, and the forms rang from art fairs, design weeks, artist talks, screenings, theatre performances, and photography workshops. Beijing's artworld accommodates an outstanding variety of art forms, techniques, and subjects. The artworld's overall ecology has transformed tremendously within the last 40 years. Nevertheless, the surviving artist studios, non-for-profit art institutions, galleries agglomerate continuously at several urban-rural-interfacing corners of this vast city.

When probing the artworld with the lens of the political-economic system (by Harvey), one notices that the geographical distribution of the different types of art institutions (characterized by their economic capital making capacity) in Beijing is not ostensibly correlated with the city's land rental structure. Many world-renowned galleries are located side by side with privately funded non-for-profit art institutions in the villages-in-the-city at the urban edge. The number of large commerce-driven institutions sponsored by domestic and global capital (like the Guardian Art Centre just mentioned) is growing, but so are the smaller artist-run non-for-profit off-spaces in the urban center. As I have elaborated in-depth in Chapter 2, Harvey's framework presupposes the law of accumulation and alienation to be the causal agent. 'Materiality' is conceived to be the *means of production*. It is categorized by *use* and *exchange value* on the symbolic level and mobility properties in capital circulation. He defines and *classifies* the social actors' agency in terms of their *productive forces,* i.e., their capacity to mobilize and accumulate the means of production they possess. Thus, following these presuppositions, the social structure (i.e., the relatively stable patterns of political-economic relation that shape the form of social practices and movements of social goods in the artworld) shall first and foremost be deemed class structure.

To employ Harvey's conceptualization of space retro-ductively, I read the complex empirical data in diagnosable events according to the basic categories he postulated. A few prevalent social-spatial normative constellations in the artworld (i.e., *tizhi-nei* vs. *tizhi wai*[6] ; *Art District, Biennial, and Public Art*) are tentatively redescribed as ensembles of political-economic norms. Particularly, I am led to picture and redescribe the material and knowledge distribution, and labor division in these events. It includes, how this *transitive knowledge* is understood and enacted by the social actors, the implied division of social class, knowledge, and material arrangements in the empirical domain. Finally, I would *assess* if the proposed causal agent,

6 Tizhi-nei (体制内) vs. tizhi-wai (体制外) could be literally translated as 'within the institutional structure or official system' vs. 'outside the institutional structure or official system.'

the principle of accumulation postulated by Harvey, is efficacious to explain the observable norm-practice interactions in the empirical domain.

5.3.1 Tizhi-nei and tizhi-wai as primary norm ensembles

On different occasions during my field trips, I repeatedly heard about some dualistic or triadic lexicons (representations of norms). It includes the *tizhi-nei* and the *tizhi-wai*, i.e., inside and outside the institutional structure; *tizhi-nei/guanfang*[7] *shangye* and *duli*[8], i.e., the official, commercial, and independent; as well as the *chuantong* and *dangdai*[9], i.e., the traditional and contemporary. In public and everyday discourses alike, these lexicons are used without many elaborations, alluding to a high status of commonsense in Beijing's contemporary artworld. When reading them literally in the context of art, *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai,* describe two opposing modes of art production, rules of capital accumulation and circulation, knowledge and techniques, and social-organizational structures. Similarly, *tizhi-nei/guanfang*, *shangye* and *duli*, imply a set of three distinct and disparate modes of art production around which social groups identify and organize. The *chuantong* and *dangdai*, are closely related to knowledge and technique in artmaking. Yet, in the broader sense, they represent two sets of economic, aesthetic and technical rules that structure the making, interpreting and circulating of two genres of artworks. When we read these terms formally, these normative dyads or triads appear mutually exclusive and dialectically negating. The questions are, what modes of art production do they represent, and how are the knowledge, rules and material resources deployed in shaping the social actors' social relations and physical landscapes in the artworld?

To test Harvey's postulated causal agent, I first redescribe the discourses and the norm-related events around *tizhi-nei* (in-institutional structure) and *tizhi-wai* (out-institutional structure), and then move on to redescribe the secondary ones (like the 'biennial,' the 'art district,' and 'independent art institutions'). From what I have observed, the referees of these notions in the empirical domain, are more muddled together than clearly demarcated and associated. For example, artist Xu Bing[10] – one of the most acclaimed contemporary Chinese artists recognized by international audiences – identifies himself as a *tizhi-wai* (out-of-institutional structure) artist, who applies and appropriates *chuantong* (traditional) Chinese art tech-

7 In these pairs of lexicons, the terms guanfang (官方) and tizhi-nei (体制内) are used indistinguishable. Guanfang implies a stronger sense of political justification, which is closer to "the official" or "the authorized" than tizhi-nei.

8 Shangye (商业) and duli (独立).

9 Chuantong (传统) vs. dangdai (当代).

10 The artist's professional profile, see, http://www.xubing.com/en/exhibition.

niques, narratives, and language in making his artwork. Xu's works are interpreted and recognized as *dangdai* (contemporary), exhibited in both *tizhi-nei* (state-run) and *tizhi-wai* (non-state run) art institutions alike. It demonstrates that actors in Beijing's artworld may play cross-sectorial roles associated with formally contradictory rules. Most of the contemporary artists I have asked have also not understood *tizhi-nei and tizhi-wai*, traditional and contemporary, as representations of temporally (enduring and repetitive) or spatially (homogenous, bounded, and exclusive) fixed rules for their artistic production. At this point, challenges have also arisen to associate dialectic modes of production, rules of social organization and resources distribution with these terms. We cannot characterize an individual's social position in the artworld by the singular productive practices one carries out (such as exhibiting in a state-funded museum).

In the political field, state bodies mobilize the lexicons of *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* in legislative, regulatory documents, designating artists and art institutions' roles and assigning means of production within the system. The review published in the *Art Daily of China*[11] is such an example:

> The *Beijing Federation of Literary and Art Circles*[12] is actively recruiting the non-Beijing *hukou* holding, *tizhi-wai* artists into the associations. Most associations under our supervision have amended their charters, annulated the constraints imposed on recruiting non-Beijing *hukou* holding artists. Thereby, the proportion of *tizhi-wai* artists in our federation has been growing. Currently, the municipal federation of Beijing has admitted around 21'000 members, among which 15% are *tizhi-wai* members […] Our federation is keen on increasing the admission of highly talented artists […] Since 2013, the federation started making exceptions for signing up those high-performing professionals whose labor relationship finds itself in Beijing city into our affiliated associations. We also started granting them with corresponding *zhicheng*[13] (professional titles). Our goal is to propel the professionalization of the non-Beijing *hukou* holding, *tizhi-wai* artists, gradually establish an evaluation system befitting the current development in the art and literature fields. (Art Daily China, 06thJanuary 2017, translation and ellipsis added)

This announcement indicates that before the policy's revision in 2013, only the actors who *do* hold Beijing *hukou* and work within state-recognized organizations, i.e., *tizhi-nei* art institutions, are entitled to have art-related professional membership and credentials. By introducing a change in the *tizhi-nei* regulatory framework,

11 The Art Daily of China (中国艺术报) is a professional art media, funded and operated by China's association of literary and fine art.

12 Beijing Shi Wenlian (北京市文联).

13 Zhicheng (职称).

this announcement suggests the loosening up of the enduring rules. In this case, the regulatory body that attributes legitimacy rules is the Beijing Federation of Literary and Art Circles[14] (BFLAC), a *de facto* state-run top-level organization in the field. Its affiliating institutions comprise state-funded art associations, like publicly funded art academies, vocational schools, museums, theatres, newspapers, periodicals, and publishing houses. They operate under the supervision of municipal and district level administrations.

The *tizhi-nei* norms become constitutive to a social actor's political-economic agency by granting individuals quotas of Beijing hukou and professional titles. Beijing *hukou* guarantees one access to many types of social welfare in the city. The professional title represents the state reckoned technical qualification, which corresponds to the salary level one has in the state-run institutions. Each member of the association gets paid, however little, by state funding. In addition, these associations regularly organize exhibitions, typically in collaboration with state-run museums and institutions or comparable institutions outside China as part of cultural exchange programs. The exclusive access to exhibitions further strengthens one's status as an artist and access to economic capital.

In sum, the term *tizhi-nei* alludes to strong *class content* till this day, firstly in the political sense, and then in the economic and cultural sense. It associates with a set of rules and exclusive resources in the artworld, mobilized by small groups of actors. Their practices of art production and monetization are conditioned by corresponding *tizhi-nei* rules when they utilize these exclusive resources. It is unclear how far the rules become internalized and embodied by the pertinent social actors and how this affects their overall artistic practices and production. In other words: if, and to what extent, could we understand *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* as the *social structure of production and liberation struggles* as proposed by Harvey? To answer this question, let me delve deeper into the historical events regarding the *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* division's origin.

The following narratives are cited from an art critic's memoir and one artist's self-reflection. They both recognize that the dualistic framing – *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* – delineate two modes of artistic practices enacted by distinct social actor groups at the inception of the contemporary artworld.

> In 1979, when mainland China ended its state of cultural isolation from the West, a new wave of avant-garde art was already evident. The role played by the actors

14 The BFLAC is a professional body administrating the state recognized art associations like the writers' association, the dancers' association, the painters' association, etc. in Beijing municipality. The BFLAC claims to be a non-governmental body, however, it is directly supervised by various cultural affair-oriented departments of the Beijing municipal government. The art associations under its administration are qualified to apply and are mostly funded by state-funding measures.

> from *official art academies* in the avant-garde movement in China is an interesting one and an important point for discussion. The pioneering Stars exhibitions of 1979 and 1980 provide a good example. The Stars *avant-garde art group* competed with the *orthodox artworld* by using forms of expression in their works unimaginable to the Chinese Art Academy painters. The artists expressed their disillusion and spiritual wounds through what amounted to a criticism of the "dark side" of society, including the educational system. It is important to note that the artists of the Stars group were not related to the art academies but rather a group of *amateur painters*. This amateur status not only allowed them to avoid the stylistic and thematic restrictions imposed by the art academies, but it also freed them to work to "overturn" the orthodox, having no vested interest in maintaining it. (Shih in Valerie C. Doran 1993, 29, italic added)
>
> I find living like a hooligan quite ok. I am, although not proud of being a *mangliu*[15] (hooligan), but also not ashamed about it. (I find), the Chinese people (in general) are in lack of the spirit of *mangliu* (hooligan). They (the Chinese) like to fix themselves in one position and get stuck in there, do not want to move upwards or downwards. It is not fun (to me). It is not that I would love to be a hooligan, but I have no other choice. My English is bad, but my understanding of the term hooligan is nothing but 'freelancer.' I am willing to be a freelancing photographer, capturing the people and things that interest me. That is what being a hooligan means (to me) (Gao in Wu 1990, translation and italic added).

We can infer from these narratives, from the late 1970s to the early 1990s in Beijing, the terms *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* were deployed in a sharp contrastive sense by actors in the artworld. Shih is an independent art critic. He associates the term *tizhi-nei* with the rules and resources from the art academies. It is also used to characterize the group of actors whose social status, means of life, modes of artistic practices are conditioned by such structures. It also applies to the forms of artistic practices (soviet-realism or traditional Chinese ink painting) and the resultant artworks. Hence, the *tizhi-nei* orders are deemed both constitutive and regulative to the *tizhi-nei* artist groups' productive practices.

Meanwhile, the actors whose mode of productive practices follow the rules *other* than *tizhi-nei* ones are categorized as *tizhi-wai*. In the second quote, artist Gao suggests that he is fully aware of the association between *tizhi-wai* and *mangliu* (hooligan), imposed by societal mainstream thinking. He clearly apprehends that the general public links particular social status and way of life to this notion while loathing them as denigrating and shameful. Notably, he deploys the term *mangliu* (hooligan), addresses his identification as a social dissident, refuses to reproduce its commonsensical meaning. He sees himself as rightfully positioned among the

15 Mangliu (盲流).

new and Avant guard art practitioners when speaking from his own experience. Thus, we can infer, on the perception level, *tizhi-wai* regulates Gao's self-identification and practice but does not constitute it.

Nevertheless, artists like Gao resist the normative principles associated with *tizhi-nei*, declare it to be conservative and orthodox – as an un-attractive constraint that they wish to be free from. From other literature sources (see, e.g., Yang and Li), characterizing artists' life in the 1980s and 1990s, we can see that the notion of *tizhi-nei*, by and large, represents a coherent mode of artistic production, associated with effective regulatory rules encompassing political, economic and cultural domains. It is reified as officially stipulated organizational and material forms like artist associations of national, provincial, and municipal levels; state-run institutions like national and provincial museums of art, workers' cultural theaters, children's theaters, *forms of events* organized under state-rules like annual national and provincial art exhibitions; *media channels* like the China Art Weekly; and the *style of artistic production* like the Soviet realism and traditional Chinese ink painting, and so forth. Meanwhile, *tizhi-wai* is interpreted more varyingly by different social groups. It is safe to say that roughly before the year 2000, the terms *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* denote distinct *modes of artistic productions*, ensembles of norms. Two groups of social actors' artistic knowledge, political stands and economic means can be thereby characterized.

I want to emphasize, the actors' artistic knowledge, means of production and forms of practices categorized under the term *tizhi-wai* have never been as coherent as that under *tizhi-nei*. In other words, there is no consensus on the productive forms and substantive contents of *tizhi-wai*. The art historian Wu Hong's description of the social-spatial conditions under which *tizhi-wai* artists live and produce art in the Dashanzhuang village-in-the-city[16] in the 1990s is quite illustrative to this point. I place it side by side with the depiction about the *tizhi-nei* artist groups by Shih from the same time period:

> Following Wang Shihua, a number of students in the Central Art Academy moved into Dashanzhuang in 1991 and 1992. … Most of them were painters, who structure their artistic activities centering in the academy environment, not in the place they lived. This situation changed in 1993 and especially in early 1994, when some of these students (such as Wang Shihua and Zhang Huan) turned into *independent artists* after graduation, while an increasing number of jobless (*tizhi-wai*) artists (including Ma Liuming, Rong Rong, Cang Xin, Zhu Ming, and Xu San) settled

16 Dashanzhuang (大山庄) was a village-in-the-city located in the east side of Beijing city, demolished in 1994. From the late 1980s to 1994, the artists living there called it East Village (dong cun), echoing the name of the artists agglomeration in East Village, New York city. This name responds also to its geographical and temporal relation to the previously demolished art village Yuanmingyuan in west Beijing, which was named the West Village.

> there after emigrating from the provinces. The village became increasingly an "art space," where the *tizhi-wai, self-trained avant-garde* artists carry out their experiments and hang out with one another. Here, it is the performance instead of painting that becomes the dominant form of their *artistic expression*. As their confidence increased, there was also a growing sense of an artistic community; both factors finally led these artists to reclaim Dashanzhuang as their own – 'east village' in Beijing. (Wu 2014, 58)
>
> Today, the art academies in China function not only as the training grounds for *professional artists* but also as the source of employment and other benefits. Aside from salaries for artists and teachers, they provide the evaluation and qualification for various scholarships and official positions in the artworld. In a situation where national economic means are limited, the fact that the art academies exert direct or semi-direct control over the social and material apparatus for art becomes especially significant. For this reason, the *contemporary Chinese avant-garde art* movements are unable to escape the necessity of some kind of relationship with the official art academies, be it positive or negative. (Shih 1993, 29, italics added)

From what has been depicted by Wu and Shih, we can reanimate the *tizhi-wai* actors' professional practices and way of life in the east village. There, the term *tizhi-wai* appears to have less to do with the actors' formal affiliations and positions. It has more to do with a set of cultural and political orientations and practical rules that are defined in opposition to the *tizhi-nei* ones. In practice, it means also, artists cut off from the economic resources provided by the academy, give up the chance to realize the exchange value of artworks as salaries, publicly, credentials. They opt for creative production rather than reproducing artistic forms already prevalent in the academy. Nevertheless, the substantive cultural rules and economical means they deploy in creating new art are far from uniform. At this stage, their artistic production often does not generate *surplus value* in the economic sense, as we can infer from the lettering artist Rong Rong wrote to his sister in June 1994:

> As far as I know, none of us East Village artists has sold anything yet. Each person has his or her own way of making a living. Ma Liuming's elder brother sends him some money every month. Curse sells pirated VCDs. Zhang Huan sells his drawings (not artwork) to some company. I occasionally take jobs from the Worker's Daily or some commissioned photography projects, from which the income is just enough for me to buy films to produce my own photographs. (Oh, my elder sister and brother sent me some money again a couple of days ago. They keep doing so, which makes me feel ashamed.) (Wu 2014, 73).

When we see knowledge as *a productive means*, then we noticed that the knowledge mobilized by *tizhi-wai* artists during the 1980s and 1990s traveled from the

global artworld. A famous documentary entitled *From Jean-Paul Sartre to Teresa Teng* (2010) has represented a few established Cantonese contemporary artists' memory of their life in the 1980s. Artists have recalled their first experiences of encountering a plethora of intellectual and artistic legacies of previous centuries from the western discursive and imaginal world, including books, catalogs, and cassettes. For artist Chen Shaoxiong, he described the learning process as having a disordered but sumptuous western-style dinner, with many gangs of dishes randomly served. No one could get enough of them but still feel overwhelmed and confused (see ibid., 11:26-12:12). Later in the documentary, these actors who detached from *tizhi-nei* have explained how their artistic practices are inspired by the cultural forms learned from a different time and space – range from Impressionism and Expressionism to Cubism, Dada, and Pop art.

By identifying these demi-regularities, I would argue that the modes of art production associated with *tizhi-wai*, even when reading it formally, were in a *negating*, not a *dialectic* relation with the *tizhi-nei* ones. In the empirical domain, one can observe, some artists' artistic practices and the resultant artworks were *freed* from the ideological and stylistic control imposed by official institutions. They turned to undefined *tizhi-wai* cultural and political rules and *de*-affiliated from the cultural, political and economic capital associated with *tizhi-nei*. Instead, they engage with cultural rules, cultural and economic resources transmitted from multiple places and times. These new knowledge and resources are heterogeneous in form and substantially incoherent. One cannot find a unifying principle in *tizhi-wai* art practices. Thus, I would argue, the formal relation between *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* resembles that between the possessed and the dispossessed only *semantically*.

Furthermore, one can observe, the materialization of these artistic practices, based on trans-local knowledge and resource, is transient and unstable. The material form of *tizhi-wai* artworld – the social bodies and their associations, art artifacts, art spaces and so forth – is also transient and fragmented. My informants recall that apart from state-sponsored museums in the 1980s and 1990s, neither private run galleries nor alternative art spaces can run formally in Beijing. As a result, parks, diplomat's residencies, private apartments, and most of all, public space in the urban villages became emblematic sites for them to create and present their artworks. The artists who detached from *tizhi-nei* structures did not associate under unitary rules but the gradually emergent artistic tendency, political value, place-cultural identification with the central figures of a community. They migrate from small towns and cities to Beijing, Shanghai, Kunming, Guangzhou to associate with like-minded companions. The 'east village' represents a small group of very loosely organized artists who engage in *ad hoc* collective art production in Beijing Dashanzhuang village-in-the-city. These *ad hoc* art groups and the material, representational and lived spaces they produce in the east village, have lasted only for two years. Nevertheless, their ephemeral and fragmented existence is caused

by a 'law of accumulation.' After the incident of a police arrest in the east village, the working relationship these artists have formed relocated to the other sites in Beijing. Other well-known groups include Xiamen-dada group, the pond group, which have all dissolved in their original place a few years after their establishment (see, e.g., Lu 2015). However, many have survived and even expanded their community through relocating to new sites (e.g., Caochangdi village in Beijing).

Historical archives documenting artistic practices in the 1980s and 1990s show that the withdraw from social and economic *capital (funding, material facilities, space and social relations-guanxi etc.)* associated with the *tizhi-nei* mode of production was not part of the initial intention of all de-affiliating artists. The rules that cohere social actors detached from *tizhi-nei* were first and foremost artistic and political rules, hence give no structure to practices in the economic sense. Entering the second half of the 1980s, when the political climate was relatively loose, artists detached from *tizhi* made tentative trials to cooperate with *tizhi-nei* institutions through mediators who have inter-sectorial memberships, with the aim of accessing exhibition spaces and achieving wider cultural, economic exchange-value and acknowledgment. The most significant event demonstrating such attempts is the *1989 Modern Art Exhibition*. It took place at the National Museum of Art – the epitome of an official art institute[17] (Asia Art Archive n.d.). Furthermore, many informants recall that since the year 2000, many new forms of contemporary art institutions (commercial galleries, biennials, art fairs, a private museum, public art, independent curators) burgeon in Beijing. These institutions have introduced new normativity, propelled more intricate re-demarcations between the *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* means and modes of production. In the following, I redescribe the processes, practices, material distribution represented by the notion of *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* in the artworld after the *fin de* siecle.

Cultural and economic normative transformations were first put forward by trans-local actors, with contestant interests and dilemmas (see Tsao and Ames 2011, 1–28). Many artworks created by freelancing Chinese artists unaffiliated with *tizhi-nei* institutions were found featured in the most prestigious art institutions such as the Venice Biennale, the MOMA in New York, and the Pompidou Center in Paris. The demi-regularities are, such artworks have acquired recognition and market success abroad, due to the 'Chinese-ness' and 'Contemporaneity.' They are received by foreign audiences to represent 'Chinese-ness.' Their enrichment to the international contemporary art arena are thereby recognized. The circulation of these works and the actualization of their cultural and economic values were promoted by key cultural mediators, curators, and art critics working in- and outside China.

17 Despite its smooth opening, the exhibition ended on the same day due to the officials' reaction to a gunshot performance by two artists.

In the meantime, the domestic *tizhi-nei* art institutions, the official regulative bodies, and some private dealers and collectors attribute the success of these works with 'international artistic acclaim.' Thus, another demi-regularity can be identified, the artworks produced by some freelancing artists have realized their cultural value first outside China, and this cultural value gets transferred into economic values in the domestic and overseas market. Some art dealers, and sometimes the freelancing artists themselves, started to found gallery spaces and work with *tizhi-nei* institutions in mainland China, speculating further on the economic or cultural capital within China. Local slang describes this phenomenon as blossoming at home and obtaining fragrance outdoor[18]. It shows that the cross-cultural *misinterpretation* of the artist's cultural status and artistic value of the artwork is necessary to realize the artworks' trans-national circulation and monetization. These new actors and institutional agents operate with distinct norms depending on the contextual requirements. It seems that the modes of production in Beijing's artworld can no longer be formally categorized as either/or but as both *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai*.

