



In the past ten years, the urban fabric of the city of Beijing has been transformed on a massive scale, and artists have begun to respond to these changes by producing site-specific work. To explore this issue, Art Journal invited the art historian Francesca Dal Lago to discuss space, place, and site-specificity in Beijing with four artists: Song Dong, Zhang Dali, Zhan Wang, and Wang Jianwei. This is the third in a series of conversations on aspects of contemporary Chinese art that the journal has published

See also Qian Zhijian, "Performing Bodies:

Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, and Performance Art in China" (Summer 1999) and Simon Leung with Janet A. Kaplan,

"Pseudo-Languages: A

Conversation with Wenda Gu, Xu Bing, and Jonathan Hay" (Fall 1999).

Song Dong (b. 1966, Beijing) is a conceptual artist whose work reflects

on the changes in the urban fabric of the city of Beijing;

he often employs urban space as the stage or the immediate target of his

performances and installations. Zhang Dali (b. 1963, Harbin) has

transformed urban space into a canvas for his painterly actions, which

mainly consist of small alterations created by scrawling on all types of

surfaces a now ubiquitous logo, the sprayed silhouette of his own

bald head. Zhan Wang (b. 1962, Beijing) is a sculptor

Conversation

Francesca Dal Lago

Space and Public: Site Specificity in Beijing

at the prestigious Central Academy of Fine Arts whose works create direct visual connections between past and present concepts concerning the relation between human beings and their living environments. Wang Jianwei (b. 1958, Mianyang, Sichuan) is a videomaker whose work investigates concepts of space both in the city and in the countryside and the ways in which this is constructed, assessed, and experienced by its inhabitants and administrators.

Dal Lago: I don't think in Chinese there is a term to describe the type of art that is the subject of our discussion today, which in the West is called "site-specific." This term defines a type of art that uses the environment as an element in the production of the artwork. The environment is included both formally, as the space woven into the fabric of the work, and conceptually, as its content. Site-specific art emerged in the West in part out of artists' efforts to remove their work from traditional exhibition spaces as a way of escaping the ideological connotations inherently conveyed from the institution to the work. This type of intervention often uncovers the historical or political characteristics of the site and exposes them through the work. I would like to discuss two sets of issues with you today. One pertains to the formal language of site specificity and how a work establishes a strong physical connection to its environment. The other relates to your own experiences living in a particular place--in this case, Beijing in the 1990s--and your direct observation of the radical changes that the city has physically undergone in the past few years. Zhang Dali, why do you choose to make site-specific work?

Zhang Dali: Because there were no available spaces--no galleries, no museums--in which I could exhibit my work, I thought, "Let's forget about a formal space; let's do something which is directly related to and takes place in the environment." I consequently started painting my logo, a stylized self-portrait based

on the shape of my own skull. This logo by itself is not the work; it only becomes a work after it is placed in a specific context, and it changes its meaning as the context changes.

Song Dong: I don't think that the only reason for pursuing site specificity is the lack of exhibition spaces. Although this was one of the original motivations, we have also begun to realize how the site can become an intrinsic part of one's artistic language.

Dal Lago: Zhan Wang, let's talk about your series, Artificial Mountain Rocks. Is this your reflection on the architectural context of the new Beijing?

Zhan Wang: During my school years, I studied traditional Chinese culture, and I spent quite a lot of time considering the relation between the individual and his environment in traditional cultural terms. My observation of the changes taking place in Beijing, which affected me directly, inspired this series. Traditionally, we would situate the rockeries, gnarled stones, in front of buildings, from the smallest abode up to the Forbidden City.

Zhang Dali. Dialogue, 1998.
Beijing. Courtesy the Courtyard
Gallery, Beijing. China National
Gallery is in the back-



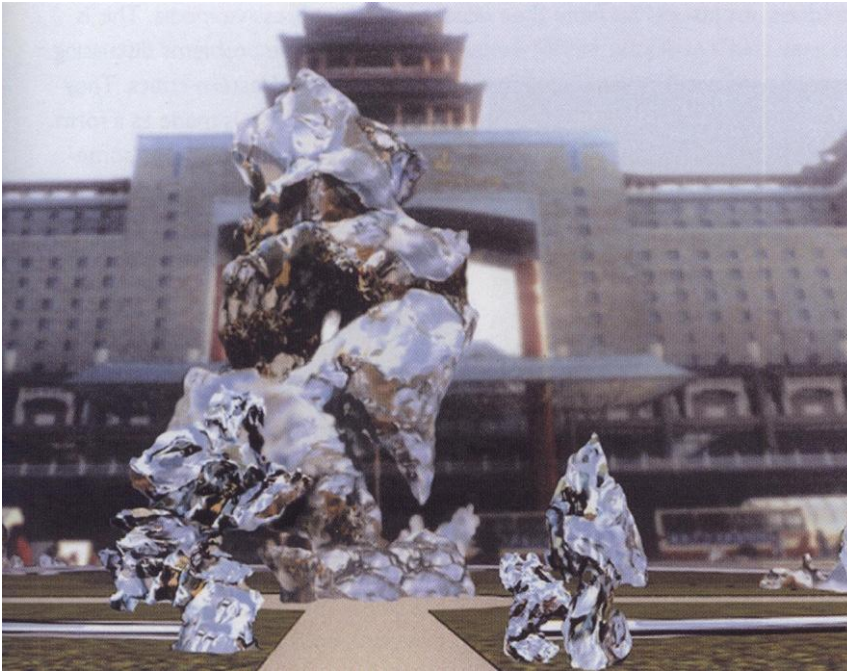
or in gardens for decoration and meditation. In China, this was not conceived as "art." Such stones had the power of connecting man with nature. What really confounds me is that while these rockeries are, in fact, real stones, in Chinese cultural terms they are called fake or artificial. In fact, in Chinese they are *rejiashan*, which literally translates as "fake mountain rocks." Why is something that is real called fake? This has to do with Chinese aesthetics: What is seen is not a rock, but a way to fulfill the imagined idea of a rock. In the modern city, we do not know where to put rockeries, and they end up clumsily placed in front of modern buildings with which they have no relation.