5.3.2 Art district, biennial, and public art as secondary normative ensembles

In this section, I continue to illustrate how exactly the artistic production and space production in Beijing's artworld is intricately shaped by *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* ensembles of rules, knowledge and resources. I foreground the examinations of three normative spatial representations – the *art district*, *biennial*, and *public art* and begin with the notion of 'art district.' It is the most predominant term adopted by urban administrators to conceive and construct the artistic space in Chinese cities. Xiang, the vice president of the institute of the cultural industry at Peking University, has described the fluctuations of the global art market, in relation to that of the domestic art district in the article *from the Art District to the Cultural Industry Park:*

> The year 2005 marks the boom of Chinese contemporary art. The contemporary Chinese artwork embraced wide reception in the global art market – subsequently, the domestic art market boom. Just one or two years later, the 798-art district, Moganshan Street No.50 art district (M50) […], come into shape. However, the global economic crisis has hit the market badly. Many of the galleries and art institutions located in this art district shut down in batches. Apart from the most prominent and established ones like the 798 in Beijing and M50, the other art districts hit their lows. The second spring of the domestic art market resumes in 2010 […] (Xiang, 18th February 2013, translation added)

18 In Chinese: 墙内开花墙外香

In Xiang's narrative, the art district's life and death are intricately linked with global art market. It implies that the monetization of artworks depends more on the global than the domestic art market. Xiang fails to capture or has deliberately omitted, the clash and collision in transforming new forms of urban art spaces into 'art district,' most representatively in the case of 798 art district[19]. The studies from Currier (2008), Yin et al. (2015), McCarthy and Wang (2016), among others, have documented the process of its transformation from a cluster of grassroots initiated underground art space in a dilapidated industrial site to a compound, officially legitimated art district. Due to its urban location, the land and buildings' in 798 were originally owned by a state-owned company. As a grassroots art space agglomeration, it faced a top-down imposed demolition at first, and later an ameliorated version of commerce-driven restructuration and redevelopment from 2005 to 2008 (Kong 2009). After that, 798 art agglomerations were acknowledged as the core constituent of an enlisted cultural, industrial park, and one of the most well-branded and iconic tourism sites in Beijing city. When visiting the 798 'art district' in 2018, I found a mixture of commercial galleries, private museums, public sculptures crafted by domestic and international star artists, designer boutiques and flagship shops, fancy restaurant and cafes, art professionals, visiting tourists and even domestic and global political delegations. According to the authors cited above, the transformation of 798 from grassroots art site to art district is propelled by the municipal government's turn to neo-liberalist cultural policy. In other words, the urban sectorial administrators are driven by *expropriating* the 'surplus value (cultural and economic)' created by the established art community, including the rising rents. The process of *squeezing out* the emerging artists, account for just the unintended consequences. Taken as the main trader behind the transformation, these scholars also argue, the urban administrators' aim include promoting the city's international cultural image, the service and tourism industry.

To analyze the normative constitution of the notion *art district*, I find the narrative from the *Beijing Cultural and Creative Industry White Paper (2017)* tangent. It is issued by the State-owned Cultural Assets Supervision and Administration Office of the People's Government of Beijing (the office).

> To construct the capital city Beijing as the nation's cultural capital, the general administrative office of the municipal government of Beijing had released the guidelines for developing cultural and creative industries (C&C industry) in Beijing in 2016. According to this white paper, all the industries are categorized under encouraged, restricted, and forbidden. Among these, 44 C&C industry types fall under the encouraged industry, ranging from the cultural content production, me-

19 Despite the fact that I often visited the 798-art district during my field trips, I didn't select 798 as my case study, as its transformative trajectory was relatively well-researched.

> dia, service industry, cultural-technology hybrid industry, high-end creative service industry, and the public cultural industry that aim to satisfy the cultural and ideological demands of the Chinese citizens.
> The construction of functional zones shall be integrated into the development plans in the neighboring areas. By excavating local resources, renovating the urban neighborhood, and old industrial architectures, our goal is to propel the city's organic regeneration. *The 798 fashion and design functional zone* shall thrust some of the *art functions* to Caochangdi, the Dawangjing park, and the area neighboring Chinese Academy of Fine Art to facilitate the development of the art ecology in the neighboring area. (The office, 2018, 12, translation added)

The quotes above show that the 'art district' is primarily conceived as a 'functional zone' containing homogenous art and economic activities under the government's plan and regulation. Despite the lack of a substantive definition of creative cultural industry, we can infer, art-related practices are considered productive, profitable, amounting to a mobilizable visual resource (like design, fashion, and media). The creative cultural industries and the functional zones that contain these practices subject to regulation from the state-run Cultural Assets Supervision and Administration Office. This organization is responsible for making plans and rules to position Beijing city as the cultural capital city in both the national and international arena. The passages above also imply the planned strategies include introducing high-end manufacturing and service industries, cultural and industrial sectors endorsed by the state, and improving the image of the urban spaces. It justifies the logic of neo-liberalist development, the law of accumulation, espoused by the cited authors. However, the art entrepreneurs I have interviewed on the ground suggest otherwise. Their experiences allude to a disconnection with the neo-liberalist logic.

> It is not easy to run the gallery business formally in Beijing. As you might know, many global gallery's Beijing branch run on deficit every year. We need to pay too many taxes, like the added value tax at the sales price (not by our actual profits), around 17%. After that, at least 40% goes to the artists' commission fees. We need to pay for the artworks' transportation and insurance fee, the salary to our staff, the high rent here at 798 for our space, all from our pocket. On top of that, I need to pay 20% income tax for what I earn. You see, in the end, it leaves little to no space for making any profit. (Interview G2), translation added)
> The only beneficial policy that applies to a private museum like ours in Chaoyang jurisdiction is to rent the land at a reduced price, for the land is designated for constructing cultural space. That explains why, in China, many real estate developers build museums while having no long-term collections nor curatorial plan in mind. Those museums soon become empty shells when the sales of the real estate project close. […] Many so-called museums rent out their exhibition halls for event organizers to compensate for their maintenance costs… There are currently

> no tax deduction regimes that apply for a company that collects artwork and exhibits in its own museum. [My experiences suggest] The state's funding source is hardly accessible to us, and the application process is very bureaucratic […] So far, we mainly rely on our sponsors to support exhibition costs. Every year, we have different sponsors like auto companies, fashion brands, a jewelry company, etc. It is not sustainable. We need to strive very hard every year to get new sponsorships. As a private museum, we don't account for the so-called cultural industry under support. (Interview M1G, translation and ellipsis added)

These two informants are private art entrepreneurs who struggle with accumulating the economic capital necessary to sustain their operations despite the fact that their institutions serve the state-endorsed 'art function' in the state-endorsed 'art district.' They show neither consent, endorsement, nor approval to the imposed regulations but practical struggles to fulfill the imposed business and cultural goals. The imposed regulations, for them, are instruments of control, more constraining than enabling their business. It contradicts what Harvey has proposed, that the urban administrator and entrepreneurs are driven by, and beneficiaries of the law of accumulation and exploitation. Only when we look aside, or in light of Harvey's notions of 'contextual embedded elements' and 'path-dependency,' can we identify the heterogeneity of stake-holding actors and their modes of productions underlying 798's transformation. The 798-art district's new administrating body consisted of the old property owner, i.e., 798 factory owners and the landlord, and an urban investment and development cooperation founded by the Chaoyang district government. These two parties are driven by revenue from rentals, land leases and the value-added tax, respectively. On the abstract level, the municipal government is interested in the cultural capital 798 art district generates, but it does not reify into any concrete resources distributed to the individual cultural producers and private entrepreneurs. In particular, the former factory owners, are endorsed to expropriate the surplus value produced by the artists and entrepreneurs reified in the rental and management fees, although they have no actual engagement in producing art. As a third wheel, they are not immediately motivated to foster relational goods with the art entrepreneurs, i.e., normative solidarity, participation in management. As their regulatory status was granted by the municipality than the artists and entrepreneurs on the ground, both administrative parties are motivated to promote the *state*-endorsed image-making and the accumulation of economic capital.

The state, district administrators and the property owner are thereby driven by accumulating politically reconciled yet economically and culturally bifurcated capitals, in the forms of 'image of global capital city', 'land rents and value-added taxes', 'property rents and service fees.' The freelancing artists, while accumulating their cultural and economic capital through trading their artworks with art

institutions in 798, have no share in the value valorization of this art district. 'Relational bad' is then generated from such a bifurcation. My informants suggested that both the rising rent and a lost sense of *genius loci* make artist studios, and even for-profit art institutions left the 798-art district. The ambiguous and poly-semiotic meaning of 'art district' manifests as the various modes of artistic practices present daily in 798. They range from state propaganda performances to activists' screenings and performances. The demi-regularities are, disparate orders rather than a shared neoliberal doctrine, inform the social actors' actual accumulative practices on the ground, in close proximity. The 798-art district can thereby be hardly read as an 'abstract space' produced by a coherent structure for capital accumulation and valorization. It is instead a 'concrete mosaic' produced by the interactions of social actors who are endowed with hierarchical political agency, aiming for various (political, cultural, social or economic) forms of capital.

I move on to discuss another secondary normative representation of art-space, the 'art biennial,' drawing on the descriptions regarding the third Shanghai Biennial (2000) by an art historian called Wu Hong and several other artist authors. In the global contemporary art's context, the term biennial, describes an institutionalized exhibition form, referring to large international art exhibitions held every two years. Since the 1990s Biennales blossom all over the globe. These cultural events are often conceived by renowned international independent curators, who address critical local issues that have global repercussions through selected artworks from worldwide. I redescribe the demi-regularities from the event of the first Shanghai Biennial in 2000. It is seen as the first art biennial in mainland China featuring contemporary artworks. It was co-organized by curators from the state-run Shanghai art museum – an official *tizhi-nei* institution – and two independent international curators and unofficial artists – the *tizhi-wai* art parties (Lu 2015, 545). According to Wu, this state-run museum was motivated to have a genuine international biennial for the first time in Shanghai. He describes, "soon after its opening- and long before it completed its full course – people already envision it to be a milestone in history" (2001, 45).

The event consisted of two sections: one was the biennial exhibition, the other was the so-called satellite exhibitions organized by independent curators and non-governmental galleries. The following texts are impressions of the two sessions written retrospectively by Wu Hong and an artist named Zhang:

> A strong sense of a series of linked happenings was generated by the exhibition opening within two or three days of each other and by the sudden get-together of a large number of artists and critics. Not only did the museum invite many guests (including some of the international renown), each of the satellite shows also formed its own public. While the gap between official (*tizhi-nei*) and unofficial (*tizhi-wai*) activities remained, participants often intermingled and roamed to-

> gether from one show to another. (Wu 2001, 45, bracketed translations are added)
> Before the biennial opening, many participating foreign artists and critics, curators, and artists from China went to visit the shows of a few galleries. That was what is called the satellite shows. After making the tours for both shows, the Canadian artist Mr. Lin Yinmeng told me that "the works on the satellite shows are much more vital, but it is a pity that they are not included in the biennial show." I find Lin's perspective representative among the overseas visitor, as [I heard] people discussing them voluntarily in the workshop. The artists hold varied opinions with the biennial organization team. There is even a saying shared among art insiders living overseas, if you want to destroy a curator's reputation, just let him/her curate the biennial in Shanghai. (Zhang 2007, translation and italic added)

Both descriptions suggest, for the two authors, the *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* or official and unofficial, remain to be perceived as valid normative schemas to identify professional art practices, art groups and artifacts. However, in their descriptions, their relationality collapsed. In other words, they are no longer used refer to address two coherent modes of production, circulation and materialization. According to Wu and Zhang, the exhibition space was provided by the museum. The funding, the independent curators' curatorial practices, and publicity generated by the visitors and the media were shared in this compressed event in respect to both time and space. Despite of the separation as described by Wu, the satellite exhibitions were also integrated into the program. Wu described further how the concrete arrangements of certain objects in the biennial present paradox and that a satellite exhibition titled Fuck off curated by Ai Weiwei went surprisingly unchallenged by the authorities, and "uniformed voice cannot grasp this aspect" (2001, 46). It alludes again to the unclear rules underlying the conception and arrangements of the biennial. The *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* distinction remain although as a *perceptual* object, but less as *material* one. Without a thorough investigation into this event myself, I would not infer further how different modes of artistic production are played out in this event. These materials are enough for me to argue, in the actual domain of the Shanghai Biennial event, *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* rules are identifiable but get intermingled in materializing the biennial.

Concerning the third notion of 'public art,' I will analyze my own observations, recordings and interviews made in a themed event during one of my stays in Beijing. This event was organized to define public art in the context of planning Beijing's new sub-city center and set the rules for planning the public art projects in its territory. I will demonstrate the knowledge, materials and rules involved in producing 'public art.'

In October 2016, a two-day forum entitled Public Art and City Design International Summit took place in the Chinese Central Academy of Fine Art (CAFA). This summit is one of the many preparatory events for Beijing Tongzhou district's plan-

ning project, a 155 square km^2 area designated as the new sub-center of Beijing city where the municipal government would relocate to. The general secretary Mr. Xi Jinping announced the 'pursuit of art' as the leading principle of this city-making project[20]. This news was announced on 27th May 2016 by the central committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It explains why the term public art went viral suddenly, and the corresponding planning rules needed to be compiled urgently. As a result, the Tongzhou district administrations had signed a collaborative contract with the CAFA to do research on public art design guidelines in the Tongzhou sub-city center. The establishment of art and design bases is also promised to CAFA. CAFA has then established a new research center called the Visual Art Creative Centre in response and started recruiting researchers to undertake the commissioned projects. It seems, just like the first Shanghai Biennial in 2000, this summit is a one-of-a-kind milestone event. Prior to that, no art academy has ever been invited to participate in a planning project of such significance (sub-city center of the capital city), let alone of taking the leading role of organizing a conference across the field of art and urban planning.

In the program, the first day of the summit included keynote speeches around the public art project's legislation issues in urban space, best-practices from around the world, and regulatory rules needed in art-led urban regeneration practices. The second day was set for roundtable discussions addressing the potential public art themes to be integrated into the plan: *the Strategic Development of Tongzhou Sub-city Center of Beijing*. The summit's first day was open to the public. Anyone who is interested in the event can easily register beforehand through Wechat. However, the registration did not explicitly say that the second day's discussions were behind closed doors, open only to invited speakers and organizers.

On the first day, the summit took place in the academic lecture hall located on the CAFA art museum's ground floor, a venue that is commonly used to host high-level events. When I arrived in the morning, the hall was fully occupied. The invited speakers and guests and the invited journalists were arranged to sit in the four front rows. Slightly after 9 am, the summit began with the welcoming and opening speeches from the organizer – two chief administrators of CAFA, including Prof. Pan, the president of the CAFA, and Prof. Hang, the president of CAFA's school of design. There were no factual statements in these speeches, but the political significance of the Tongzhou project was readdressed. It is similarly stated in the invitation:

20 From 24th March 2016 to 13th September 2017, regarding the planning and designing Tongzhou as the sub-center of Beijing, China's general secretary Xi Jinping and the state council have repeated emphasized "having international vision", "pursuit the spirit of art", "showcasing the Chinese characteristics", "enhance of the charm of the city" **?**.

> The general secretary of the Communist Party of China, The chairman of PRC, has proposed the idea and demand of "constructing history and pursuing art" to plan, design and construct the sub-city center of Beijing. The government of Tongzhou district and CAFA hereby communicate and collaborate closely to explore a brand-new path of urban development, namely, the "art-oriented urban innovation. (sina.cn 2016, translation added)

Subsequently, two representatives on *the state ministry level*, the former director of the Ministry of Construction and the director of the evaluation of national new-type urbanization projects, have each given a 5-minute talk. The former, Mr. Song, stressed the significance of integrating public art projects into urban planning and design as a strategy of remedying cities' *poor artistic taste* and *quality of life*. The latter, Mr. Chen, contended that public art in the urban design should represent *shared collective memories*. "Following the one belt one road national strategy, the public art shall stress the *national identification*, achieving the 'international expression of Chinese culture.'" (source: private recordings). In this opening session, a strong nationalistic ethos and political value were proposed to be infused in public art production. The politicians left soon after their speech, as their official status and presence have already made all the points. Following this, Prof. Liang, the chief planner from the Chinese Academy of Urban Planning and Design – the leading state-run planning and design institute, which is commissioned for coordinating the planning of the sub-city center project – presented the topic titled *Art city: Tongzhou's vision*.

To illustrate what role public art could play in urban planning and design, Liang took "architecture, sculpture, street furniture, and graffiti" as examples to illustrate public art categories that he (in his role) would justify. He stated that public art could help "eliminate the banal functional-oriented development of urban space and help to cultivate the public aesthetic tastes." He then referred to the case of Wuzhen, a historical town appointed for hosting the International Internet Summit. Hangzhou is another best practice case, which has once hosted the G20 summit. They are both deemed to have illustrated the positive impacts public artworks can and ought to deliver: re-shaping the city's image and thereby stimulating capital accumulation for public and private bodies, reinvigorating urban economic development and construction. As the head of a professional planner's community and a quasi-cadre, Liang's functionalist and instrumental definition of public art was in line with that from the minister, Mr. Song. In his speech, Liang emphatically clarifies the political status of Tongzhou jurisdiction, "Beijing is the capital city. It is, without any doubt, our political center. The Tongzhou sub-city center's political position presupposes the non-capital functions it ought to accommodate. It could (only) be shaped like an art center, not a cultural center. A cultural center has a profound connotation" (private recording, 2016, translation added).

Liang's speech revealed a normative rule commonly followed by Chinese urban planners. That is, the city of Beijing has long been appointed with a threefold positionality and functionality. It is expected to be the *capital city,* the political and cultural center for the state; a municipality ruled by local legislators, under the direct administration of central government; and an *inhabitable city* for people living and working in Beijing. Urban planners recognize the city's first two positionalities and associated functions, administrations, and rules to be the source of many administrative conflicts and urban epidemics like congestion and urban sprawl. By planning and constructing a new sub-city center in an adjacent but different locale, the secondary positionality and functions could be channeled to Tongzhou District. In contrast, the current central Beijing area is planned to remain as the political and cultural center. The media reports have already revealed one core project in this plan – the relocation of the Beijing municipal government to the new sub-city center. Considering this, it becomes clear that the concept of 'public art' or the 'city of art' applied in this particular context is inherent to the top-down *designated political normative orders*. The meaning and form of *public art* are pre-tuned to reproduce the assigned political order.

The remaining speakers, categorized as domestic (including Hongkong and Macau) and international guests, were scheduled to give speeches in mixed orders. These speakers' views about public art and how to carry it out materially in Tongzhou's context ranging from the very progressive (public art as the activist movement) to the very conservative (public art as an enduring form of craftsmanship). There was a pro-business cultural minister who sees public art as a creative catalyst. There have also been art educators who endorse art as a means for public empowerment on stage. I could recognize some established *tizhi-wai* artists' faces, who hold very different political and cultural stances, on the audience side. My first impression was that it was a very open-minded platform that enabled different voices to be heard. However, a focus group for the planning project, i.e., the current residents of Tongzhou district and the relevant citizen communities whose personal space would be transformed, were missing on this occasion. As usual, the planning experts have conceived *volk* as only an imagined community, not the actual citizens who have values, desires, and actual needs in mind. I quote one more speech to demonstrate the discrepancy of views among the speakers.

> The context of this public art project is in Pindong, around an old house that partly survived from the famous flood in 2008 […]. When we conceptualize this project, we want the process to be instrumentalized for environmental education, instead of just a static art object finalized and delivered by us. We have deployed many water pipes as the carrier to tell the story we collect from survived experiencers. That is to say, the people who come here would get to know the past of the local place through this artwork. We want to address the interrelation between the

> artwork and the people, encourage critical reflection it might induce… (Ms Wu in private recording, 2016, translation added)

Gradually, towards the end of the day, the meaning of 'publicity' in 'public art' had been addressed by several speakers from entirely different angles. The ideas range from *public accessibility* in the physical sense – the artwork (like a sculpture) shall be situated in an outdoor space (like a plaza) accessible to the public – to *communal identity* in the symbolic sense – representing a collective-public identity. The discussions also covered who shall be involved in producing public art, defining and examining the existing cultural and material context, translating the production process into legislative forms to guarantee the equal distribution of art funds, and many other topics. However, while these discussions occurred, the room was only about half full.

On the second day, the roundtable discussions were held in a much smaller conference room for about only 40 people. On a Sunday morning, the entrance to the building where the roundtable took place was closed, so the participants were let in with security guards' permission. Around the table in the conference room sat the speakers from the first day, but the politicians were absent. I sat in the back row. The others who sat next to me were organizers and researchers affiliated with the CAFA, who would later participate in the project.

The discussions began with questions regarding significant contextual elements and then the preparation for a call for proposals of the concrete theme for the public art projects in Tongzhou sub-city center. The discussions were open and heated at first, and the participants raised the issues like preserving the artist village agglomerations in Tongzhou, the potentials of integrating existing art spaces into the plan, and the forms of folk culture in Tongzhou. There was no sign of consensus about whom the public art projects would be done for, nor about the form, about how public art projects could integrate into the planning process. Liang mostly remained in silence during the discussions. Only at the very end, he took over the floor and wrapped up the discussion with a short but compelling note. I cite his main arguments here:

> Without a doubt, the grand (Beijing-Hangzhou) canal symbolizes the collective memories of the (people of) Tongzhou and that of Beijing city. It shall be addressed as an essential cultural landmark […] planning is an integral science; everyone here should attend to one's own (designated) *role* instead of attempting to intervene that of the others. … The CAFA team was asked to kick-off, to help to invite the artists and experts to coordinate with us (the urban planners and Tongzhou administration), but not to lead the project. (private recording 2016, translation, ellipsis and italics added]

After Liang's speech – who spoke on behalf of the urban administrators who were absent – the rules for conception and division of labor emerged. It becomes clear who is in the deciding role. However, such an *order* was not achieved in a confrontational, rather a soft but coercive way. The moderating professor from CAFA, despite his overt skepticism towards the politically designated theme and the planner's conception of publicity, did not debate further. He attempted to resolve the tense atmosphere by alluding to his lack of expertise in planning instead. It is also clear that he was not in a position to argue against Liang, who represented the commissioner and examiner of the collaborative project. One could already infer from the order that emerged in this roundtable that the proposals for constructing public art and integrating a funding system for public art projects in every planning project would otherwise not be endorsed.

An event like this might be one of a kind, as rarely any city-making project shares the same level of political significance as that of the sub-city center of Beijing. The forum is partly performative. It is organized to signal an open discussion and debate between different actors, including the state representatives, the state-funded artists, the freelancing artist groups, local and international researchers and activists. Yet, this event has made the polysemy and vagueness of the notion of 'public art' and the participants' discrepant cultural, political and economic stakes apparent. This becomes especially lucid on the second day when diverse opinions about how art relates to the public in a city were raised. The focus was no longer on the factual nor conceptual debates but rather on the distribution of roles, knowledge, means, jurisdictions and liability. Nevertheless, this moment of establishing roles and order, divorcing values from practices, took place behind closed doors.

Later, I asked one informant from CAFA who is recruited into this project about his understanding of the collaboration and how he feels about *tizhi-wai* artists' role in this project. He stated that CAFA could get commissioned design projects, a new base in Tongzhou, and funding as students' scholarships. This is only possible through following the government's guidelines in this commissioned project. He sees the project as a positive opportunity for the *tizhi-wai* artist to collaborate with CAFA, to earn money and cultural capital through the practice of city-making. He also sees the imposed political rules as less of a problem, as "the political actors will embrace the new art forms/language as they are exempt from the text. An abstract artwork without text is mute. It can say everything or nothing to the public" (Interview CA1Z). This implies that actors would continue carrying out the mode of *tizhi-wai* art practices in negotiating the cultural meaning of public art. It is possible due to contemporary art's esoteric language.

In this state-commissioned collaborative project, the two sides are consolidated under the hierarchical political and economic order. The relations between politicians and artists cannot be translated as pure political-economic exploitation, solidarity, nor resistance. The *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* modes of artistic practices are

merging in accumulating political and economic capitals, leaving the production of cultural capital a separating domain. The boundary between the *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* structures is further muddled in the practical domain for the individuals engaging their livelihood and dream in Beijing's artworld. A separation remains, in the production of cultural value, in the forms of utopian dreams, when some actors manage to navigate specific rules and tacitly insist on reproducing their own forms of knowledge. *Tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* mark thus no longer a material divide between two social groups in producing art district, biennial, and public art, as the two parties share the principle of accumulating economic capital.

5.3.3 Independent art institutions and intersectoral social practices

According to my informants, alternative art institutions have emerged in cities like Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou since 2010. These institutions are generally referred as '*duli* (independent) art space' in the artworld. To understand the referents of this term, one can neither find a shared definition, a registered association, nor a regulatory body. In December 2015, I attended a forum entitled *How independent art spaces survive,* organized by a private museum, and took place in the Ullens Center for Contemporary Art in Beijing's 798 art district. Thirteen founders or directors of art institutions who identify with the quality of independence were invited to discuss their self-defining indicators while showcasing their daily operations and milestone projects. At the beginning of the forum, the curator, Mr. Feng proposed a tentative definition of independent art spaces as: "the art institutions that are independent of the art museums, galleries, art district, and other established art institutions. They are often self-organized, dynamic private organizations, playing an important role in balancing the overly marketized, institutionalized artworld mainstreams" (private recordings, 2015, translation added). Feng's deployment of the term is neither substantive nor normative. It is at most a descriptor of various types of art institutions alternative to those solely funded by the state and market.

The participants all come from reasonably young institutions. The disparate social-economic attributes of the alternative institutions are manifested, first of all, in their founders' biographies: their birthplaces range from metropolitan Shanghai to rural Guansu in China, from Hongkong special administrative region to Stuttgart in Germany. Their professional identities range from the curator, university professor, village leader, and freelancing artist at large. After listening to 13 presentations, the common ground I could discern was that they address an experimental tendency in their artistic and curatorial practices. Speaking of funding sources, some rely on meager funding from collaborating with commercial institutions (such as insurance companies and publishing houses), some are registered as the non-for-profit organization (NPO) and get supported by international art funds, some work with one-time fund directed by the local government funding

vehicle[21] (like the one who runs Beijing international design week). In contrast, others operate informally through private donations.

The forms of artistic programs presented are also very diverse: one art center based in Hong Kong specializes in archiving Chinese video art; an art NPO runs residency projects, accommodating European artists to practice in the Beijing hutong-courtyard; one village museum located in rural Gansu exhibits the local villagers' amateur artworks together with artworks from established artists following the *tizhi-nei* structures. Apart from attending to their self-representations, my visits to several independent art spaces in Beijing the days after the conference were also illuminating. Interestingly, none of the so-called independent spaces I have visited were contained in 'white cube' spaces, nor were they located in the state-reckoned 798 art district. They instead scatter in suburban villages, private apartments, and rental housings in downtown hutong allees. Lab 47, a one-room exhibition space dedicated mostly to young emerging artists' experimental projects, was founded by a Chinese anthropologist and a French ex-pat artist. An organization called the Institute for Provocation operates as a critical art think tank and organizes exhibition and residency programs funded by various European and Australian art foundations. I cannot abstract a unitary mode of material and value production to characterize these institutions' political, economic, and cultural features.

However, I venture to draw a demi-regularity that the artist-run space is the most common form of 'independent art space' operating in Beijing. They are financially sponsored, managed, and operated by practicing artists. Interestingly, the boom of the so-called independent art scene correlated with the revival of commercial galleries after the economic crisis around 2010. When we read from a lens of capital circulation, the substantive difference between the independent art institutions and those already established becomes clear. This correlation is then explainable. I take the case of an artist-run organization called *On Space* to illustrate this. On space is operated by five young artists in a townhouse apartment located in Yanjiao, some 35 km away from the city center. Lian is one of the founders of this organization who also works as an independent artist. He is young (born in 1988) and graduated from one renowned art department in Beijing. Lian's understanding of the independent art institution is as follows:

> I see the independent art organization's role in the current moment to be no longer an *alternative* to the gallery or museum. It is rather an *extension* to them. To be honest, some of the works exhibited in our space could also be exhibited in a gallery. Their artistic language and concept suit there too. The extent of detail is the same. However, as artists, we find it necessary to have this space to reflect

21 The local government funding vehicle (LGFV) is the special government endorsed company who financialize the urban development or re-development projects.

> on our status as artists, to experiment, and to explore the margins of what can still be defined as artwork and artists. The feedback we received from our peers here would also help us to think about that. (Private recording, 2015, italics and translation added)

In Lian's description of their past projects, the experimental approaches manifested in, for example, the team spending on average two months to conceive and implement an exhibition plan. Such a timetable is unimaginable under the rules of commercial galleries. "The gallery does not do curation, and their exhibitions follow very fixed schedules. They just lay out the artworks and put the most demanded work in the most pronounced spot" (Interview IA1L). Lian also mentioned that the existing rules of the gallery would not support the artists to work on or regularly revisit the same theme continuously. It is also hardly possible to persuade a commercial institution to employ an open-air setting for exhibiting artworks. To illustrate this, Lian recalls an exhibition project they once curated in a natural environment called Chaobai river. This river marks the physical boundary between Beijing municipality and Hebei province's jurisdiction, two adjacent but administratively and economically polarized areas. They have curated several art projects around this river, in different seasons and with different groups of artists. Their goal was to explore the social-ecological, cultural and environmental affordance of the river in-depth, to continuously explore the new forms of art this context could trigger. At this point, we can see how these self-identified independent art institutions set themselves apart from the modes of practice and value production common to galleries and museums.

It is not disputed that the independent art institutions rely on sustenance resources, which are usually not *immediately* transferred from existing art institutions, marketized or state-funded ones. Their actual funding often comes indirectly from the *surplus-value* artists gain from the market or the state. In Lian and partners' art space, they mobilize their individual gains obtained from selling artworks in the gallery for operating the art space. After graduating from top art schools, these artists already made a name in the artworld, and achieved a good selling record, despite their young age. Lian was already collaborating with two galleries and had exhibited in one private museum by the time I met him.

Such a crowdfunding approach was commonly employed by the artist-run art spaces I have visited. Their founders sustain the space financially by redistributing personal income gained from gallery commission or other lucrative jobs such as collaborations with fashion brands to their own art space. Very often, rent constitutes the main cost, if not the sole expenses, as they do not calculate their own administrative service or physical labor as costs. It also means the artists who want to respond to their curatorial call shall pay for their own material expenses and labor. I would thereby argue that the means of production (money, knowledge, and cultural

recognition) these self-identified independent art places rely on are de facto surplus-value individuals gain in the *tizhi-nei* and commercial mode of practices collaborating with private galleries and state-funded museums. Through alternative art practices, they further produce the immaterial cultural 'use-value' recognized by share-minded art community members. These individuals play cross-sectorial roles, accumulate economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital through enacting various forms of practice in line with distinct contextual rules. The alternative mode of artistic practice materializes into experimental art artifacts, like-minded social groups and physical exhibition rooms.

In another case, the founders of the IAPs alluded to me that artist can generate one particular form of *surplus-value* while collaborating with independent art space. Cultural and social capital as such, are recognized with distinct *exchange value* hence *circularity*. One artist explains that, in the Chinese artworld, even the very established artists favor collaborating with artist-run off-spaces regardless of the zero to negative economic payback. The value generated lies in individual artistic freedom and exchange value in the forms of constructive peer reviews and media publicity. The independent institutions draw attention from art critics and journalists due to their perceived marginal, alternative status. One informant clarifies that "art media attends more to the underdog. The experimental spirit of off-space is a relatively scarce asset, which worth their attention already" (interview CE1W-1, LA1C). As a result, the exhibitions there get portrayed more in written reports, criticisms, catalogs, and so on.

Drawing on the short developmental history of contemporary art in China, I find that Lian and his friends' strategies and tactics in navigating the artworld resonate with many of their predecessors. In his book, Wu (2000) depicted how an artist called Zhang Dali, on the one hand, lives as an artist-activist, known for his graphite works on the demolition sites of Beijing, while on the other, sells his photography and oil painting in distinguished art fairs. The prevalence of such *intersectoral* practices imposes again challenges to a dualistic or triadic understanding of the artistic production field among the so-called independent, commercial and official. A dialectic rationale of capital accumulation and exploitation directed to the possessed actors and institutions as coherent parts, fails to explain the dynamic events nor the resultant material layout depicted in this section. However, the epistemic forms of use-value, exchange-value, material and immaterial means of production, capital circulation and accumulation, when applied to individuals, are helpful to 'explain' the intricate differentiations and entanglements in the transformation of the artworld.

5.3.4 Summary

In this section, I have adopted the political economy lens to read the norm-related events in the artworld, around two primary (*tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai*) and a few secondary normative ensembles (the independent art, public art, commercial art, art district, biennial). This means, while I sample and organize the empirical and literature materials, I have tentatively assumed a dialectical relation between two modes of space production, each associate social actor possessing particular means of production and knowledge. I found that before 2000, the *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* division can be well-read as a social division of class, knowledge, and material. However, the presumption of dialectic relationality – i.e., the former accumulates by taking over the latter's surplus-value – is not congruent with the evidence found. The social positions categorized under *tizhi-wai* are plural and fluid. This notion thus represents the sum of a plurality of trans-local actors associated with heterogenous means of production. The knowledge (academic and commercial) and value (economic and cultural) production and circulation in the normative field of *tizhi-wai*, are embedded firstly in the global contemporary artworld and then the domestic one.

The modes of space production represented by the Shanghai Biennial 2000, the 798-art district, the public art projects in Tongzhou, are the prototypical for big cities in China after 2000. In my reading of the situated events associated with representations of the 'art district,' 'art biennial' and 'public art,' I can identify a plurality of productive forces, yet an underlying political order structuring the distributing of state-assigned material and immaterial resources (land, material space, credentials, legal legitimations and so on). I would thereby not relate the corresponding processes of space production to a sort of "post-modern diversity, freedom, fragmentation or eclecticism" (Stallabrass 2006, 112). The actors' modes of production are entangled in the material and symbolic space they produce. To reduce their layered subjectivities (especially artistic orientation) to their class status obstructs the understanding of the mosaic form of art spaces being produced.

Finally, alternative art spaces are produced by social actors who play inter-sectorial roles in the existing differentiated fields of production. They produce and accumulate cultural, economic and political capital by appropriating contextual rules across these systems. They then redistribute these resources into materializing alternative artistic imaginaries and order. The *tizhi-nei*, *tizhi-wai* or the possessed and disposed grammar, have lost the holistic, mutually invocating character of syntax. Furthermore, only if one read the meaning of formal relationalities contextually could the observable social-spatial agglomeration and fragmentation in Beijing's contemporary artworld be explained.

5.4 Artworld as a space of everyday practices

As previously mentioned, the contemporary art scenes are relatively new to Chinese urban spaces. Within a brief development period, normativities in the artworld are far from coherent, making a straightforward structural perspective problematic. In this section, I employ an actor-centered perspective to read the artworld on the level of everyday practices. To be more specific, I adopt the analytical framework from Martina Löw as an 'initial theory' in redescribing my empirical materials. As discussed in chapter two, Löw and Thrift's theories have both addressed *practice* as the central analytical dimension, but their conceptions are built on different ontological footings. Epistemologically, both scholars have distinguished the 'pre-reflective-perceptual' and 'reflective-cognitive' aspects of the practices. Concerning primarily the pre-reflective practice, Löw deems the social actors' internalized social structure (the 'habitus') to be conducive to the space of the everyday. Here, I will employ her analytical concepts such as *synthesis*, *spacing*, *institutionalization,* and *atmosphere* to redescribe the space constituting processes related to a few relatively consolidated spatial forms, i.e., the 'artwork,' 'loft,' 'art village' and 'exhibition.'

I single out 'art-making,' 'studio-ing,' and 'exhibiting' as patterned events shared by the contemporary artists. I examine the forms of the event constituting everyday practices, socialization in the family and professional fields and the visible forms of material arrangement (placement), such as lofts, studio agglomerations in villages-in-the-city, and exhibition spaces in Beijing's artworld.

5.4.1 Becoming artists: four biographical narratives

To begin with, I redescribe the typical ways in which four contemporary artists *socialize* in family and the professional fields, develop *certain perceptual patterns(synthesis)* conducive to the everyday routinary practices. As a qualitative attribute, no public survey data are available to derive perceptions forms. Hence, I draw on the life stories I gathered from four artist interviewees, whose biographies are emblematic and representative of those I met in the field. They told me about how they carry out artistic practices and professional engagements in the artworld, about significant past experiences that matter to them, and how such experiences affect their daily life. The narratives are organized in roughly chronological order.

Li (Interview AFA1L, translation added) is both artist and co-founder of an artist-run art archive space, whose current life and work oscillate between Beijing and Guangzhou. Li was born in 1981 in Guangzhou city to a scholarly family. Her father is a traditional ink paint (*shuimo hua*[22]) artist, a minor celebrity in the local painters' circle, while her mother is a local high school teacher. Li studied painting

22 Shuimo-hua (水墨画).

with her father since her childhood and subsequently attended the high school affiliated with the fine art school, where her father teaches. The childhood experience brought her life close to art. However, instead of pursuing straightforwardly in art, she decided to study design in the U.S., a decision realized with the emotional and financial support from her parents. She turned to art again later by pursuing an MFA in experimental art at another graduate school in the U.S.

"I'm not cultivated as an artist by my family as others think," Li explains, "despite my father and some relatives being artists, they are traditional artists. I was not sure if I wanted to become an artist like that, so I studied design instead of art for my bachelor's degree." Li carries on explaining that it was an accident that contemporary artworks entered her horizon and changed her life. "I was so much impressed by video art presented in one art center. So, the video became the medium I work with ever since."

Economically, Li appears to be in a good position as a young artist. She has a fairly spacious apartment/studio within walking distance to the 798-art district. Her work had already been shown at distinguished short film festivals and in several not-for-profit art centers in Europe and the U.S. back in school time. After graduation, Li decided to return to Guangzhou city to become an artist, as "the life there appears more intriguing and offers different conditions in which I can explore my relationship with society." In China, her new works featuring the resistant practices of women in their daily life are exhibited in various institutions, ranging from off-spaces and galleries to biennials. Her participation was achieved mainly through invitations from "the friends she has gotten to know over the years." In 2010, Li moved to Beijing, both due to an invitation to teach a course at a local art academy and her intention to anchor herself in the more dynamic artworld there.

Besides being an artist, Li and two other artists have also co-founded an art NPO since 2012, which archives contemporary video artworks from Chinese artists, with branches in Beijing and Guangzhou. It was intrigued by an offer from a real estate developer acquaintance, who provide them a room free of charge for some years. This makes "try something out physically" possible. After having got a room, "we figured out that we could make it into a video art archive space." The archiving protocol was gradually developed by experimenting with artworks from a small circle of artist friends. Their practical approach is "learning by doing." The organization has already become a credible and irreplaceable art institution in the field of video art in China.

Yan (Interview IA3Y-1, IA3Y-2, translation added) is an artist who has lived and worked in Beijing since 2014. Born in a third-tier city in south-west China in 1979, Yan describes her parents as someone who "have zero ideas about art, let alone contemporary art." Yan got her first university degree in English literature in Beijing. Like many high school graduates who do not choose their practical major on their

own, Yan pursued her own dream after fulfilling the expectation of her parents – she went to Canada and got her second B.A. in Fine Art. Later, she got admitted to a distinguished graduate school in the U.S and achieved her MFA degree. Her works have been exhibited in group or solo exhibitions in galleries in Canada, Australia, and China. I got to know Yan as she is socially very active and closely connected to a group of overseas returnee artists in Beijing.

Though the trust mediated by some mutual friends, Yan alluded to another important private reason that compelled her to settle her life and work back in Beijing – the divorce with her then Canadian husband. The loss of an emotional foothold in Canada also made dwelling in China more appealing. Back in Beijing, she quickly managed to settle in her studio and rebuild her private family and friend circles in Heiqiao village, one of the art villages close to 798. She met her now-boyfriend in Beijing, who is both an art critic and an artist-activist.

Yan's daily schedule became much busier in China. Through interviews and following her social media account, her presence in residency, exhibitions, and artist talks in different cities and countries can be noticed. As a result, her paintings have been exhibited in small artist-run spaces, as well as in grand art fairs like the Shanghai biennial. Apart from engaging with painting, she has also engaged in feminist discussions, initiated female impact-journalist workshops in off-spaces and private museums. On the side, she also contributes art reviews to different media platforms.

Zeng (Interview IA4H-1, IA4H-2, translation added) was born in 1973, in a small village in a comparatively deprived western province of China. Both of his parents are farmers. A curator friend introduced Zeng to me as a representative figure of the Chinese artworld's independent spirit. At the age of 16, Zeng had enrolled in a school for pedagogy and became a middle school teacher when he turned 20, a privileged and decent job in the eyes of his parents and peers. A few years later, he quit his job and started preparing for the college entrance exam as an older student. Zeng failed the exam for the first time, but after trying again in the subsequent year, he got admitted into the ink painting department at the Xi'an Academy of Art. One year after graduation, He came to Beijing to continue antistatic practices, as "Xi'an is a provincial place, with too few like-minded people around." Zeng explained, "I was hesitant to quit my job at first, but after the first failure, I realized that I have to cut off all the safety net that kept me there. After a year in the art academy, I found that very few of my professors understand art. So, I started to explore my own way again."

Soon after Zeng's relocation, he achieved some initial success in Beijing's artworld. His painting works were exhibited in solo shows in two established galleries in Beijing, although he attributes this to external reasons: "the art market was thriving in Beijing back then, lots of opportunities." Later, instead of deploying ink and water (his major in school), Zeng favored performance as his medium of artistic

expression. It is not an immediately collectible or valorizable art form, if at all, as it can be exhibited only following its creation, in forms of photography and video documentation. Subsequently, Zeng has co-founded an artist-curatorial group in Beijing with two other well-known art peers from Xi'an. The group was united by a strong identification with classical Confucianist moral values, addressing artists' social responsibility for generalizing public good. They have curated a series of performances in non-gallery spaces, like relics in a demolition site or discarded building. While realizing value-charged artistic projects and having no paid bills, Zheng managed to have basic financial security through working as a part-time art editor in a journal for three years.

By the time I interviewed him in 2016, Zeng lives and works in Heiqiao village, getting by his everyday life with "not too little, not too many" art commissions. The art group was disassembled, as his close art partners have embarked on a normal life back home, out of family or health concerns. The paper-based journal has been bankrupted for a while, and the heyday of galleries has also faded. Among all these changes, he admitted a disengagement with social affairs but tried to pursue his individual moral and aesthetic potential to the full through practicing art.

I met *Wu* (Interview PCA2W, translation added) while interning in a gallery where he is signed for long-term collaboration. Wu is a local Beijinger born in the early 1980s. He studied advertisement for his bachelor's degree and then switched to a distinguished art school in Beijing for graduate study, under the supervision of a first-generation experimental art professor. Wu also become one of the first academy-trained experimental art professors in the academy, as the department was set up just one year after he enrolled in 2004. Wu follows his supervisors' genre and deploying traditional Chinese folk-art language in his conceptual art.

When I met him, as a 40-year-old artist, Wu is already an associate professor and a researcher in Traditional Vernacular Art Research and Conservation Center – a state-funded research institute under the national cultural ministry. Due to his footholds in both *tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai* institutions, Wu's works have been widely exhibited in the state museum system, galleries, domestic and international art fairs, and biennials.

To summarize, these four artists grew up in post-reform China but from very different social-economic family and regional backgrounds. Professionally speaking, they have all been trained formally in the art academy system in Beijing or elsewhere. However, their professional artistic practices have not necessarily been shaped by how they are trained in the university systems. Three of them are not Beijinger by birth but moved there deliberately to integrate into the local artworld and pursue a career as a contemporary artist.

Judging by the professional credibility they have achieved, indisputably, they have '*made*' it in the Chinese artworld. They represent the very active actors in Beijing's artworld: having substantial exhibition records, broad collaborations with art

institutions ranging from off-space to commercial galleries to state-owned museums and academies, in and outside China. One can easily find two to three full webpages of articles reviewing their works and other publications. The steps they follow to become an artist in Beijing appear vastly different from those in western cities. In Paris, for instance, artists are bound to climb up highly hierarchical, institutionalized legitimating organs, from local and central institutions to prominent gallery exhibitions (Hanquinet 2016, 202–3). Thornton has described a similar pattern in New York City:

Since the 1960s, MFA degrees have become the first legitimator in an artist's career, followed by awards and residencies, representation by a primary dealer, reviews and features in art magazines, inclusion in prestigious private collections, museum validation in the form of solo or group shows, international exposure at well-attended biennials, and the appreciation signaled by strong resale interest at auction. More specifically, MFA degrees from some art schools have become passports of sorts. (Thornton 2012, 45–46)

What Hanquinet and Thornton have both pointed out is that to be an artist requires one to climb a staircase set by a wide range of legislators, i.e., the art school, dealing agency, art critics, collecting clients, and so forth. The credentials that artists acquire from these legislators would then positively correlate with their perceived success in the artworld.

Despite my representation of the seemingly distinct life and career trajectories of Li, Yan, Zeng, and Wu, they all seem to build their career following 'chaotic' rules. In other words, their professional career path is *non-linear*, not tied to a single or fixed set of professional posts and credentials. In addition to an artist, one can use lots of names to introduce them, such as curator/editor/critic/lecturer/researcher, and so on. By playing in different games situated in different contexts simultaneously, they manage to achieve various goals in the relational matrix. To draw a connection with our discussions in the last section, these actors connect and work actively with multiple types of rules and resources (*tizhi-nei* and *tizhi-wai*, public and private, domestic and foreign), more or less at the same time. A young curator, Mr. Song, has once made an illuminating comment: "I actually know no contemporary artist graduates from CAFA's experimental art program. Instead, classical programs such as oil painting and sculpture have brought out quite a lot of talented artists" (Interview EAA1S-1). He also implies that the graduates who follow a linear path often fail to survive in the artworld. The *non-linearity*, I would argue, has shaped the art professionals' perception and practices navigating the artworld in Beijing.

In the following, I focus on re-describing the events of *making art*, *dwelling*, and *exhibiting* through Löw's framework. On the level of practice, I examine what *recursive perceptions* and *everyday practice* have led the dislocated life trajectories to be in the commonplace. I will also examine how they relate to constituting the consol-

idated parts in Beijing's artworld: the artwork, loft studio, and exhibition. At the end of this section, I *assess* if and when the causal agent postulated by Löw, the principle of repetitive social doing, is efficacious.

5.4.2 The practice of making art and spacing the artworks

The urge to live differently

The four listed artists, as well as many of my interviewees, have alluded to a lack of or detachment of social rules they acquired in the family/school environment and the rules they follow as life/professional orientation. This is especially salient in Yan and Zeng's cases. Yan's parents are in their late 60s, living in her hometown – a third-tier city 2000 km away from Beijing and far away from Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Yunnan. In other words, they are far away from all the cities in which contemporary art scenes flourish in China. Yan mentioned that even though her father enjoyed classic ink-and-water landscape paintings when she was a kid, what her parents want the most is for her to study and have a decent and secure job. She further stated that "my parents understand (visual) art merely in terms of painting or drawing. They understand art as one's skill to depict something on paper realistically and beautifully." (Interview IA3Y-2). When I interviewed her, as a 39-year-old female artist, she lives with her boyfriend, also an art-insider, in their shared village studio. This way of life is clearly not fulfilling her parents' expectations.

> When I went abroad to study art, they expected me to be a university lecturer or high school teacher after graduation. Studying abroad is a good thing in their eyes, but they did not understand that art can also be a good career until two years ago […] What triggered the change in their mind was when I took them around the finest galleries in 798, you know, like Pace Beijing and Beijing Commute. They finally accepted that an artist could be a job that offers decent social and economic status. […] Still, I cannot say that I am fully economically independent, and my way of life is still and always is a concern for them. (Interview, IA3Y-2, translations and ellipsis added)

In Zeng's case, his motivation for being an artist was first to break away from the 'meaningless' way of life lived by his parents and to escape the destiny of 'a small-town man':

> Whenever I thought about the industriousness of my parents and the repetitive and bare nature of their lives, I feel like, they have failed their lives. The boredom I experienced while teaching in local high school drove me to explore a bigger world. I always liked literature, history, and especially art. Also (to change my life), the art exam was the easiest one to pass compared to other subjects. (Interview, IA4H-1, translations and ellipses added)

In the 'entrenched perceptions' of Yan and Zeng, to do art is challenging. It involves a lot more uncertainty than a commonly defined 'normal life' – to get a regular and stable job after a university degree. It also involves a lot more excitement. In fact, 'still and repetitiveness' are very distant words to describe their way of life as freelancing artists. Their daily lives involve frequent traveling from city to city for residencies, exhibitions, artist talks, and workshops. When he is alone in the studio, Zeng suggests that he is busy practicing calligraphy, reading, watching football, conceptualizing his performance artworks, composing poems, posting and interacting with others on social media. In between our interviews, he got a call from a curator from Nanjing, who invited him to participate in a group exhibition in the following month. Yet, in the later interviews, Zeng admitted that he had changed his mind about the value of banal and repetitive lifestyles. "When my father died three years ago, I lived at home (in the village) for a long while, carrying out life as he did. I felt enlightened while working in the field. I become *conscious* and yet accepted life's meaninglessness" (Interview, IA4H-2, translation added). Later, he also transforms this *highly reflective* experience into a piece of artwork.

In both cases, the artists' life orientations have *deviated* from the meaning system lived by their parents. This is more so in Zeng's case, who has ruminated what he *ought to* pursue in contrast with what is taken-for-granted in a small town. His *conscious* reflections and *physical desire* (repellent emotion, in this case) against his parents' lifestyle, without a doubt, constitutes the "necessity of changes" (Löw 2016 [2001], 156). In less intensive forms, many informants often lamented or teased about their parents' and friends' bizarre imaginations about their professions, with terms such as 'bling-bling designer,' 'craftsman' or 'pure timewaster.'

For Li, her choice of art as a profession might seem to be a product of her primary socialization. Her father is, after all, a well-known traditional Chinese painter who also supported her to attend art high school from the beginning. Yet, to me, her rebellion is just of a more nuanced kind. Li mentioned that she did not take the fine art program for her Bachelor's major due to skepticism to arise from observing her father and relatives' practices. She wondered whether art is worth a lifetime dedication. Her parents' understanding of art as a career, and their support of her own choice, might be read as an indirect or neutral influence. As Li suggested, she could communicate with her father about art on some particular dimension, such as what they find innovative. However, she also felt: "my father cannot understand the media that I am using. He also finds some of the form s or theme of my work not artistic at all" (Interview AFA1L).

Instead of linking one's disposition, artistic tendency, and life orientation with views cultivated in their familial and educational milieu, my informants present more differentiation and distancing between them. Often, the well-reflected gaps, misunderstandings and the withdrawal from their parents' generations entrenched perceptual patterns that are taken as the guiding principles for their life orienta-

tions and artistic practices. This coincides with what Löw termed as a 'deviation' – the actors' practical tendency in abandoning old habits and in favor of new routines. The space constituted in such processes is termed as *counterculture space* (ibid., 156).

However, I would not claim such forms of perception and practices to be immanently consolidated nor enduring. As alluded by my respondents, their peers and friends tend to fall back to the regular track of life when they move back to their hometowns. From my interviews, other demi-regularities could be identified, including the *inter-personal relationality* (e.g., live among like-minded people) and *external material affordances* (e.g., dwelling in the art village) as the necessary conditions for sustaining the practices constituting countercultural space. In sum, a social-spatial condition that ensures an abstention from old habits allows contemplative practices and assigns resources to actualize alternative desires is constructive for achieving the change and conducive to constitute countercultural space.

Incoherent indoctrinations in art schools

I now move on to examine if and how art school educations shape artists' forms of perceptions and artistic practices. When I had conducted my field trip, the certification of art schools played the role of a legislator of the entrance to the artworld. To claim this, I have to admit a potential bias in my sampling, as the artists who agreed to talk to me were mostly under 40 years old. They belong to a generation with (relatively) easy access to art schools compared to their predecessors and successors[23]. According to a statistical report carried out by artron.net in the year 2013, with 80 active post-1975 born artists, 85% of them graduate from one of the ten listed art academies in China. 30% graduate from CAFA, while the other 55% graduate from domestic *shifan*[24] (general) universities or overseas universities (Artron.net 2013). Among my informants, the relatively older ones have sometimes studied in similar disciplines like design or architecture and later switched to an art major through a master's degree in fine art or film. The younger ones tended to study art programs all the way through. Yet, in the professional field of art, art school credentials are not functionally specific.

As previously stated, Wu switched from an advertising to a fine art program and now teaches in the experimental art department despite his artistic language

23 The art school in China resume recruitment since 1978. Experimental art and the similar programs (media art, experimental art, inter-media art, and so on) are adopted as pedagogical program in Chinese universities since early 2000s. The legitimation process take place later. The experimental art became an entry category in the National Fine Art Exhibition in 2014, and designated as a new discipline by the Education Ministry (see Yan 2014).

24 Shi-fan (师范)

and inspirations coming primarily from ancient vernacular Chinese myths. Wu justifies his hybrid approach by referring to the undifferentiated subject formations in the artworld and the corresponding lacuna in institutional settings: "experimental art is new in China and very open to all artistic languages, more and more so." (Interview PCA2W) He was recruited in "a freshly established experimental art department where no rules are set." Wu perceives folk art symbols, materials, and language justified in the realm of contemporary art, as "it is the most effective language to express my ideas." (ibid.).

In terms of changing artistic orientation, Zeng is another extreme. He was trained for traditional Chinese painting and calligraphy but has employed mainly performance, video, and poetry as his professional media. He still practices calligraphy to maintain his overall wellbeing (*qi*), and paints with water and ink from time to time, simply because "it sells better than conceptual art forms like video and installations." This alludes to the fact that, very often, the knowledge and techniques artists acquire from the public education system is not fully embodied or incorporated into their practice of making artworks, as they may be incompatible with the market preferences or with the rules artists set for themselves. In the latter cases, artists develop a keen sense (perceptions) of telling art from non-art, according to their inner-most preferences.

Some university students studying in art academies have also offered illuminating insights about how art is learned and understood under the university's normative rules. A difference is first drawn between art students[25] and normal students[26] before entering the art schools. To be admitted into an art academy, a high school student needs to pass both general college entrance exams[27] and a test for artistic techniques and specialized knowledge requested by art schools. Their performance in the general tests is merely a partial indicator, meaning that they can be admitted to a university with low scores in scientific subjects. The fine art program's special tests are heavily technique-oriented and dogmatic, including subjects like color and pencil sketches; the test for traditional Chinese art programs includes water and ink painting on bird and flower themes. For many young students I knew, art school might not be their ideal choice but remains a lower hanging fruit amidst the fierce competition in the regular exam subjects. An art degree maintains its exchange value as a bachelor's degree, a watershed between white-collar and blue-collar positions in the job market. These students are most likely not going to be a professional artist after graduation.

25 Yi Kaosheng (艺考生).

26 Wenke-sheng/Like-sheng (文科生/理科生). Their examined scientific subjects consist of social and natural scientific knowledge.

27 Gaokao (高考).

Those admitted to art schools learn tangible art-making techniques more than critical thinking skills. In addition, school programs do not guarantee a contextualized learning. Taking the most prestigious art school, CAFA, as an example, the non-applied art programs are categorized under two parallel divisions: one focuses on traditional Chinese art subjects, like ink painting, calligraphy, folk art, ceramics, jade, furniture, bronzes, and so on, while the other includes oil painting, printmaking, sculpture, mural painting, and experimental art. What is worth noticing is the separation between traditional Chinese, modern, and contemporary subjects and a juxtaposition between experimental art and other programs. As mentioned, the contemporary and experimental art discipline is new to Chinese universities and remains marginal. Only since 2000 have experimental subjects been integrated into an official program and freelancing artists[28] invited to teach. These experimental art courses remain to be a result of individual efforts than institutionalized reforms. Students from CAFA reflected that the institute's actual teachings are not as clear-cut as the names suggest. They are organized by studios instead of by departments, where artistic tendencies and evaluation standards are up to the professor in charge (Interview SCA1L). The relation between the decentralized training system and the individual developments is just as Tan, the vice president of CAFA commented that "in each art school, it was like a small sparkle of fire lighted by one individual teacher. When this individual is powerful enough, then it may grow to a studio and a department" (Liu 2015).

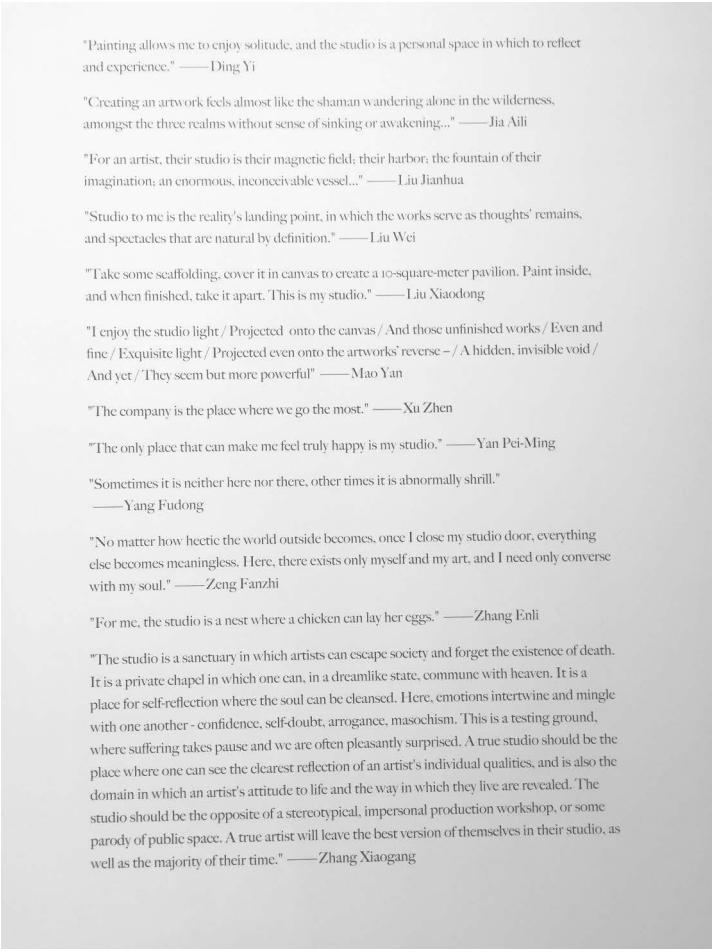
Apart from their critical reflections on educational experiences, I am more surprised and impressed by the artists' *reflective qualities*, directed particularly to challenge the existing rules and norms in art practices. The artists I have interviewed (those who survived a few years in the artworld after graduation) demonstrated a profound knowledge of language, techniques, concepts, configurations, and materials applied to works in the artworld. They inform themselves about their peers' work, resorting to the internet (via VPN) if they are too remote. I would argue, in their perceptions, artwork is permanently *differentiated* in relation to those that appear in established biennials, art fairs, auctions, and even the artists' own works. Even art critics like to draw on existing ordering principles in art history like Impressionism or Dadaism to position someone's new work, the artists themselves are predetermined to 'make a difference.' They may appropriate the same techniques and use similar materials in their artistic creations as their counterparts in the other parts of the world. They hold dear to the idea that a real artwork has to be unique. I would thereby argue, unrelated to the form of training one gets, a high sense of reflectivity is the defining feature of true artistic practice.

28 According to Peng (2011), The recruited individuals under the spotlight are those like Lv Shengzhong, Qiu Zhijie, Feng Feng, and Zhang Peili, who have established an international profile and have managed to hold a career both inside and outside the*tizhi*.

Overall, with regard to artistic practice and professional orientation, I did not find a practical connection between my informants' family, school indoctrination, and their current forms of perception and practices on a general level. Artwork is an artifact result from routinary artistic practices, yet it cannot be explained as an institutionalized material form resulting from pre-reflective practices. Instead, it is unique forms come from highly reflective perceptions, reflections and practices.

5.4.3 The practice of studio-ing and the spacing of studio and art village in suburban Beijing

Figure 8 Narratives of studios, by a few established contemporary Chinese artists, at a group exhibition titled 'The Studios.' (Photo by Xiaoxue Gao, 2016.10. Qiao Space Gallery, Shanghai, China)



The citations in the photo above (fig. 8) suggest that artists often represent their studio space as a sacred place of solitude, where artworks are created by the hands and souls of these solitary beings. It is deemed a personal space. "Alone in the wilderness," "landing point," "sanctuary" are the common terms deployed in enchanting the studio. In a banal everyday context, the studio is also known to be where professional interactions occur, such as meetings with professional assistants, partners, curators, dealers, and collectors. The visits paid by the latter three groups are often known as 'studio visit.' This refers to the necessary informal viewings, discussions, and negotiations between collaborators around the artworks before formal agreements are made.

Coming back to reality, for many artists living and working in Beijing, to have a studio (regardless of how small it is or whether it is shared) means to have the pre-condition of being a professional artist. It is also a meaning-charged notion that can be used as an icebreaker to any conversations, professionally or casually, among the art insiders in Beijing. It is the case for two reasons. First, for many artists, their dwelling and working take place in the same bounded physical space. The studio is thereby a notion treated by many as interchangeable as 'home' and 'office.' Someone jokes that to see if an artist is successful, one just needs to know if (s)he lives in their studio (resource: interview IA5L). I do not know the extent to which this joke reflects reality, but very few artists I have known or heard of have two separate sites for working and living. Thus, one can casually ask, "what are you up to in your studio lately," suggesting either a personal or professional curiosity. In Beijing's context, the notion of studio is also intricately linked with many broader societal topics crucial to the artworld, e.g., the commodification of housing in cities, demolition of informal housing in village-in-the-cities, and precarious welfare available to the art community. Almost everyone can share one heartbreaking story about studio demolition/relocation from their experience or hearsay. In discussing studios, the art community members exchange not only practical knowledge and tactics to deal with their everyday challenges but also sympathy for each other's troubles and pains.

After frequently participate in the events held in various artists' studios in Beijing, I propose to further redescribe the artists' processual practices that constitute the studio, under the events of 'dwelling,' 'practical coordination,' and 'networking.'

Dwelling and 'loft' in the village-in-the-city

A studio of one's own is deemed a self-evident pre-condition for a *tizhi-wai* artist, as they have access to neither offices nor studio rooms provided by public and commercial institutions. In Beijing, artists tend to adept specific rural houses (with

high ceiling or warehouse structures) in the urban fringe or, be more specific, in the villages-in-the-city, to studio spaces. Despite this, these houses/structures had ambiguous legal status in the land administration law before its revision in Jan 2020.

Figure 9 A studio called Iowa in Caochangdi, transformed from a greenhouse by inhabited artists. (Photo courtesy, artist Zhang Ruo and Zeng Yilan, 2014. Caochangdi, Beijing, China)

Firstly, I could identify a demi-regularity in that artists in Beijing tend to inhabit factory spaces, greenhouses, warehouse structures and convert them into 'loft' forms. In Beijing's villages-in-the-city like Heiqiao and Caochangdi, lofts are constructed by different actors at each village's different developmental stages. At an early stage, most artists rent rural housings from the villagers and convert them into lofts themselves. The attic's location and size are flexible, dependent on the old structure and the artists' preferences. I have once visited an artist's place in a remote village-in-the city called Luomahu, who had transformed only the roof level of a three-floor house into a high-ceiling studio space and kept the structure of the downstairs space as a family living space and lounge. In her case, a studio was constructed in juxtaposition with a normal housing unit in the same building. One has to pass through their lounge and dining room to the studio space. Thus the

boundary between work and life, is although fluid, but more or less consolidated by the doors and walls. In the later stages, the artists' preference of loft is known to many stakeholders. Either the villager property owners, artists or developers, start to construct buildings directly, following basic industrial warehouse styles and then rent it out to artists as target clients. The artist tenants then re-adapt this basic structure into loft-shape studio space once they move in, with minimum effort. In the latest models, an attic block is already included in the design. A classic built plan called loft is copied all over the art villages. The double-floor part comprises an attic level room at the inner end of the studio, accessed by a ladder, a kitchen and toilet, sometimes even a small living room on the ground floor underneath. The rest of the studio is a large space with a high ceiling, remains flexible at the artists' disposal, which can be adjusted according to their needs for their art projects (see fig. 9 and 10).

Leaving the cheap rent in the village-in-the-city aside for the moment, my informants associate studio dwelling closely with their preferred way of life. They find the rural/industrial housing structure, first of all, practical, as they need the high ceiling and enough room to hold their sculptures, canvas, materials, books, parties, and imagination. The warehouse structures set fewer hard borders than the functional compartmental rooms commonly found in ordinary apartment buildings. Without exception, I was told by my informants in one way or another that 'loft' is for them the ideal architectural form for maximizing their artistic freedom. In response to my questions about the charm of the loft, I was often told that it is "how studios are supposed to be" (Interview IA6ZR). One extreme example is that one artist and his family relocated from Caochangdi to Berlin in 2016 and reconstructed an almost identical loft studio there. They confirm that loft as *the* form of the studio is deeply known and widely shared by the artist. Looking aside, one can find studios in art schools in Beijing, structured as lofts. The loft form can also be found in the catalog images or studio tours in foreign countries.

Now, let us talk about the locational feature of the loft studios: they situate mostly in the so-called art villages, i.e., villages-in-the-city where lots of artist studios and institutions agglomerate. As suggested previously, calling a place of dwelling a studio instead of home implies the shared social condition faced by many artists: most of the freelancing artists living in Beijing do not have a Beijing *hukou-local household registration*. They have no way of acquiring one unless they are deemed qualified for their exceptional performance by the official association and are willing to succumb to legislators' ruling (this point has been addressed in 5.5.2). As a result, most artists have constrained access to public services in Beijing, like public rental housing[29], license plates for cars, public health care insurance com-

29 Even without Beijing hukou, one could access commercial residential housing, with higher rates of down payment and less percentage of bank loans.

Figure 10 Typical self-restructured 'loft' studio in Heiqiao village, Beijing. (Photo by Guzidao (2016), retrieved in October 2016 from https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s/YYabG2yNCp-EZFx3AYxMxQ)

pensated by employers, and quotas for public kindergartens and high schools. The studio, then, becomes a *provisional* solution for most of these problems. In villages-in-the-city, one can (informally) access spacious studio spaces and affordable village public infrastructures (i.e., cheaper food options). Also, as most of their peers and art institutions are located in the vicinity, there are fewer travel costs for work. Although dwelling in the studio and village cannot make artists immune to all the issues mentioned above, it offers feasible alternatives.

However, in the villages-in-the-city, as I have depicted earlier in the case of Caochangdi, world-renowned artists live in harmony around the overwhelmingly dynamic village typologies. The villages-in-the-city offer and afford diverse lifestyles to be co-existed in proximity. One can choose from a 2 RMB pancake or a 50 RMB coffee. These elements co-constitute the perceived dwelling environment for artists in the art village, not straightforward alternatives to institutional provisions. It reveals another demi-regular event. If it were only out of practical need or navigating structural constraints, the renowned artists could have opted for private services anywhere in the city. There will also be no supply of luxury goods like coffee. It is common for artists in Beijing, even those who are very established, to live in the village-in-the-city. These villages accommodate both the

Figure 11 A 'loft' studio in Songzhuang village, Tongzhou, Beijing. (Photo retrieved in September 2018, from Basha art (2018), https://www.94477.com/article/1959014.html.)

economically thriving artists and the young and unestablished art graduates who have different means and demands for their productive and everyday existence.

The bare, rough, and dynamic aesthetics in the village-in-the-city is often described by my informants with a positive tone, as 'authentic' and 'stimulating.' This could only be explained by the 'alternative aesthetic' shared by the art community. When reading it with a *trained eye for alternative aesthetics and atmosphere*, the village-in-the-city is also home to contra-modern material settings, contra-homogeneous social environments, and contra-unitary aesthetics. "The streetscapes and people here are very adaptive. It has a life full of struggles and vitality," says Guo, who often travels between New York, Milan, and London, and has a good taste of cognac, but settles his studio close to a landfill in Heiqiao village (Interview IA2G-2). It implies that the artists intend to physically and mentally *position* themselves in closer relation to the underprivileged proletariat in society. At least, they want their positions to be seen like that. It also implies the artists' shared *anti-establishment spirit*. I would thereby argue, the artists shared aesthetic *habitus* is necessary to understand their practices of village living. It enables a shared *synthesizing* of selected heterogeneous elements constituting the artworld in the village-in-the-city as a

whole, against the backdrop of mainstream urban living. When looking through a contemporary artist's eyes, the dwelling in the village-in-the-city has enabled their ways of lives detached from *tizhi*-specific rules and resources, their unique work-life arrangements, and a shared anti-establishment sentiment.

Very rarely, I met artists who work and dwell in regular apartments in the city. Li is one of them. She said she has been lucky, as both she and her husband's (not an artist) parents have supported them financially to buy an apartment close to 798 art district and Caochangdi art village. It allows her to engage with the activities in the artworld easily. For explaining her 'exceptional choice' of living normally in the city, she firstly attributes the reason to her medium – video art: "it is compatible with the space layout in the normal apartment." However, after interviewing many married couples in the artworld, I noticed that family structure also plays a critical role in explaining how they live and work. Many female artists state that, regardless of the type of artistic practice they engage in, once their kids are born, they must move back to the city for accessing kindergarten, medical services, convenient public transportation connections, and so forth. As parents, "it is not ideal to allow kids playing close to the landfill and eating takeout as we do" (ibid.).

In light of the constitution of (everyday) space by Löw, I would argue that the artists' *habitual appreciation* of authenticity, versatility, and life-work integrity; their *practical need* for flexible and spacious material structures, and the *indoctrinated yearning* for an alternative positioning in society, contribute to the reproduction of studio spaces in the form of a loft in various villages-in-the-city settings, at the urban fringe in Beijing city. These preferences are bundled with highly individualized lifestyles. Once these artists' work and life enter into other consolidated relational configurations (e.g., family, art academy), these preferences would be compromised and shape other dwelling and working space forms. The practice-oriented approach by Löw offers a strong explanatory power to read and understand the constitution of studio space in loft form and their agglomerations in the village-of-city settings.

Practical coordination and the 'art village'

By the time of my last field trip at the end of 2016, the notion of 'art village' has again drawn everyone's alarming attention in the artworld. Demolition orders were put up at every corner in Heiqiao village, a famous art village adjacent to Caochangdi accommodating around 1000 artists and 78000 migrant residents. The deadline for the final evictions was set for February 2017. Artists had been living there since 2012 when nearby villages became saturated, mostly emerging young artists, including artist He and Yan. Heiqiao is just like Caochangdi, another village-in-the-city, which means that almost all rental housings there are self-built without planning permission. While their existence has violated the planning and construction

codes of Beijing city, they are tolerated by the authorities. It is common for village-in-the-cities, given their limbo status between the urban and the rural. To cope with the eviction order, artist Zeng chooses to move to an even more remote art village called Luomahu, where "a few neighbors already settled, and they helped me find a place" (ibid.). Due to the eruption of incidences as such, a demi-regular event regarding informal coordination (in land-use, rental contracts, social relationships etc.) across social groups (artists, villagers, developers, administrators) is exposed. The forms of connections and coordination among these cohorts of people are reshaped and redistributed.

An art village often grows from one or two key settlers. It could be an artist who is acquainted with a resourceful local villager or developer and negotiates with village committee members to settle a reasonable deal on behalf of the art community. This initiator further plays a middleman's role between the landlords (the village collective) and developer in transforming the original meaning of village housing, factory warehouses, or whatever discarded structures found into tradable studio spaces. Gradually, words about available studio spread and informal rental relations are established between the art community and locals in a village. However, words do not often spread evenly. One block of studios in Heiqiao, for example, is rented by a group of artists who all graduate from Sichuan Art Academy. Pre-existing social relations like alumni and friendships are often reified in coordinated dwellings in art villages after their relocations to Beijing. In other cases, depending on the scarcity of land and the opportunity to transform housing units, social relationships of different strengths are at play to mediate this coordination. From close to distance, they range from friendships, fellowships or *lao-xiang*[30] (people of the same place of origin), teacher-student relationships, alumni relationships, and contractual relations with no strings attached.

Once they are all settled, practical knowledge is circulated among the artist tenants from one day to another. One respondent told me: "judging by our tenant Wechat group, around 100 artists live in this block, both Chinese (from different provinces) and foreigners. I am not friends with everyone, but I got the impression that most are friendly. We share knowledge and resources about stuff like how to insulate the roof, how to install the water filter, which heater suits the best for the studio, and how to negotiate with the landlord." (interview IA8G). These are common practical issues affecting the artists' everyday life qualities in Heiqiao. Their studios are mostly rented in a crude shape where necessary infrastructure like heating was lacking, insulation was generally insufficient. One can infer that these issues *become* common among artists in the art village. It stimulates social

30 The term *laoxiang* (老乡), in principle, refers to people who come from the *same* region. In pragmatic uses, the range of the 'same' region is never objective but identified mutually by the participating parties.

coordination due to the artists' similar *habitus* and basic trust with each other. Migrant workers in Heiqiao, on the other hand, live in similar low-quality housing but not coordinate with the artists in this regard. They do not see the installation of filtered water and clean heating in their temporary rental home as necessary.

I would not venture further to argue, such coordination is found on shared identification, internalized values or rules. Very few artists dwelling in art villages are local, their different economic and social status is immediately visible from the solutions they adopt in fixing similar problems. Some refurbish their studio to the finest, while others commit to a minimal, functional repatching. Considering this, I read the banal coordinations and collaborations like solving practical problems, sharing meals, and Didi taxi rides with the close neighbors to b*e emergent from* their shared engagements with the art village's physical set-up, the *material affordances*.

When attending to coordination and collaboration in art villages beyond the everyday, one can notice a *surge* sense of collectivity and solidarity when conflicts occur with an intruding outer group (most likely, the village committee/local villagers). Such occasions range from rent rise, landlord scaping contracts, lousy property management services to eviction. These incidences elicit the formation of new collective and coordinated defense among the artist tenants. Incidences like this take place, although not daily, but *recursively*. For example, in September 2015, in response to an unfair and forcefully charge of parking fees imposed on the non-villagers by the village administration, almost all artists in Heiqiao signed for a protest. Under this circumstance, the artists swiftly coordinate their actions in solidarity. The recourse to the media in the name of one collective, voluntarily represente the other floating residents (mostly migrant workers who drive informal taxis for a living) whose rights also got inflicted. Such a cross-group alliance does not exist as in everyday scenarios in art villages: artists hardly socialize with the other migrant groups due to their different rhythms and standard of life. However, when a *shared* opponent appears, artists extend their alliance to the other similarly inflicted migrants. The artists see themselves as having the social responsibility to help the ones with fewer capacities and resources to take action. The shared perceptions *of economic affordances and threats* emerge and drive new forms of collaboration beyond art in the art villages. In section 5.5, I would explicate more on this aspect using elaborated events observed from Caochangdi.

Networking and the 'art village'

For artists living in Beijing, the notion 'art village' speaks little to a dichotomy between the private and the social sides of their life. A demi-regularity is that, many artists tend to socialize with their peers who dwell in close vicinity. In studios, the active ones regularly host wine tastings, hotpot dinners, film screenings, ping-pong game, and many other activities. In each studio that I have visited, at the

very least, a sofa or dining table is placed for accommodating friends and visitors. A curator has once pointed out that "dual sets of teawares and red wine glasses" are the default tableware for studios nowadays (Interview CE1W-1). Studios in Beijing's art villages embrace spontaneous drop-ins. I cannot remember how many times I have been taken as a 'plus one' into an unknown studio party. My informant Bin said that when he is not working for a particular exhibition deadline, he drinks and debates with other neighboring artists until dawn and repeats the same thing the next day in the early afternoon (Interview IA9LB). Even as a researcher, I was invited to drink and eat homemade lunches after the interviews. The lunch topics range from the 'me too' movement in the U.S. to the rise of right-wing parties in Germany.

Artists deem the 'art village' the right place to broaden their professional and intellectual horizons. To have the opportunity to bump into someone and join activities together was described by many of my respondents as a benefit of living in an art village (see figure 18 in this book). Teng, an artist from Chongqing, explained to me, "I had never heard about the critiques of neo-liberalism in my hometown. Back then, all I hated was what I thought of as 'collectivism' – the suffocating factory and its assembly lines. I thought that any system other than collective socialism would be better. I started to understand neo-liberalist rules when I came to Beijing. This awareness arose through talking with other like-minded, but more knowledgeable artists" (Interview IA7ZH). A nourishing atmosphere was not always foreseeable and sustained in an art village. It requires social subjects to have a minimal level of mutual identification regarding the political and cultural values and endurance for cultivating the shared topics. Teng also lamented on the fragmentation of intellectual exchange in his village, as many friends moved away from that particular art village over time. He blamed the "ruthless eviction and rental rises" for that (Interview IA7ZH).

Through my observations, in art villages, knowledge transfer takes place on mutually selective bases. Sometimes, the neighboring relationship is pre-supposed by pre-existing mutual artistic appreciations, friendships, or similarities in social and economic status. In this case, knowledge transfer naturally follows. It applies to Sui's case, the dean of the Sculpture Department of an established art school. In a courtyard, he set his studio up in Guigezhuang, neighboring another two equally established artists affiliated with the same school, and a private art foundation directed by a friend of him. In other cases, knowledge exchange emerges from physical proximity and shared cultural capital. One artist, Xu, told me that he rented his current studio because of his neighbor, whom he admired deeply. "When I got to know that this studio was vacant, I immediately decided to take it. To have X as a neighbor has saved me ten years of muddling in the artworld" (Interview IA10X). It means, Xu expected the form of relational good potentially arises from such a

neighbor placement. Through acting upon it over time, the physical relationship evolves to actualize other relational good and bears other transactive practices.

5.4.4 The practices of exhibiting and spacing of the exhibition

Every artist I met confirmed that exhibitions are their occupational necessity. It is the exhibition rather than the artworks, the artistic capacity that confers one with the status of artist (Interview IA7ZH-2). As a form of event space, the exhibition results from joint practices or interactions, by definition. Phillip Hook, the director and senior paintings specialist at both Sotheby and Christie's with thirty-five years of experience, refers to exhibitions as "assemblies of works of art put on view to the public for limited lengths of time" (2014, 228). Hook further addresses that exhibitions are held in different places to make different points: "they can be museum shows which juxtapose paintings of the past that would not normally be seen together in order to make an art-historical point; or they can be commercial gallery exhibitions showcasing the latest developments in contemporary art, sometimes comprising works by a single living artist" (ibid., 228). We can infer, the constitution of 'exhibition' is pre-supposed by different forms of interactions among a wealth of collaborators: curators and directors, art critics, art media, dealers, collectors, public audiences and so forth.

Hook also implies that in a highly institutionalized artworld, well-differentiated rules would ensure institutions to hold exhibitions for those artworks with corresponding value. Furthermore, the exhibitions would be orchestrated to allow the audience to recognize and reproduce such value. These values would reify on art-historical comments and on the artworks' price tags. In the context of Beijing, insiders widely believe that, artistically valuable exhibitions do not always promise good sales. The artworks' economic value often does not match with their artistic value, especially true for contemporary artworks. Their spectrum of language and aesthetics are open and fluid (Interview CR1LJ). In light of Löw's constitution of the (everyday) space, I capture these bundled interactions in the events of the exhibition, including *negotiating access, translating meaning* and *material arrangement*. I redescribe the perceptual and practical patterns observed in these events, the rules and resources incorporated in the occurrences, and the placement of social bodies.

Archer (2018) has studied the catalogs produced by Sotheby's inaugural auction on contemporary Chinese artworks in October 2004 and revealed the networked activities of a small group of dealers, critics, and curators. They act as cultural mediators and have created the cultural value and global market for the artwork of a select group of Chinese artists. "The primary mediators to whom the weight of this translocation points are curator/dealer Johnson Chang, Chinese curators Gao Minglu, Wu Hong, Li Xianting and Hou Hanru, and two Swiss men- collector Uli Sigg and curator, Harald Szeeman" (Archer 2018, 3). A decade later, when I explore

the contemporary artworld in Beijing, there are (as demi-regularities) an increased number and variety of spaces for exhibitions. However, it is still the fact that, a few cultural mediators and legislators, who transfer and translate the cultural and economic value trans-locally and mediate them inter-institutionally, remains crucial for realizing circularity and various forms of value.

Through observations at exhibitions and interviews with young artists, curators, and gallerists about their experiences, I have identified three events integral in constituting and giving shape to an exhibition. The very first and most obvious one is *negotiating access*. Many informants told me that in Beijing, exhibitions could be incubated in many ways. It could start from an art institution, which releases a curatorial concept and ensure by calling for artworks, screening the artworks, and putting them into place. It could also start from a group of well-connected people or well-known artworks, the curatorial idea, materiality, means of communication, and collaborating institution are negotiated along the way. Artists tend to 'display' their works in their studios, on the internet, or on social media, when neither commercial, academic, nor media partners are present. These self-organized events are although noted as 'exhibition' in the artists' own CV, get less recognized by other stakeholders in and out of the artworld. Thus, circularity is at the core of an exhibition. In 2016, when artists are asked about how they managed to have their first exhibition outside the campus, the response was always "through whom you know" (Interview FM1W, IA5L). Young artists are also aware that many institutions cannot or do not have long-term plans themselves, nor do they operate with constant resources and fixed rules. They are conscious about the fact that institutions may relocate, recruit, re-ally, and re-structure. But, core cultural mediators are mobile and adaptive. In their eyes, to bond with core mediators is more substantial than a contract, who ensured circularity, and whose reliability supersedes the written rules in the currents of institutional developments. The placement resulting from such *perceptual patterns* is the loose social network with multiple centerings occupied by the key mediators and artists. These social networks can be identified in Wechat groups, social gatherings, exhibitions, zoom meetings, among others.

As I have indicated in previous sessions, although all of my informants – those active artists – hold a BFA or MFA degree issued by art academies, they report no sensible connection between these credentials and access to exhibitions in Beijing. My informants also report that the way they negotiate access to exhibitions varies with the *momentums* they sense from a particular location and time in the contemporary artworld. An artist named Tian once illustrated such a good momentum in his experience. As an elite art academy graduate, his first exhibition opportunity was offered by someone who followed him and appreciated his work on social media. When the market is good and vacancies abound, access to an exhibition can be actualized through very weak social ties. Many informants recall similar stories of accessing exhibitions through side jobs and contingent networking activities when

the art market in Beijing was booming. It was before the global economic crisis in 2008 and shortly after in 2010. The locally sensible momentum indicated varied opportunities and fluctuating thresholds.

Secondly, I have identified *translating meaning* as necessary bundled events shaping an exhibition. The core practices are often carried out by the cultural mediators mentioned above. This could be illustrated by my own observation in a studio visit where I accompanied a gallery curator named Lewis to Heqiao village. In the third studio visit of our trip, Lewis had picked up an abstract oil painting. On the painting, the fuzzy geometrical lines could be seen within foggy grey hued background layers. Lewis believed that the work was of value to a few clients he had in mind and thus decided to include it in the next group exhibition. He asked the artist about the concepts behind the painting, and the artist replied that it was an expression of her personal dark memories. When this painting was later exhibited in the gallery space in Beijing and New York, it was interpreted as environmental art, refer particularly to Beijing's air pollution.

Lewis, just like and the other trans-local critics, has played the role of a cultural mediator. His selection, curation, and review of the artworks were *ordered* according to their understanding of the logic of targeted market and clients. Through such deliberate and institutionalized misinterpretations, artwork, gallery spaces, reviews, patrons, and money were brought together in a *relational placement* to realize a part of the event space called 'exhibition.' As I have mentioned, patrons who consume contemporary Chinese artworks primarily come from the western market. The practice of interpretation is always, to a great extent, *translation*. A dealer I spoke to also addressed the necessity of translation to ensure further transactions: "our western clients favor 'mischievous and quirky' artists, and 'one-of-a-kind' artworks, while our Chinese clients favor the 'well-acclaimed artist' and the artworks that resemble the established ones. To supervise their investments, I need to explain to why a certain piece of artwork is deemed a good deal in the eye of the other" (interview, CE1W-2).

Thirdly, I will redescribe how artists and curators, together with other collaborating actors, negotiate the *material arrangementd* of an exhibition in the course of its happening. To kick off an exhibition, setting up the vernissage is of primary importance. In 1910, Apollinaire described the attendance at the opening of the annual exhibition of the *Société des Artsten Français,* including lovely ladies, handsome gentlemen, academics, generals, painters, models, bourgeois, men of letters, and blue stockings, and so on. From what I have observed, in 2016, an exhibition opening at a gallery in Beijing Caochangdi was attended by art students, academics, curators, media journalists, professional friends of the artist, internet influencers, and many others. The gallery staff, typically only a small crew of two or three people, spent more than two intensive weeks preparing the opening. Galleries usually follow a similar timetable and work with the same group of contractors in preparing

each exhibition. Some of the labor is materialized into products presented to visitors, including promotional material like posters and invitation letters, catalogs in print, announcements and newsletters posted by art media and mailing lists, artwork installed with the help of the contractors, insurance for the artworks and their logistics, visual archives and price lists, catering service, and drinks, and so on. The list is endless. These material and social bodies, and the way they are ordered in relation to one another, are institutionalized to a greater or lesser extent.

For one commercial gallery, the *principle* one applies in placing the exhibiting items usually is 'maximizing revenue.' Undoubtedly, artworks differ in material, form, and size. Their layout plan needs to meet the capacity of the room, gallery staff, the allocable budget, resulting from negotiations between the actors (mainly the artist and the gallerist) involved. The most desirable works are always placed in the most prominent spot.

Above all, *social bodies* (audiences), particularly the guests invited to join the social dinners, constitute central elements of an exhibition opening and exhibition. The presence of a big group of distinguished guests would be read as a precursor for an impactful peer review. Ideally, the event should be well-orchestrated to generate the right momentum for making sales. The right food and drinks are served to prompt that atmosphere, and hence, the expected conversations. These social bodies' gathering does not just happen by sending out catalogs, posters, and Instagram and Wechat posts. It is actualized through the exhausting and meticulous labor of the gallery personnel. The first round of invitations takes place months or weeks ahead of the event through emails, Wechat texts, short messages, and phone calls. The gallerist invites VIP guests, who are either long-term patrons of the exhibiting artists or potential candidates, with personalized messages. For non-VIP guests – curators of art festivals and museums, directors of public and private museums, auctioneers, art journalists and editors, art academics, potential collectors (diplomats, designers, celebrities, influencers, public relation managers, partners and CEOs of firms etc.), and other artists in collaboration with the gallery, and friends of the artist – the gallery director customizes a list based on people's economic competency, professional status, their level of being 'in' the artworld, and the closeness and endurance of their relationship (guanxi) to the gallery. The feedback from these targeted guests is continuously updated in an Excel chart until the last hour of the vernissage.

Despite all the intentional efforts put into practice, neither the form of an exhibition nor the subsequent sales would turn out exactly as planned. The desired guests' availability is unpredictable, especially considering the successful actors in the artworld have cosmopolitan lifestyles flying worldwide. In principle, no one is obliged to attend a vernissage or social dinner apart from the exhibiting artist and the gallery's crew. Some art critics/peer artists are present due to their own artistic or academic interests; some collectors appear to check the artwork and the

crowd to decide if the timing is right to invest. Their presence and form of involvement are mostly conditioned by their own professional or personal preferences and itinerary. Some actors (e.g., the gallery's contracted artists) who are not directly involved in the selling-buying transactions may show up out of emotional obligation. They expect others to do the same for the set-up of their own exhibitions. Sometimes, famous art historians appear, as they got paid for their visit, as well as a positive review after the opening. These people are most likely to act as 'planned.' Finally, some unpredictable visitors may be brought by a friend who falls outside the category mentioned above.

Even for those social bodies (gallerist and artist) who are bound by formal contracts, how they relate to each other in dynamic interactions have impacts on their perceived form of the 'exhibition.' For instance, artists and art dealers live on contracts individually settled with commercial or not-for-profit art institutions. Despite the contractual clauses, their actual agency in forming an exhibition usually do not come across loud and clear. The gallery personnel often express their anxiety about sustaining the long-term collaborative relationship with certain artists whose status/price rises too fast and outpaces their offers after a big show. On other occasions, the gallery is the more established party, making exploitative use of the vague rules. When collaborating with an established institution, artists often perceive themselves as the favored receiver, agree on more exploitative contractual terms and disadvantageous profit-sharing plan. The number of resources to be invested in the extra services, such as reaching out to art critics, doing P.R., or events that enhance the artist's cultural capital are also to be negotiated. Despite the labor and revenue division formally set on the contract, artist or gallerist can act as the more dominant party, deciding on how to constitute the show. Thus, the collaborative practices in the exhibition and its constitution are positively or negatively reinforced by unceasing negotiations.

In light of Löw's conceptualization of (everyday) space, I could first confirm that the *temporal and spatial arrangements of an exhibition* result from partial institutionalized forms of perception and practice. The material entities (artworks, posters, catalogs, exhibition halls, catering food and party furniture) are similarly set up from one exhibition to another, implying a similar 'ordering principle' and standardized sequence. Yet, as described above, from the perspective of the organizers, the gathering of the social bodies and the forms of their interrelations constituting the exhibition is hardly an institutionalized process. In particular, in a young and marginal social sector like contemporary art, there are few fixed binding rules or resources to ensure the presence, relatability, and predictable forms of interactions among art patrons, independent art critics, celebrities, journalists and surprising guests. A cognitive disparity is enduringly perceived and presented by the collaborating parties in negotiating the peripheral spatial arrangement of the exhibition.

Contingencies are also abounded and could critically affect the peripheral social-material constitution and the individually sensed atmosphere of an exhibition.

5.4.5 Summary

In this section, I have redescribed the events of *artmaking*, *studio dwelling* (including practices of dwelling, practical coordination, and networking), and *exhibiting* (including practices of negotiating access, meaning translation and material arrangement), enacted by the art community insiders. I have drawn on Löw's thesis of the constitution of (everyday) space in re-describing them and examine, if and what 'repetitive everyday doings' result in the constitution of *artwork*, *studio space* (loft, art village) and *exhibition*.

By deploying the categories of socialization, habitus, reflective and pre-reflective practice, synthesis and placing, I have read the artists' *art-making practices* as highly reflective and individualized. Although they are repetitively practiced, the resultant material-meaning figuration – the artworks – are not institutionalized. I see Löw's presumed casual relations between the repetitive social doing, the atmosphere, and the spatial figuration, very well accordant with how dwelling and working practices are related to the configuration of the studio in loft form and the community-dwelling in the form of art village. On the level of individual everyday practice, the configuration of 'loft' and 'art village' is explained by artists' internalized idea of studio space, their indistinguishable perception of work-life practices, and their attunement to alternative aesthetics. The prescribed causal agent explains the prevalence of loft studios and art villages in Beijing's suburbs.

On the other hand, 'art villages' in Beijing's can be read as different relational configurations when we focus on different social actors and their space constituting events. Practical coordination and networking are commonly enacted by old and new art inhabitants around their studios. In Beijing's dynamic urban-rural-interface, such joint practices are often not structured by clear normative rules and often interrupted by contingent orders imposed by the outsiders. The practical *coordination* can be interpreted as pre-reflective practice emerging from art community's shared perceptions of material and social conditions in the village-in-the-cities. The practice of *networking* also prompts the agglomeration of studios and the formation of art villages. I shall argue, art village is differently constituted by social actors who not only act reflexively in light of existing relations but also on/with/through an external social-material relation that is continuously emerging and changing.

Regarding the event of *exhibiting*, I have redescribed the demi-regular practices of *negotiating access*, *meaning translation,* and *materialization*. The enactment of these practices has entail different extent and forms of contingency. Social bodies (of the artist, the curator, the gallerist, the dealer, the collector, the museum director, etc.)

act upon an inherent idea of 'exhibition' but also on non-reciprocal and mediated frames of meanings. In addition to attribute causes of temporally and materially fixed arrangement of the exhibition to such inherent meaning, I also attend to the mediated, contested, and transient perceptions in constituting the periphery form of 'exhibition.'

5.5 The artworld in Caochangdi: a manifold analysis

In 5.3 and 5.4, I have examined a few consolidated spatial configurations (artworks, lofts, art villages, and exhibition spaces) that result from the observable events enacted by Beijing's contemporary artworld's insiders. This section pays particular attention to the multi-linear events anchored in a place called Caochangdi. These events are not tied to each other yet constitute divergent temporary socio-material parts of the artworld. The three previously discussed conceptual frameworks of space are all deployed here to enable manifold coding and interpretation of such events. I aim at revealing the co-existent generative mechanisms that underscore the divergent artworld constituting events observable from *Caochangdi*.

In line with CR ontology, this section begins with a search for demi-regularities at the empirical level of reality. In 5.5.1, a re-description of Caochangdi's developmental history was guided by the political economy theory of spatial production (Harvey). In 5.5.2 and 5.5.3, empirical re-descriptions are carried out using the lens of the everyday (Löw) and assemblage (Thrift) of space. At the end of this section, I conclude with how such an analysis identifies a multitude of causal mechanisms driving current transformation trends in Caochangdi, a typical art village in Beijing.

5.5.1 Caochangdi as a Village-in-the-City

In Beijing, just like in other first and second-tier Chinese cities, the term 'village-in-the-city' (VIC) has been coined to capture a type of social-spatial phenomenon that crops up in the rapid political, economic and material transformation processes. Such social-spatial phenomenon usually straddles geographic, legislative, and socio-economical urban and rural institutional structures (see, e.g., Wu, Zhang, and Webster 2012; Lin, Meulder, and Wang 2012; Bach 2010). As a territorial unit, it often locates within but on the verge of an urbanized area, gets encircled by legally defined urban land and administrative system. In terms of social features, more than any other city quarter, VIC accommodates social-economically heterogeneous local rural collective and migrant workers. Administratively, the village committee is a self-organizing administrative unit, while not being part of the formal hierarchical governmental system, it has to respond to rural and urban administrative

rules and solve practical problems for the rural collective. Departing from the notion of VIC, a politically and economically loaded term, I will redescribe the events that give form to Caochangdi as a political-economic totality. This includes tracking and redescribing the moments and processes where the stakeholding actor groups come together, mobilize various *means of production* (labor, land, capital), acquire, transform and redistribute their capitals from their relative *political-economic positionality* (e.g., in Beijing's urban-rural administration, household registration system, and land-use structures). Finally, I examine if and how the *law of accumulation* explains the observable material arrangement.

Caochangdi satisfies the 'primary parameter' of being a VIC due to its limbo geographical location and its hybrid land-uses. It is located 20km northeast of Beijing's city center and only 14km away from Beijing's capital international airport. Its territorial boundaries are adjacent to the intersection of the fifth ring road and airport express road, which were seen as markers of the end of Beijing's urban proper area at the time I conducted my field research. Once a *ziran cun*[31] (natural village) consisting only of a local rural community and their farmland and settlements, Caochangdi's approximate 1.2 square km^2 area is now densely covered with informal housing, 'rural' public infrastructure (kindergartens, middle schools, rural community centers), and 'urban' infrastructures (police stations, art institutions, light-industrial, and small-business facilities, small green spaces and parking lots). These appropriated forms of land-use, make-shift building forms, and informal economy indicate either no effective laws and regulations exist, or they are not strictly enforced.

The social constitution of social bodies living in Caochangdi also fit the descriptive definition of a VIC. As a *de jure* rural self-organized social unit, Caochangdi's legal members are the registered local rural community, consisting of only 295 registered rural households – around 1100 individuals. In the context of the perennial dualistic urban/rural land tenure and household registration (*hukou*) systems, only the local rural community is still legally entitled to Caochangdi's land and can access the rural public services. However, Caochangdi's inhabitants are predominantly migrant communities. The only existing public census data from the year 2013 shows that 30,000 migrants live in Caochangdi, 30 times the normatively defined 'local' population (Liu et al., 2013). Through my observations and interviews between 2013 and 2017, I could confirm that migrants constitute the dominant majority of residents in Caochangdi.

Caochangdi's migrant inhabitants' socio-economic status is heterogeneous. They situate in divergent political and economic *positionalities* across 'rural' and 'urban' systems. The defining attribute includes their *hukou* (Beijing or non-Beijing, urban or rural) and labor status (formal or informal, long-term or flexible, white

31 Ziran-cun (自然村)

color or blue color employment). These attributes are critical in characterizing their productive and reproductive agencies in Caochangdi. I put them into three social groups. The first group consists of the local villagers. They hold Beijing rural *hukou*, which grants them the ownership of Caochangdi's housings and land and access to social welfare from the Beijing rural system. They are economically well off, as they gain income from private rentals and shares of renting the rural collective land. The second group consists of low to middle-income[32] migrants coming from rural and urban areas out of Beijing. The low-income actors usually work and live in the VIC, self-employed or informally employed (as platform taxi drivers, construction workers, vendors, gig-economy delivery staff, or short-term workers, freelancing artists, or interns in art spaces). They are excluded from both urban and rural social welfare in Beijing, and hence are most dependent on services and opportunities in Caochangdi. The middle-income actors usually live in the VIC but have a formal job contract either in the VIC or in the city. They are mostly blue-collar and white-collar workers in the manufacturing, hospitality sector and art institutions. The third group consists of high-earning actors who work formally in Caochangdi, live and register in Beijing city. They are the relatively well-educated and well-paid creative social class and international art crowd. They are either citizens of Beijing or migrants from other 1st tier Chinese or global cities. Their lives mostly unfold in urban areas, and they come to Caochangdi only for professional issues.

Finally, Caochangdi's immediate administrative body, the village committee, is ruled under both the rural and the urban administrative systems in Beijing. The rural administrative system consists of village, township, and county levels of governments, offering meager but stable funding to cover the rural community's social welfare. On the urban side are the neighborhood, district, and municipal levels of governments, to whom it is of utmost importance to evaluate and regulate non-agricultural land-uses and economic activities in the previously rural region and to withhold an 'urban' image. As Beijing is China's capital city, the Caochangdi village committee is also inevitably subsumed under the state administration, who might impose general rules and plans affecting the VIC's administrative operations.

Now, let me redescribe Caochangdi's developments in terms of the three groups of stakeholders' social positionality, their means and forms of productive activities while addressing the transformation of Caochangdi's social, normative, material constitution and boundary. According to the village archive (2007), Caochangdi has

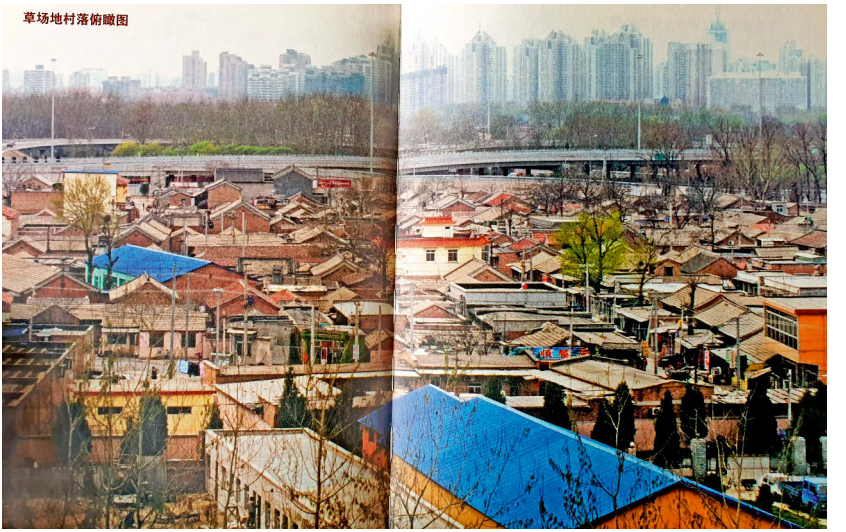
32 Between 2013 and 2017, my informants cited a net income of 4000 RMB/month to draw the line of 'surviving' or 'getting by'. It was commonly perceived that a medium level income would fall between 4000 and 8000 RMB/month. Therefore, I adopt these two numbers, 4000 RMB (around 550 Euros) and 8000 RMB (around 1100 Euros), to mark low- and medium-income categories.

Figure 12 Map of Caochangdi village's built-up entities in 2007. (Adapted based on a map released by Caochangdi's village committee (2011), retrieved in November 2014, http://ccd.grwh.cn/)

been recognized as a natural village since 1949. It is made up of around 1400 *mu*[33] (0.94 km^2) of collective rural land, among which 200 *mu* is assigned for the rural community to build up their homesteads, 800 *mu* is designated for collective agricultural production. During the communist era, the villagers engaged solely in farming under the organization of a 'people's commune.' The people's commune, the private rural housings, the homestead, the arable land amount to a material totality for capital accumulations and flows. The material circulations are mostly internal and non-capitalized. Since the onset of economic reform in 1978, several resourceful local villagers have appropriated pieces of arable land, established small family workshops in the name of a collective rural economy. At this stage, new raw materials came in, and commodities went out – capitalized material circulation break off Caochangdi's territorial and administrative boundaries. However, the most important means of production – the farmland – remains collectively

33 Mu (亩) is a commonly used land measure unit in China, 1mu equals 666 2/3 square meters. 1400 mu is around 0.94 sq km^2.

Figure 13 Local villagers' residential housing on the northern area of the site (homestead land) in 2007, before widespread self-initiated housing densification processes. (Photo retrieved from the Caochangdi village archive (2007), preface page)



owned and used by the rural community. The political-economic (ownership, usership, designated rural function) barriers of the land make its value not-exchangeable to the non-community members. The rural community's labor force is capitalized, but to a minimal extent, as their capital gain is spent entirely on paying taxes, reproducing their labor force and maintaining their industrial infrastructure.

Since 1992, increasing amounts of villagers ceased to farm, and more farmland became vacant. From 1993 to 2007, for Caochangdi's rural community, the established capital circulation loop – from monetizing the collective-owned farmland, producing profits to reinvesting in the collective public infrastructures – was gradually expanded and reinforced. In response to inquiries from both local members and their collaborating non-local entrepreneurs, the village committee expropriated more and more farmland for constructing industrial building structures. The rents from these building structures became assets to the villagers' collective, while the competent local villagers (as tenants and as the business owner) also obtained a private share by operating businesses in these buildings. The village public infrastructure (such as improvements to the water sewage system, gas supply, gating and fencing, Asphalt roads, and streetlights.) was developed, funded and supervised by the village committee. In the meantime, such 'self-modernization' practices were

Figure 14 Informal housing on the northern side of Caochangdi. The photo was taken under the fifth ring road of Beijing, towards one of Caochangdi's entrance. (Photo by Xiaoxue Gao, Jan 2014, Beijing, China)

tolerated by the upper-level government – Nangao-Cuigezhuang township – which is an under-financed rural jurisdiction.

Increasingly, most of the rural community, following the footsteps of the few competent peers, has reoriented themselves to engage in profitable light *industrial production*. The hiring of outsider labor forces was not yet common. Meanwhile, as shown in figure 13, the private housing on the northern side (on the homestead land) of the village remained underdeveloped until approximately 2007. These properties are mostly one or two stories high and resided solely by registered local villagers and their family members (interview CVC1). The under-development of private housing property also suggests that, until then, the surplus value generated by the modes of collective and individual production was not yet sufficient to materialize as private fixed assets properties.

According to several villagers and artist interviewees, Caochangdi's most rapid political-economic, and physical transformations took place between 2007 and 2011. For the first time, several large portions of land in the southern part of the Caochangdi were leased to external developers, which were soon transformed into agglomerations of art institutions and studios (see fig. 12). Alongside the overall village industrialization and urban sprawl of Beijing, the northern part of

Caochangdi began to accommodate a growing number of non-local actors seeking dwellings and livelihoods. They rent and live in the rooms of local villages' self-built houses and/or shopfronts, running small businesses. In response to the increasing demand, individual rural households carried out numerous renovations and floor-lifting projects between 2007 and 2010. The traditional courtyard housing typology was replaced by densely laid-out 3 to 4 story concrete box buildings, whose height and floor area was maximized for accumulating rental revenue (interview CVC1). Simultaneously, numerous small businesses catering to the residents' daily needs began to appear as ground-floor shopfronts or vendors on the street, expanding quickly from street intersections to all main alleys.

By 2011, these commodified forms of private housing land were consolidated into various hybrid forms of land-uses and building structures in Caochangdi. Continuous, small-scale and incremental turnovers take place in this already cramped dense environment. Several local villagers continue to refurbish and renovate their housing, materializing the rents they accumulated from migrant workers (interview CVC2). In this process, most local villagers have repositioned themselves again from industrial workers to professional landlords. The individual household's homestead is largely commodified into rental housing, and their surplus-value become more and more fluid. The socio-economic boundary of Caochangdi has also become porous and extensive.

From 2014 to 2017, I also witnessed an increase in the number of upscale designer boutiques, supermarkets, and coffee shops that supply imported alcohol, snacks, and flat whites. The village committee continued to seek and negotiate with new private investors in transforming their rural-communal public infrastructure. The small vendors at an old communal food market, for instance, were entirely wiped out and replaced by 'hipster' restaurants and boutiques. In 2017, both high-end and budget service options remained co-existent in Caochangdi. The two types of land, the homestead and the former arable land, were eventually commodified in similar ways but by divergent stakeholders, social relations, capital accumulation, and redistribution loops.

Meanwhile, in response to funding and executive orders issued by different upper levels of sectorial governmental bodies, the village committee sporadically initiated thorough micro-scale projects to improve the public infrastructure for the rural community in the village. These sectorial rules and resources were intended to enhance services in their own purview of the legislation. Such announcements could be found on the posters in the village's official bulletin boards or on the homepage of the Cuigezhuang '*diqu*[34](area)' office, a transitional urban-rural administrative body that has governed Caochangdi village since 2004. The 'area' office was designated to facilitate the pan-urbanization process in Chaoyang district

34 Diqu (地区).

before the comprehensive rural-to-urban land requisition and conversion are in place. All 19 township-level administrative units situated within Chaoyang district were transformed into 'area' by 2004, which operated under the concept of 'one administration, two names[35].' This indicates that the village committee of Caochangdi submitted solely to the rural system of rules and resources before 2004. After 2004, the municipality acknowledged the *de facto* urban developments in its rural jurisdictions and gradually integrated them under an urban administrative system. The rules issued by the urban and rural system from top-down is not well coordinated. Nor are they enacted in coordination with the on-the-ground actions by the villagers, migrant workers, art and non-art entrepreneurs. Under the rural system, the village collective and committee were given higher administrative and operational responsibility yet limited fiscal resources. Under the urban system, the village collective and committee are funded to operationalize the urban-regional plan.

As this rural-to-urban governance transition unfolds, Caochangdi falls between the rural and urban regulatory systems. These urban plans introduce conflicts with the local actors' capital accumulation interests and practices. Especially under the urban governance, the local actors' utilization of farmland for non-agricultural purposes is illegal, or at best, informal. From my informal interview with the village committee representative and villagers, they all admit such informality but insisted that that is the only approach they can take to improve lives. The village committee's self-justifying narrative is, to a great extent, made *ex-post* for the higher political governors who carry out evaluations from an urban regulatory perspective. The individual and collective's illegal commodification of rural land and services was ameliorated in meaning. At the same time, the committee representative addresses their compliance with several documents issued by the central government in 1994 and 2004 for protecting farmers' land-use rights in the process of urbanization, industrialization and guidelines for restoring farmers' living standards and securing their long-term livelihoods. These justifications were also upheld by the villagers interviewed. Some senior locals mentioned that, prior to the transformation, they needed to visit the township center to access public services, which were scarce and of low quality. Some recalled collectively initiated modernization projects that were never visible to me, including the waste collection system, the wideband and later the fiber internet network, and so on. It affirms that the village community's self-initiated value transformation practices were not driven by capital *accumulation* at first but by sustenance. Nevertheless, it sets off a momentum where more and more transactions became monetized and commodified. The local villagers and committees were also able to accumulate more profit from the inflow of migrant workers and external entrepreneurs later.

35 In Chinese: 一套人马,两块牌子.

Some contingent rules can be mobilized to the rural community's benefit. For example, Beijing's municipal government has generally held an ambiguous attitude towards the migrants, seeing them both as labor force contributing to city's economic development and a potential menace to its political stability and the image of a global city. In this context, Caochangdi's existence offers an *ad hoc* solution to the urban administration, which fails to provide low-cost and legally protected housing for migrant populations working for the urban economy. The come-into-being of the informal villagers' private housing, the so-called small-property-right housing, can thus not be explained by a coherently functioning neoliberalist economic and political logic.

In the village administrators' narrative, 2007 was one of the turning points for Caochangdi's development. The Cuigezhuang area and Chaoyang district government-endorsed Caochangdi as a pilot site for experimenting with the village-based development of 'art and cultural industries,' guided by and under the Cultural and Creative Industry Development Plan revised and permitted by the Beijing municipal government (People's government of Cuigezhuang township, Chaoyang district, Beijing 2010). The endorsement from both rural and urban upper-level administrative bodies explains the empirical tendency I have observed, more plots of land were rented out to artists and developers, and the number of art institutions in Caochangdi increased rapidly since 2007.

The top-down allocation of resources to area development became especially frequent since the end of 2010 when the urbanized Chaoyang edged closer to Caochangdi. For example, the village community center, together with a township-owned management company, was set up for formalizing the property management in Chaochangdi. One can also observe various political agendas and materializations subsequently occur in Caochangdi: "converting village into community pilot project" and "rural collective property rights reform" (2011). Both were issued by the Chaoyang district's working committee, targeting at non-agricultural rural communities in its jurisdiction. The construction of new rental spaces in the southern collective farmland was carried out according to the policy framework aimed at "constructing creative and cultural industry" of Chaoyang's urban cultural industry development office. A series of environmental beautifying projects (cleaning up wire poles, distributing recycling garbage bins, and so on) were implemented in alignment with the "Beautiful Countryside" (September 06, 2018) framework imposed by the Cuigezhuang township-area office, as well as the "three new modernizations" and "constructing the second urban green belt" planning frameworks prescribed by the district's Reform and Development Office – representing Beijing's municipal government. Judging by the area office's financial report, these 'urban' *or* 'rural agendas' are assigned with corresponding 'urban' or 'rural' fiscal supports, executed by the Cuigezhuang township-area office together with the Caochangdi village administration. According to Liu et al. (2013),

Caochangdi village collective's revenue has become more transparent. This revenue was partly (around 70%) spent on maintaining the rural collective's communal infrastructure, such as water, heating, and gas pipes, and partly (30%) shared among the registered rural community members in the form of an annual bonus.

The political-economic conceptual framework brings the relative positionalities of Caochangdi's stakeholders in the urban-rural administrative, land-use and welfare systems into the foreground, which are causally related to how these actors collaborate in space-time and under various types of rules and material resources. An informal economic alliance is visible. The village administrative committee, in charge of the rural community's collective revenue, ally with the migrant workers and art and non-art entrepreneurs who pay them direct rent. Particularly, the scaled enterprises (mostly galleries) are deemed as an economic alliance, as they contribute to the township's revenue through paying management fees. Following the pathways of economic capital's circulation and accumulation, we can define a relative totality of quasi-rural Caochangdi.

Politically speaking, Caochangdi is officially constituted by the village committee, registered local villagers and their rural land, housing and shared public asset. The Cuigezhuang township-area urban administrative issue administrative rules and allocate resources to Caochangdi village committee, to ensure the rural villagers' economic sustenance and political stability in the short term. In the long term, it aims for Caochangdi's overall integration into the urban political system. It means replacing the rural community committee with an urban neighborhood administration under the rule of Beijing-Chaoyang administration. The rural land tenure will be replaced with state-owned land tenure and the chaotic rural spatial image with a neat and tidy urban one. In other words, the Beijing-Chaoyang government is in charge of Caochangdi's land requisition and organizational integration. From a political perspective, despite migrant workers' and enterprises' contribution to the Caochangdi rural community's informal and formal economy – through sales, added value tax, and corporate income taxations – its significance is not comparable to their political alliance.

Caochangdi, just like many VIC located in suburban Beijing, its political-economic position has shifted slowly from rural to urban. Its rural community members and administration subject to access more and more urban resources, aesthetics, and regulatory norms. Despite the growing amount of accumulated wealth, the village community and its administrative committee has less autonomy in drafting their own decisions. The direct manifestation is that the rampant private building practice comes to a hold. More and more beautifying projects are initiated, with the funding directed from the upper-level area-township government. I would thereby argue, in the context of a top-down plan of integrating Caochangdi's rural community and land in urban political-economic systems, Caochangdi rural community's disjunct political and economic positions, coincide with the observable conflictions

between their own modernization narratives in the political sense and the practices of exploitation rural land and migrant workers' income in the economic sense.

In short, when reading Caochangdi's transformation through a political-economic lens, I could identify and code the following *demi-regularities*. The socialist regime had left Caochangdi with a community-based social organization and a collective land tenure structure. Its members are entitled to mobilize their own homestead and a share of the capital earned from the shared farmland. The rural community's *mode of production* has noticeably transformed from agricultural to industrial (with initial internal labor force and later migrant workers) and services (run by local villagers). The stakeholders' *means of production* have also changed drastically. The local villagers' extensive expansion of informal housing can be read as private capital accumulation, extracted from the migrant workers' and tenants' surplus value. The renting of arable land to art and non-art entrepreneurs helps the rural community accumulate economic capital. I would argue that the Caochangdi rural community's private and collective economic capital is accumulated by appropriating their *rural political status*. However, as the top-down plan integrates rural communities and their land into the urban system, the rural community's sustenance relies more and more on the grants allocated from the urban administration. In this context, the modes of production and materialization of space in Caochangdi result from stakeholding actors' juggling between two different principles of capital accumulation in the urban and rural systems.

To sum up, the political-economic framework of analyzing space production proposed by Harvey has brought several groups of actors' political and economic positionalities, their means and practices of value production, transformation, capital circulation and accumulation to the foreground. The law of accumulation has clearly explained the process whereby the local rural community valorizes their collectively owned farmland, industrial infrastructures, and their own private housing. However, Caochangdi's stakeholders' political-economic agency also changes, as their positionality in the urban-rural system change. Suppose these urban-rural political-economic fragmentations were not there, a more radical 'exploitative' mode of development would occur in Caochangdi, which already occurred in its immediate, surrounding area. Nevertheless, these co-existing and fragmented political-economic logics have manifested as variegated commercial and industrial practices and a diverse landscape of dense urban-rural settlements and public infrastructures. As a particular case with historical details, the law of accumulation cannot fully explain the material form of Caochangdi co-produced by actors from near and far.

5.5.2 The rhythms of life in Caochangdi

The political-economic lens has left some gaps capturing the underlying causes of social actors' conflicting modes of perceptions and patterned practices. It also fails to attend to the stakeholders whose agencies are marginalized in the formal political-economic frameworks. To fill these gaps, in this section, I adopt the perspective of everyday space constitution from Löw and the non-representational theory from Thrift. Before I start my analysis, I would like to invite you to take another look at the village streetscapes (see fig.15, images to the left). Despite the mediation of the photo, you might still sense the discrepant atmosphere on the northern and southern sides of Caochangdi.

You may have noticed the labyrinthine narrow streets on the northern side. Houses are towering four or five stories high on either side, hardly allowing sunlight to reach in. The ground floor shopfronts offer all one needs to sustain a low-budget and fulfilling lifestyle. There are numerous restaurants, 24-hour supermarkets, pharmacies, post offices, laundry, internet cafes, electronics services, barbershops, dentists and public baths. From the second floors up, these buildings are filled with rooms for rent. Some are equipped with heating, air conditioners, individual bathrooms and kitchens, while most are only plain simple rooms. Amidst all of these, one can also find 'hipster' restaurants and artist-run cafes, mixing in in an unremarkable manner.

On the southern side, the streets are much broader and noticeably less lively (see fig. 15, images to the right). On the sides are mostly factory and warehouse structures that are adapted by creative communities and related service-providing companies. These architectural compounds are built of the same material as most of the private housings in the north. One can notice, unlike their pragmatic neighbors, they display an intentional, minimalistic aesthetics. Among them, the 'red courtyard' is the most well-known art block and occupied primarily by distinguished art institutions. The 'grey courtyard' is another big block, consists primarily of artist studios. Both are designed by internationally famous artist and architect Ai Weiwei, who has also set up his own home and studio in the village. In total, Caochangdi is home to 21 galleries, seven not-for-profit art institutions, 28 listed studios hosting established artists, and 43 art and design-related enterprises[36].

On any ordinary day, anyone can notice the vastly different rhythms of life occurring in Caochangdi. People who live in the northern part of the village rush out to their workplaces in the city early in the morning. The breakfast stands accommodate customers before 6 a.m. in the summertime, as many tenants in Caochangdi need to travel one to two hours by public transport to their workplace in town.

36 The number of active operating art institutions in Caochangdi always fluctuate. This calculation was done by the author in July 2014.

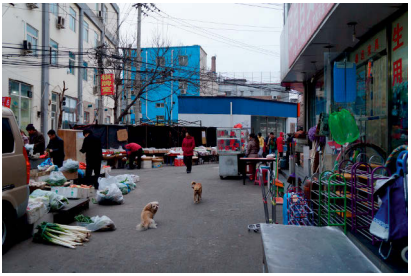
Around 9 a.m., the streets in the north slowly calm down. The street vendors disappear, and the breakfast stands start to fold away their tables and chairs. Meanwhile, on the southern side of the village, the day has not yet started. Most art institutions open from Tuesday to Sunday, from 10-11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Shortly after 10 a.m., the murmurs slowly begin in the village's southern part: galleries start to open. Street vendors operating on tricycles shift their frontier to the street that sits in-between the residential area and the 'industrial' site, as they refer to it (see fig. 16 images to the right). The art institutions' buildings are usually very spacious, occupying between 400 to 1200 square meters of floor area. The spaciousness is magnified in my perception as they are operated by very few staff, typically between three and five. Walking around these art spaces, if you don't peek through the office doors, you will find nobody in the exhibition halls. During the day, local villagers roam around the village streets, walking their dogs, greeting their neighbors, and running their daily errands. They rarely take the smaller pathways between the galleries and studios. The pathways and the small open space within the red compound – a block of art institutions – appears usually deserted from Tuesday to Friday afternoon. They only get filled from Friday evenings till Sunday evenings, when artist talks, book launches, exhibition openings, and screenings take place.

At times, the daily life rhythms change at remarkable speed and frequency in Chaochangdi. During Caochangdi art festivals, art crowds from worldwide fill up large and small alleys, making their presence known by their moving bodies, music, and unexpected spatial appropriation practices (broadcasting, photographing, videoing etc.). At other times, during the 'two meetings[37],' for instance, the village streetscape becomes instantly pristine: all vendors and small businesses are notified that they must close, and the practices of artists are surveilled more stringently. Some changes affect the daily life of all social groups in Caochangdi, some only partially. In section 5.5.2, I redescribe two entangled forms of these rhythms. I call the first event 'drifting co-existence,' referring to the processes when different social and material entities come together in Caochangdi as a horizontally integrated, provisional whole. I call the second event 'obscure turbulence,' referring to the scenarios in which strict, incoherent and fragmented rules are imposed by external authoritarian actors. The first group of events describes the process when heterogeneous social and material bodies come together in Caochangdi, establish relations. The forms of relations get increasingly stable over time without any party monopolizing an overall ordering principle. The second group of events showcases how disruptions affect the existing composition. I identify the demi-regularities regarding the *patterns of perception* from different acting social groups in Caochangdi,

37 In Chinese, Lianghui (两会).The term is used by the mass media and in everyday conversation as a reference to the annual plenary sessions of the national or local People's Congress and the national or local committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.

and *the forms of relations* inherent to, and emergent from, interactions among disparate social actor groups, in these two orientation processes.

Figure 15, Life rhythms observed in different areas and at different times in Caochangdi. On the left, from top to bottom: Street views in the northern residential side, in the regular mornings and late afternoons, at time of political inspection (during the 'two conferences'). On the right, from top to bottom: Street views outside art spaces, in regular mornings and afternoons; inside the red courtyard during exhibition openings. (Photo by Xiaoxue Gao, 2015.10-2019.3, Caochangdi, Beijing, China)



5.5.3 Multi-centered co-existence: space constitution at regular times

Caochangdi constituted by villagers and migrants

At about the end of 2013, I passed by a construction site where a local rural family was extending their private house. I got a chat with the head of contractor on-site, asked about the project's progress. He explained:

> Our clients, a local family, decided to extend their three-story house to five stories. They believe Caochangdi will not get *chaiqian*[38] (demolished) any time soon. After completion, there would be thirty-some more rooms available for rent! The new rooms are equipped with independent bathrooms, which was not possible with the old structure. The construction will take four months in total, and now there is just one more month ahead of us. The interior design and facility installations would probably take another one to two months, but the whole project could be finished before the Lunar New Year. […] Design? No […] we do not need that since it is a standard project. We have years of experience in building housing of this kind here in Caochangdi and other villages. We plan in our minds. The price […] um […] it is not expensive […] Our client drops by very often to check the progress and discuss the preferred material and their prices with us as the project proceeds. They didn't have enough money to build a taller house a few years ago. Now they just seek the chance […] (interview CVC3, translation and ellipsis added).

The contractor's narrative shows how hastily and proficiently self-built residential buildings come into being in Caochangdi. In 2014, I could find no vacant land or scaled courtyard housings left for further densification. The village's physical space was saturated. After chatting with a few locals, I recognized three incidents, which were perceived as crucial triggers for the frenzy construction between 2007 and 2010. The first event was that, the township-area office re-positioned Caochangdi as a creative industry tourism-oriented village. The villagers understood that the township administrators approved and encouraged them to lease land further and attract investment in the creative and cultural industry. They reacted thereby by building more rental rooms to accommodate the expected influx of art entrepreneurs, working on their collectively owned farmland. The second event being taken seriously by the local villagers was the release and enforcement of the *National Property Law* by the national congress – the highest legislative body – in 2007. The new law acknowledges villagers' rural land-use rights as quasi property rights. To utilize their new rights, villagers reacted by expanding their private housings on homestead land. Finally, every local in the village sensed the momentum of growth – in the wake of the upcoming Beijing Olympic Games in

38 Chaiqian (拆迁).

2008 (the third event) – more people move into the city and search for places to stay. In this context, of course, many jumped at the chance to build more and lease more.

Regardless, between 2007 and 2016, Caochangdi is also co-articulated and constructed by the local villagers, migrants, and members of the art community in the mundane everyday scenarios, in a relatively uninterrupted manner. As I have characterized in 5.5.1, these three main social groups have disparate political-economic backgrounds. In light of the everyday constitution of space, I redescribe their everyday interactions to see if and how their dispositional perceptual habits shape their practices and condition their interactions with one another in close physical vicinity. I begin by redescribing the everyday interactions carried out by local villagers and migrant workers.

These incidences, as mentioned earlier, were organized and announced more or less abruptly by different levels of administrations. On the ground, the local villagers and village committee were not able to anticipate the timing of their arrival, grasp the magnitude of new rules and resources, nor fully comprehend the subsequent impacts on their daily lives. Nevertheless, they responded agilely when strong signals reached them, actualized whatever was practically possible and made sense to them. I was repetitively told about the importance of following the *momentum*, do what your peers do: "some early movers have torn down their old houses and built three-story housing, and nothing happened. More and more families just imitated this, including me" (Interview CVC4). The villagers see their own community members and even rural villagers from the nearby area as good references. The underlying perceptual logic is that, they share similar social-economic conditions. Furthermore, if something goes wrong, the law cannot punish everyone when they are all offenders.

Gradually, more migrants have noticed the increasing amount of available housing supply in Caochangdi. The title of Ray and Mangurian's (2009) book *Caochangdi, Beijing Inside Out: Farmers, Floaters, Taxi Drivers, Artists, and the International Art Mob Challenge and Remake the City*, has aptly captured the heterogeneous social backgrounds of the migrants living and working in Caochangdi. The migrants I talked to – who make their living through informal contracts in VIC or city center – perceive the booming economy in Beijing and the low living expenses in Caochangdi as their opportunity. They may get twice or three times more salary for the same type of job compared to the same posts in their hometowns. Many are young, in their twenties, who hope to seize the opportunities to improve their quality of life. Some are elders in their late 40s or 50s, whose children are studying at home, they want to make extra money to support their family members. They both do not plan to stay longer, let alone settle down in Beijing or Caochangdi. They are aware of the temporal nature of their work status and their restricted

rights to housing quotas in the city. They also live without full access to local public welfare like medical services.

My interviews conducted between 2013 and 2015 confirmed what Ray and Mangurian called 'chain migration,' "the mechanism by which rural residents from the same village make a move to a large urban area, usually in search of work and better opportunities, aided by previous immigrants from their village" (2009, 124). Yet, I also met some actors who enter Caochangdi through contingent social relations, like friends on Douban[39] website, in addition to pre-existing private social connections, such as extended family relations, *laoxiang* (fellow man), colleague, or alumni relations. For example, Ms. Shen was around 50-year-old, working as a cleaning lady in an art institution. She first settled in Caochangdi alone and found her first provisional job by replying to a call on a poster. Her husband relocated to Caochangdi after her, works as an informal and sometimes Didi[40] taxi driver. Following him, his younger brother relocated to Caochangdi subsequently. The two brothers run a shared taxi business, take day/night shifts and pick up people travelling to and from Caochangdi. They find their business lucrative, as the lack of access to metro stations close to Caochangdi makes informal taxis a necessity, Shen explained. Particularly, when they take regulars from the village, they run 'black' and pay no money to the third party.

Most social actors carry out their lives in the village at regular times within their small circle of peers, like Ms. Shen, who does not know her neighboring tenants, as "they are mostly young people." At the same time, they are aware of each other's practical needs, willing to connect with other distant acquaintances. A demi-regularity is that 'the practice of renting' constitutes the very shared experience among actors in Caochangdi. Through *renting*, they build weak ties with one another. Shen suggested that she has a good relationship with her landlord, who is of a similar age. They chat and help each other out with daily chores (Interview MR1CS). Another example is Ms. Chen, who worked as a gallery intern. Chen told me that she got her room from her colleague, who quit her position shortly before. Her rental room was located in a four-story building in decent condition, comparatively spacious (22 sqm.). It is heated, with a single bathroom. In her building, she recognized two other art graduates – two young men and a couple of white-collar workers from an animation production company in the village. Through everyday encounters, Chen knew her neighbors' faces, but not much more, as "tenants move very often in Caochangdi" (Interview G3CJ).

39 Douban (豆瓣) is an interest-based social networking platform, whose main users are white collar urbanites and university students. Actors can form social groups under their music, film or lifestyles they share.

40 Didi taxi is a service provided by independent drivers via Didi platform. Its concept is similar to Uber.

Finding a basic room in Caochangdi does not require much money, time nor bureaucracy. In Jan 2019, the monthly rent for a single room around 20sq meters cost around 1600 RMB in Caochangdi, half the average price in the nearby formal 'urban' residential buildings. My informants recalled the procedure as simple as, calling the landlord by the number written on the poster, who then most likely comes downstairs immediately and shows one the available room. When a tenant is satisfied with the price and living amenities on offer, a one-month rental contract could be agreed upon within an hour. I often heard things like: "the landlord prefers to have us young artists or white-collar workers as tenants because we pay our rent regularly. They see us as trustworthy" (Interview G3CJ). However, stories about landlords revoking the contract clauses were common, especially when "tenants from nearby art villages undergo eviction. The rent in Caochangdi would get raised immediately. One has to choose between acceptance or leaving" (Interview EC1ST). Hence, for newcomers, it is not difficult to plug into and reinforce Caochangdi's weak social-material ties through finding temporary accommodation or informal jobs. In the context of highly dynamic VIC, social actors accepted the norm of reaching short-term solutions via mediated weak ties. These weak relations are perceived external, hence often not do sustain in a network of flexibility. The collaborating social actors re-evaluate the quality of their relationality (i.e., with an informal landlord) when new actionable elements (a regulator/higher bidder) enter the network. The everyday interactions across these social groups constitute thereby a network of heterogeneous entities connected with *relations of exteriority*.

The missed opportunity referred by the contractor above was an abrupt order issued by the Chaoyang district government. It was propagated through the village committee to all inhabitants in Caochangdi, about Caochangdi's demolition in 2011. This notice claims that Caochangdi area fell into the planned land-bank conceived by the Chaoyang district administration. Concerning 'public interests,' Caochangdi area is requested to be converted to urban land to fulfill the greening and development plans of the municipality. The villagers could be compensated with resettlement apartments elsewhere and/or monetary compensations. Judging by my local villager interviewees, they interpreted the notice as a positive opportunity to improve their economic status. With the demolition order in sight, between 2009 and early 2011, they built more at faster speeds. They took similar land-retrieval and demolition cases in other VIC in Chaoyang district as reference and motivation. From their perception, the more housing square meters they own, the more money or apartment compensation they could later obtain (Interview CVC4).

The 'responsive construction' carried out by the villagers, the 'responsive renting, job-seeking and socializing' carried out by the tenants can be identified as pre-reflective practices. They are enacted as the first-order commentaries, subjected to

a sense of immediate opportunity and risk. I call it a shared risk-driven perceptual pattern. I would argue, it is condemned by local villagers, migrant workers, and freelancing artists' long-term deprived political and economic agency in urban-rural systems and access to transparent information. I would also argue, the coming together of the local villagers, migrant population, and art community during regular times was, in some way, a result of shared perceptions of (substantially different) risks. For the most part, the actors' daily practices *drift* with the peers they recognize situated in similar social-economic scenarios. The overwhelming sense of risk makes it harder for anyone to form a clear and coherent orientation. Drifting together, their personal identities are absent.

I would not argue for a common frame of meaning consciously shared among these heterogenous social groups. In my interviews, I could barely recognize any villager who could recall the names of the galleries or the iconic artists living in Caochangdi. As indicated, the social backgrounds of the actor groups in Caochangdi vary significantly, so are the frameworks of meaning applied to construct their everyday space. In terms of 'resources,' the material distribution across the social groups is *vertically* disintegrated, which hinders the discrete social groups from perceiving each other as part of an interest-sharing totality. Concretely speaking, Caochangdi's rural public infrastructure is mostly funded by the rent collected from non-local entrepreneurs and art community. Yet, for the individual local villagers, such a connection is not easily perceivable. Since 2011, the processes in which the land rental revenue materialized into the public facilities have become *more vertically mediated*. The value-added tax generated in trading artworks and other relevant businesses in the village is firstly channeled to the Cuigezhuang county[41] tax bureau. The redistribution then takes place on the municipal level in the form of project-based financial transfer payments and rural social welfare. Furthermore, even rent is anonymized in the long chains of transactions between the gallery representative and developer, between developer and village committee, village committee and the individual villager. This long chain of interactions makes the transaction functional, mediated and impersonal. The question of meaning would only occur when conflicts arise. Moreover, for the local villagers, the meaning of rents is immediately attributed by the village committee as a communal bonus, further strengthening the perceived hierarchy between them.

During my stay in Caochangdi, I have also observed new intersectoral practices. It includes artists operating art cafes, vendors at the farmer's market, and village leaders patronizing contemporary artists. These practices, are although transient, allude to horizontally integrated parts of Caochangdi. A concrete example is that

41 Some galleries registered elsewhere in Beijing city, while physically locate in Caochangdi village. In this case, they pay tax to the jurisdiction of registration than location.

when exhibition openings took place in galleries on Saturdays, villagers, migrants, and their children living in the village would be the first to arrive. Over time, these non-art inhabitants of Caochangdi have learned about free pastries and drinks served at the art events. They feel happy to have a taste but still intimidated to interact with the art community. Nevertheless, the staff at the art institutions, having their neighbors' visits in mind, would put out some snacks before the art community's arrival.

By and large, divergent social actors' day-to-day interactions unfold through *weak* but *horizontal ties* based on shared perceptions of risk, practical needs and opportunities, i.e., informal contractual ties, provisional business cooperation. One can also notice traces of sympathy. In the everyday scenarios, due to the lack of transparent and integrative communication structure, these actors although co-constitute Caochangdi on a daily basis but fail to discern the actual meaning structure that underscores the others' practices. Yet, these risk-averting, practical and opportunistic practices come together in multi-linear events, give form to rhythmic placements among heterogenous social bodies and material entities (see fig. 15) without a spoken plan. These cross-group interactions materialize into more or less transient placement, like short-term rental rooms, rotating usage of streets, provisional parking places, makeshift posters, and external staircases as the exclusive entrance. These intricate changes make Caochangdi a dynamic and static space at the same time.

Caochangdi constituted by the art community

Now, I turn to redescribe the art community's routinary perceptions, practices, and ways in which they relate to other social bodies and goods in Caochangdi, both symbolically and materially. All my informants repeated the narrative: Caochangdi as an art village began from the relocation of Ai Weiwei's studio in 1999. Ai rented out a piece of land from the village committee, conceptualized and built his studio there. Later, together with partners called Hans van Dijk and Frank Uytterhaegen, he found the first gallery in Caochangdi, named CAAW. After the relocation of Ai's studio and gallery, a resourceful local villager called Sun leased a few plots of land from the village committee in 2001. Sun constructed several factory and warehouse-like structures while having no concrete investors or businesses in mind. Later, a few artists and gallerists, socially connected with Ai, responded to Sun's call and rented and transformed those structures into studios and galleries.

As indicated, the main gallery block in Caochangdi is called the 'red courtyard.' A similar story was told about the origin of this block. Through the mediation of Ai, an artist-entrepreneur named Mao obtained a 20-year lease contract from the village committee for several plots of vacant land. Mao planned to build spaces for art institutions and commissioned Ai to design them (Wang 2012, 28). The design

was quickly done, consists of reasonably simple structures and the cheapest local material – brick and concrete. In his book *Fake Design in the Village (2008)*, Ai has documented his own studio's building process. This 400 square meter space was constructed in 1999 by a team of local construction workers in 100 days, costing just 100,000 RMB[42] . Although I wasn't able to obtain an updated cost of building in Caochangdi during my field trips between 2013 and 2017, I have observed the same building structure, material, the contractor team are still at work. The buildings are constructed at equally fast speeds. Therefore, I could infer the costs remain cheap, especially in comparison to the costs of land price and construction in urban Beijing.

Figure 16 The bricklayers at work, constructing the red brick galleries in the red courtyard, March 19, 2007. (Photo from Eduard Kögel, ed. Ai Weiwei Beijing. Fake Design in the Village. Berlin, Germany: AedesLand. 2008, 54)

The subsequent storyline shared by the art community is, artist individuals transformed those pre-existing abandoned factory building structures into art spaces. They acquired access to the buildings mostly through sub-letting from

42 According to the exchange rate (1: 8.28) between USD and RMB in 1999, issued on the Statistical Monthly by UN, 100,000 RMB equals to 12077 USD in 1999. Source of reference in Chinese can be found on the website of national statistical bureau, http://www.stats.gov.cn/ztjc/ztsj/gjsj/2000/200201/t20020111_50742.html

local villagers (who rent from the village committee) or previous entrepreneurs (Interview EC1ST). The tenant turnover in Caochangdi was high, the frequency correlated with the global economic crisis. Non-Chinese galleries often react faster in retrieving their financial investments. Nevertheless, the buildings are constantly re-filled by new aspiring gallery and off-spaces owners through second-hand or third-hand leases. I confirmed this narrative. In early 2016, I found that only 12 out of 28 art institutions sustained more than five years of operation in Chaochangdi. The remaining ones are the most prestigious galleries and art institutions in China's contemporary artworld.

Despite distinct storylines told and the stakeholders involved, the art community follows a similar principle in structuring their dwelling and constructing practices in Caochangdi as with the villagers. Their practices can also be characterized as a fast *reaction* to changes (increasing risks, profits) in the art market and *drift* with the tide co-created by their peer groups. Most art institutions came to Caochangdi between 2005 and 2007, when China's art market was thriving (Interview EC2YB). Prestigious international galleries chased the opportunities in the thriving art market from global cities like London and New York to the art villages in Beijing's suburbs. The art spaces in Caochangdi were not erected according to a collectively conceptualized plan but constructed gradually, in batches, by many actors. Nevertheless, the placement of the art institutions in Caochangdi was assembled by a few well-connected actors in the center of this scene. The red and grey courtyards designed by Ai Weiwei were mostly rented to a small group of established art institutions and individuals. These buildings offered perfect solutions to the gallerists and directors who seek spacious and affordable space for exhibitions and want to remain close to the city's expensive art neighborhoods in Chaoyang-Wangjing area. The magnetic elements include the 798-art district, the art academy CAFA the Liquor factory art zone, art villages named Heiqiao, Huantie, Jinzhan 008…

When asking these actors why choosing Caochangdi, I got two common answers: "to know the people" and "ride the wave/momentum[43]."

> Back then, the rent rose extremely fast in the 798-art district. We saw more and more artists and institutions moving to Caochangdi. We sensed a positive momentum in Caochangdi. Also, considering it is very close to the ring road and airport, we relocated here (Interview CR1LJ).
>
> I knew Ai Weiwei when he was living in New York, and we had already collaborated in our New York space in early 2006. Late that year, when I visited him here (Caochangdi) in his studio, he suggested that I should open a new space in Beijing […] He took me to the site, and it was still full of trash […] I thought …hmm …. But

43 Jieli (借力) or Jieshi (借势).

> next year in February, all the trash was gone, and I could easily envision a promising cool gallery space based on the already built-up foundations. This space here allows us to experiment with big group exhibitions in Beijing. We can gather the feedback there from the market in Beijing, and we can then (better) select the group to exhibit in NY (Interview G1MC).

More concretely, *momentum* refers to the positive *atmosphere* exuberate from the agglomeration of established art individuals and institutions in Caochangdi who possess rich social, economic, and cultural capitals. A plurality of individuals, social and material resources come into relationalities around multiple centers (key figures and institutions). The for-profit art institutions in Caochangdi share the cohering principle of *'profitability.'* Due to the ambiguous nature of 'collectability' in the contemporary artworks, sharing client resources within close professional networks is at the core of the gallery's business operation. One of my tasks as a gallery intern was to guide distinguished collectors from various parts of the world in Caochangdi, walking around the institutions and studios that share tight *guanxi* with my employer. Moreover, artworks are material whose devil lies in the visual details. The art institutions' physical closeness is also crucial for collectors to see, feel, and compare the pieces. I was told that "global art collectors and critics have very tight schedules in each city, some of them just half a day in town. Once they are in Caochangdi, of course, we shall let them have a quick look at what is presented in our friends' spaces" (Interview CR3YM).

Placements of art communal members centered around 'fun' and 'artistic knowledge' are also common in Caochangdi. From year to year, the art community, especially the non-for-profit ones and the freelancing individuals in Caochangdi come together as temporary collectives in the forms of festivals, summer camps or pop-up parties. The Caochangdi Art Festival in 2012 was initiated by very few prestigious non-for-profit art institutions. It was instead organized in a decentralized and voluntary manner, funded by crowdsourcing. Each participating institution was invited to open their doors and plan their exhibitions independently while keeping in line with the festival's timetable. The event was crowdfunded so that each participating gallery is asked to contribute only a small amount (5000 RMB, around 625 Euros) and non-for-profit art spaces for just half of this price. The fund was raised just to cover the shared publicity material, while all the administrative work was voluntary. For the first time, Caochangdi's art institutions were represented together as a collective. (Interview CR1LJ).

Such horizontally integrated organization and collaboration exist mostly transiently, such as during the Beijing design week (fig. 17 to the bottom) when a shared other (audiences) was in sight. On regular days, most art spaces schedule their programs independently. Caochangdi is in not short of spontaneous parties (fig. 18), related or unrelated to exhibitions or businesses. The principle is that friend's

friend is another friend. Yet, institutionalized associations like workers' unions or tenant's associations do not exist in Caochangdi. Despite stronger ties (formal and informal, external and internal) exist among many art-related individuals and institutions, the multi-centered art community in Caochangdi as a whole cannot be considered as an institutionalized community form.

Figure 17 Top: Representation of the art institutions in Caochangdi as a collective during the Caochangdi Art Festival (2012). Down: Representation of Caochangdi as 'community' during Beijing Design Week (2014). (Illustration retrieved in October 2017, from http://2017.bjdw.org/bjdws/FHC/FHC201719.html)

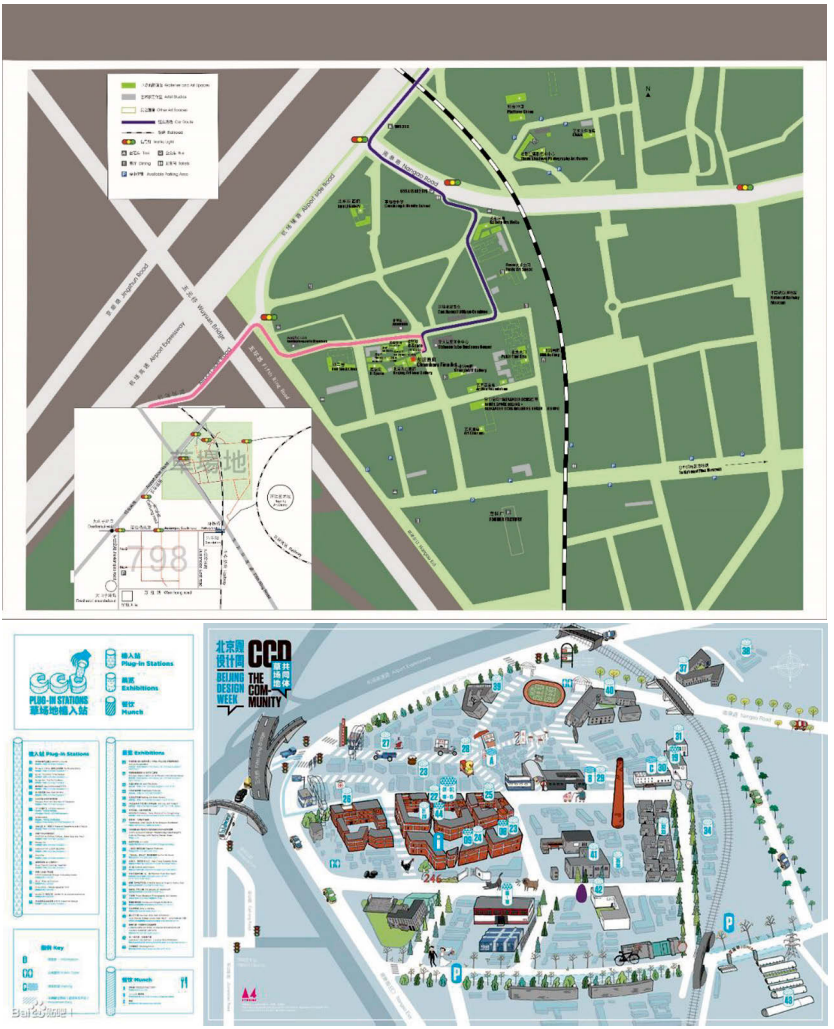


Figure 18: A scene from regular weekend party organized by artists living and working in Iowa studio compound in Caochangdi village. It opens to spontaneous guests. (Photo courtesy: artist Zhang Ruo and Zeng Yilan, Caochangdi, Beijing, China)

5.5.4 Obscure turbulence: re-assembling at disruptive times

I have so far redescribed how social groups carry out their daily lives in routines and interact with one another in Caochangdi through flat, weak, and mediated social ties during regular times. These practices shape the multi-centered configurations of the social and material bodies in Caochangdi during uneventful periods. By eventful, I mean particularly the times when external authorities challenge the legal status of land and housing uses. Informal land uses and rental practices in Caochangdi, as in all the other VIC, are deemed as a potential landmine by all stakeholders. It is so powerful that, once triggered, can overthrow the enduring symbiotic social-material co-existences between the art and non-artworld observable in Caochangdi. One gallerist from the red courtyard told me that despite having a rental contract with the developer – a 15-year written lease contract – in black

on white, he would not exclude the possibility of being evicted overnight: "the demolition order was like the story of the wolf coming from Aesop. No one knows when the actual wolf is coming or even who the actual wolf is" (Interview G1LC). Re-describing and analyzing the events of movements and re-assemblage of the art and non-artworld in such times are the goals of this section. I opt for non-representational theory (by Thrift), as the concept of assemblage centers on the ongoing processes of forming associations among heterogenous social entities.

As mentioned, around August 2009, one turbulent event occurred in Caochangdi: all villagers and tenants received a printed notice from the township-area administration on behalf of the Chaoyang district administrations. The township representatives would take action to register and measure the existing properties in Caochangdi in short due. According to my informants, the art community in Caochangdi presumed, this order prepares for the villagers' relocation and compensation. They learned from previous cases that demolition come shortly after. Yet, nothing happed in the subsequent months. In April 2010, the art community was further noticed by Caochangdi's village committee, that all buildings in the area would be demolished in a short-term period. An exact deadline remains to be announced. A colleague who experienced this event recalled that "the second order of eviction came from the village committee. It sounded more concrete than the first one, and we have all believed it. The survey company came and measured the villagers' homestead and housing. They (local villagers) actively supported the demolition and aspired for getting rich through high compensation fees" (Interview IA6ZR). In the eyes of the art community, the village committee, together with the villagers, have betrayed their rental contracts and upheld the demolition order. The ambiguous legal prerequisites of renting in VIC left the art community in a disadvantaged position to defend their contract. The art community also believed that the village committee has some authority behind such a decision. If the demolition order got enacted, the rental contracts that bind artists, founders of institutions, and the village committee together would be immediately invalidated.

The demolition did not occur in 2010. I was intrigued to understand the full threads in this event regarding what has happened in resolving this turbulence. What has spared Caochangdi from the tragedy of destruction? As I proceeded with my interviews, I realized that different groups had very distinct reasoning based on what they knew from their relative positionality. They enacted actions and reformed alliances based on their extrapolations of how the authority or the majority would associate and act. One villager informant stated that she and her family were entirely sure about the execution of the demolition order, as it had already oc-

curred in several nearby villages[44] in Chaoyang district. Before executing the order, a resettlement plan had to be settled that satisfied the expectations of all stakeholders. She recalled, some villagers were unsatisfied with the uniform compensation plan offered by the administrators and developers due to the size and quality difference of their properties. These villagers assumed that their peers would fight together on this position, especially the village leaders. The villagers were split into two camps. My informant addressed, "I did not care about what the others want; for this house we have here, I need four more resettlement flats or an equal amount of monetary compensation for my family" (ibid.). However, this appeal was eventually left ignored. Another informant told me, the village committee reported later that the district administration gave up on Caochangdi due to its meager size and problematic electricity infrastructure. These factors made the area unappealing to developers (interview CVC4).

On the other hand, a curator informant told me an entirely different story. According to him, the happy ending was hard-won through a joint effort among the art community residing in Caochangdi and their strategic alliances with higher-level administrators.

> Rongrong, the Caochangdi art festival's core organizer, has some connections with those artist deputies participating in Beijing's Congress meeting. They have helped to draft a petition letter with all the signatures from the art community here in Caochangdi. Both the individuals and institutions showed real solidarity in standing for our spaces. Many friends who work in the media have also reported on this incident. They convey their sympathies to the artists while criticizing the short-sightedness of the government. I also heard that some established artists pulled some strings with people working in the ministry for culture. That is how the district politicians issued an exception order to cease their action […] (Interview CDA4C, translation added)

The stories told by the villagers, the artists and the curator contradict each other in the empirical domain. Yet, according to CR's stratified ontology, they might all be true, according to the events they have experienced. These narratives help to reveal the underlying plural generative mechanisms and their interactions transforming the artworld in Caochangdi. In my field trip, I was often surprised by the artists and gallerists' lack of knowledge about their renting contracts' legal status and the participating parties' legal liabilities. The village committee, the immediate and primary landlord, did not disclose all legal risks to the art community and other

44 According to the report on New Beijing Daily, by the end of 2011, 9 villages (de facto VIC) located at the urban-rural interface in Beijing Chaoyang are to be demolished. In total 4 square km^2 of collectively owned rural land are reclaimed, and repurposed for village resettlement, urban green belt, and road and industrial constructions (Tang, January 13, 2011).

migrants. Moreover, the art entrepreneurs and individuals generally have no idea about the plural political bodies and their fragmented administrative agendas regarding the development of Caochangdi. Even when the contract is declared legally sound, the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Land and Resources's higher administrative decision-making power (over township and village administration) can make the final decision, the land reclamation invincible.

Confronted with two distinctive explanatory narratives from my interviewees, I decided to triangulate the process by requesting interviews with the village committee. However, my requests were rejected. Nonetheless, the reports from the Caochangdi administrative committee's homepage – a website run by the village committee – shed new light on what might have (also) happened. Several reports were released under the *lingdao shicha*[45] (leaders' visits) in March 2010 – three weeks before the eviction order was distributed. One news piece reported that Caochangdi village leaders had accompanied the politicians from Chaoyang district on their inspecting trip to research the development of cultural and creative industries in Caochangdi village. The village leaders proudly presented the art institutions as their achievements to the township and Chaoyang district-level politicians. The reports implied strongly that the district politician was impressed by the flourishing creative& cultural industrial scene in Caochangdi. Credit was given to the village committee for their support to the art community and entrepreneurs. *If* these reports represented the village committee's real political-economic motivation, it is incoherent with that known by both the villagers and the artist community.

Having no chance to access the full communication processes among all stakeholders, such as correspondents among the township area office, district administration, and politicians from the ministry of culture, I have to admit that I cannot reconstruct or represent the full picture of the events in the actual domain. In line with the spirit of non-representational theory, representations are highly likely to be deceitful in this case. To me, it is neither a theoretical nor empirical necessity to know whose description is closer to *the* 'truth,' as the truth might consist of plural generative mechanisms interacting with each other in this case. The ways in which heterogenous actor groups *react* and *re-associate* according to what they have experienced, believed to be real and feasible is of significant research value, as we can probe retro-ductively to find the generative mechanisms. This approach also coincides with what Ingold claims, "to perceive an object or event is to perceive what it affords" (Ingold 2011 [2000], 166).

In this case, when practically no one had the agency to access all relevant information nor engage with the entire ongoing process, all my informants have ex-

45 Lingdao shicha (领导视察). Relevant reports, see http://ccd.grwh.cn/2010/lingdaoshicha_0322/843.html.

pressed their senses of the evasive, risk-laden atmosphere that *emerged* in their experiences of the interminable events. The non-representational theory addresses the *background spatial and temporal conception* that illuminates the schemes that actors employ for interpreting and justifying their practices. I would claim, the socially divergent actors' experiences of incomprehension and disorientation have propelled the previously formed horizontal associations across social groups into a new, unexpected shape.

The issue of *affordance*, to my understanding, comes to the fore in understanding the socio-material re-associations during these events of 'obscure turbulences.' In the context of irregular and changing conditions, the symbiotic, intermediary and weak horizontal coalitions were challenged. The artworld in the Caochangdi are noticed to de-materialize hence facing de-territorialization. The social actors' instantaneous perceptions thus create responsive and practical knowledge for re-associating and re-territorializing. Their interpretations *emerge* from reactions against the contingent top-down orders. Drifting or aligning with what 'peers' do remain common, but how social groups place themselves against one another became very different. I was informed that the wealthier local villagers re-grouped with the village committee in this turbulence, associated by their interests in defending shared material possessions, the homestead, private housings, or another current 'absent' but 'possible' form of them, the 'compensated apartments.' The art community re-grouped – through the mediation of various well-known artists – with the ministry of culture, associated by their shared interests in defending studios, galleries, creative industries, art events and so forth, or more precisely, Caochangdi as a space of all these possibilities. Such rapid re-orientations and placements are not easily grasped in relation to one's habitus, conventional normalities, or principles of capital accumulation and class conflicts. As the turbulence escalates, all social groups' re-associations have willingly or unwillingly reinforced the political decision-making hierarchies and urban-rural divide. Each group resorts to an 'affordable' vertical and asymmetric social relation with actors of higher status in the political hierarchy, with whom they believed their interests are aligned. Whereas, at regular times, art community members intentionally distance themselves from the politicians, if not position themselves on the opposite side. I would claim, the art community's power-submitting practices amid the disruptions do not necessarily constitute their everyday practices. This alludes to the dynamic conflicts between a vertical urban-rural (heterophilous) and versatile horizontal (homophilous) interactions.

Another critical message the non-representational theory sends is to examine the shifting re-definitions of the parts and whole and the modes of motion occur repetitively. In late 2016, I saw a brand-new art compound standing on the south-east edge of Caochangdi. It consists of some nicely built studio spaces, greened with planting and flowers. Two gated entrances were set up, unlike the other un-

guarded 'grassroots' art spaces. I heard from one tenant, an owner of a video studio, that the compound was built by a developer, who obtained the legitimate land lease from the Cuigezhuang township-area office. He suspected that the Caochangdi art village would obtain the legal status of 'art district' from Beijing's municipality, just like 798-art district did. Just when I was about to believe him, at the end of July 2018, news of studio demolition broke out in Caochangdi once again. Eleven days later, two galleries, several studios, and a restaurant were confirmed to be the target of this round of demolition. I was not in Beijing when this event occurred but was informed by one artist who witnessed it. According to Lu, the artists had contacted the village and township offices who responded that their studios fell within the 'green zones' of the railway: "it violates the planning codes according to Beijing general planning 2016-2035" (Interview IA6ZR). The studios were categorized as unsafe structures.

Though the railway has always been there, long before any artist moves into Caochangdi, this sectoral order targets the illegal building structures and the lack of a buffer area around the green belt. It ignores the other forms of lives unfolding in Caochangdi and how such partial interventions may break the balances they have reach with other social beings and entities there. Lu mentions that the developer of this plot of land owns a valid contract with 13 remaining years of permitted land use, while tenants have valid contracts with the developer for 3-5 years of architectural use. The two poor victim artists had just finished the interior renovations one week before the arrival of the demolition order. The narratives from the victim artist are that "the developer was on the same side as the village committee. We infer that this piece of land has been sold to someone else. The developer must have been compensated already. He simply disappeared and was uncontactable after we got the demolition order" (Interview IA6ZR).

As in the previously described events, new social and material bodies come to form provisional assemblages. The third-party demolition contractors, the village security guards are recruited by the Cuigezhuang township-area office to ensure the implementation of the top-down order. They have brought the excavator, roadblocks to forming their provisional spatial assemblage. The non-inflicted art community members come to join the protest initiated by their peer victims, while journalists and curators produced news bits to expand and strengthen their provisional assemblage. Nevertheless, the demolition took only five days, or to be exact, five nights, as demolitions are carried out in the evenings. This time, the demolitions were much smaller in scale and faster in speed. The inflicted art entrepreneurs and artists failed to reach to any higher politician for help. I take this event as the epilogue to my study about Caochangdi, as the way it evolves repeats what has happened between 2010 and 2011 and many small incidences between 2012 and 2017. This shows that, for all social groups, the hierarchical and fragmented governance remains dormant or absent in their everyday perceptual and practical constitu-

tion of Caochangdi, the social and material bodies come together horizontally as a loosely structured, multi-centered, provisional whole. In the event of mighty, external interventions, the shared senses of fear and risk-aversion have triggered the perception of political hierarchy and practice of submitting to a higher authority. Another intriguing aspect is the recurrent cyclical trend whereby the totality of Caochangdi shifts from being relatively integrated to relatively disintegrated and back again.

5.5.5 Summary

To summarize, in light of the ontological-methodological link proposed in Critical Realism, I have mobilized the space of economics (by Harvey), the constitution of everyday space (by Löw) and non-representational theory (by Thrift) in this chapter, to give manifold descriptions and explanations of a complex and dynamic phenomenon, the artworld in Beijing. It is exemplified by the case of Caochangdi art village. Probing into the empirical materials retroductively, I have identified several demi-regularities regarding the changing modes of practices and associations among heterogeneous social and material bodies.

Most art historians and critics see the own history of Caochangdi as utterly unimportant: not many native Beijingers know this name and its mode of existence. Its transformation process resembles that of many villages in suburban Beijing. On the contrary, I read and analyzed Caochangdi first and foremost as a village-in-the-city, whose particular geographical, social-economic, political positionings matters to explain the artworld-constituting events occurred there. Applying the lens of political economy (by Harvey) retroductively, I have captured the rural actors' slow reposition and re-orientation in a fragmented and dynamic urban-rural system between 1990 and 2017. It is particularly due to Caochangdi local community's and land's ambiguous rural status, their changing political and economic interests/values, make the inflow of the artworld and the materialization of art spaces possible.

When applying the lens of the everyday constitution of space, I have captured, how at regular times, divergent social groups come together in Caochangdi, forming a horizontally integrated and multi-centered whole. Milieu-specific perceptions and practices are at the core of understanding the constitution of relatively homogeneous socio-material constellation. I was able to identify how milieu-specific perceptual patterns propel a social group (the art community, the migrants and local villagers) to form particular daily rhythms, alignments with in-group, outgroup members and particular materialities in Caochangdi. These constellations have porous borders, which regularly interlace with that constituted by other social groups. Across these groups, coordinated practices based on a shared pre-reflective sense of risks and profitability are also noticeable. The causal agents proposed

in Löw's conceptualization of space, the 'repetitive everyday doing' and 'habitus,' can well explain how different modes of lives appear coordinated and materialize as mosaic landscapes in Caochangdi. In addition, at both the regular and disruptive phases of Caochangdi's developments, central figures (like resourceful local developers, established artists like Ai Weiwei or Rongrong, the village leaders) play significant *mediating* roles in translating, and hence bridging the epistemic gaps across the groups. The mediators and translators facilitate the process of translation and reconciliation of the heterogeneous interpretive schemas employed by disparate social groups, who can thereby co-function in the absence of clear formulated rules and transparent multilateral coordination.

At *disruptive times*, the demi-regularities are the swift disintegration and regrouping among social actors and material entities. By adopting a weak epistemological principle from Thrift, I am propelled to ask how particular new relations appear and hold together across differences and contradictions? I have captured, when disruptions like forced evictions and demolitions occur, everyday interactions based on weak ties cease to-exist, fear, distrust, anger and duplicity emerge. New forms of vertical relationalities arise in the Caochagndi assemblage, when the distribution of agency and ordering principles are re-negotiated. Actor groups reassociate with their perceived peers and act in coordination with political authorities within their reach. In this context, undoubtedly, the agents' vastly different indoctrinated perceptual and practical schema explains to a great extent what material entities they choose to hold on to and with whom they choose to associate with. However, the introduction of new political bodies, the emergence of new hierarchical order, and the transient forms of re-orientations observable in turmoil situations, can not be well explained by 'repetitive social doings.'

It is not helpful to simply state that social actors' indoctrinated schema is fallible. Or, their outlooks or practices are always affected by contingent social factors, which are not thoroughly diagnosed or discursively penetrable to them. In this context, I have identified 'hierarchy' yields an underscoring affective and cognitive ordering principle in people's perceptions and actions. A hierarchical sensible-cognitive structure (my claims in 3.3.2) is mobilized by actors across social groups at turbulent times. It emerges only when it gets triggered. This structure is indispensable in explaining why some villagers stop collaborating with the artist and entrepreneur community, relinquish their economic values associated with private housing, homestead, and collective farmland, re-group and re-orientate with the village committee when negotiating with the urban administrators. It also explains the anomic practices of the art community. Facing top-down imposed eviction and demolition orders, they choose to ally with municipal and state ministerial authorities, who own higher political agency regarding the development orientation for Caochangdi. In each turbulent event, the actors' perceptions of, and submissions to, an asymmetrical power relation explain how such different spatial and

temporal processes are drawn together at these conjunctures and made stable. To deploy the lens of non-representational theory help me to uncover the generative mechanisms of these events on the level of affection, in relation to the nominative political-economic structures. In these events, the territorialization and re-territorialization of new social-material assemblages can be interpreted in the dynamic balance between the co-existing vertical (heterophilous: fear, reverence) and horizontal (homophilous: trust, intimacy) generative emotions. They make up the continuities and discontinuities of the artworld in Caochangdi.