I started making the sculptures out of stainless steel because it's a very popular material in contemporary architecture. It's everywhere in China. The shine creates the impression of something precious,

and at the same time it's relatively cheap. I used to hate steel and initially chose it as a negative reflection of Chinese cultural values. I use steel to replicate the stone and create a fake "artificial mountain rock"—a really fake stone. Negating a negation equals an affirmation; it becomes something real.

Dal Lago: For each of the Artificial Mountain Rocks, you closely consider the environment and the meaning generated by presenting your work in that environment. You've also envisioned displaying your works in front of buildings such as Beijing's new West Train Station. In using such a place, you implicitly reflect on its contextual architectural framework. Could you elaborate on that?

Zhan Wang: Beijing's West Train Station is very ugly, but it is also a landmark of modern architecture. By placing my Artificial Mountain Rock in front of the station, I want to express the fact that this building possesses a high status that is very meaningful in the context of our time. At the same time, the building is the fake reconstruction of a traditional architectural idea and thus an extremely appropriate site for my artificial mountain rocks.



Zhan Wang. Artificial Mountain Rock in Front of Beijing's West Train Station: A Proposal (elevation), 1995. Computer-generated image by ZhuYu.

Dal Lago: Wang Jianwei, apart from the wish to exit the conventional exhibition spaces, do you think that the desire to establish a more direct exchange with the audience could also be considered a factor in these changed artistic practices? I think of *Production*, the sixty-minute video in which you investigate the use of public, government-controlled spaces in the province of Sichuan, and which you exhibited at *documental X*. Catherine David has said that your work was attempting to erase as much as possible the artist's direct influence on the creative process. This way of filming could be called documentary, but it could also be described as an attempt to let the environment speak without adding a personal reading to the process.

Wang Jianwei: Every artist uses elements deriving from the environment in various ways, and I do not agree with the attempt to gather different Chinese artists under a general concept, such as the motive provided by the environment they inhabit. The way in which the environment inspires an individual is different for each person.

That said, regarding the relationship between my work and its context of production, I do not like to focus just on formal problems, but I prefer to dwell on the cultural conditions of production. After the object is produced, it is circulated to the audience. I consider this an open process that was the first consideration behind *Production*. In this work, I made the artist and his work the actual object of the creative process, with the result that the artist's predetermined thinking during creation was eliminated. Therefore, his style of working in relation to the environment was not important anymore, and neither was the question, "Am I making a work of art?" In one month I inspected the public spaces of five counties in the Sichuan region, mostly tea houses. The result probably looks more like the record of a performance or a documentary, but it is exactly this combination of things that draws my interest: When the artist has ended his project, used up his tools, dissolved his state of mind, and detached himself from the concept, does the work still have the possibility of existing as

art? The most interesting aspect of these questions is the possibility of the creation of continuous exchange. It would be simplistic to think that we are doing site-specific art just to get around certain elements of artistic production. The process is not: "I reject the museum system. I refuse to do painting. I want to get rid of this and that, and then I get to site specificity." For me, at least, this mode does not just derive from the refusal of other expressive media. This is the fake reconstruction of a traditional architectural idea and thus an extremely appropriate site for my artificial mountain rocks.



Wang Jianwei. Production, 1997. Video (color).
Courtesy the artist.

why I often have problems discussing my work with Western critics. They always think that it is made as a form of rejection or opposition to something else, and in fact it's not so simple. This is a problem I confronted when I went to the countryside in Sichuan to grow wheat for *Cycle-Growing* (1993-94), a conceptual work consisting of photographs and documentation of my experiences working in the fields. I wanted to create a total exchange between artistic and nonartistic identity, between spaces related and unrelated to art, without providing any conclusive explanation. Eventually that is also how I created *Production*. If you want to consider the problems of a cultural system, you cannot base your work only on the realm of images. I do not think that the control over our minds is only limited to the visual products: in fact, a lot of what we think

is natural is artificially created to appear that way. My work attempts to uncover how we are used to looking at the world.

Dal Lago: I'm still interested in the problem of the relationship with the public. Perhaps Zhang Dali can talk more about this issue. If we continue the comparison with Western art, we should add that one of the factors that stimulated the emergence of site-specific art was what we might call the need to "exit the ivory tower" and establish a less mediated relationship with an audience. In the past, Chinese Socialist Realism was intensely concerned with the public, with the type of works that would suit the audience's needs and likings. Beginning in the 1980s, with the emergence of independent art, there has been an inverse process that sees the audience becoming a less and less important factor in the process of creation. Sometimes I have noticed from artists a gradual distancing from the local public--even an open disregard. In this context, would it be possible to say that your work has also been motivated by the attempt to reestablish a certain relationship with the audience, what in Chinese is still often referred to as "the masses of the people"?

Zhang Dali: I put my works on the walls of the street so that more people can see them, so at least they will know what I am doing. Even if the Zhongguo

Meishu Guan (China Art Gallery), the officially approved space for the exhibition of contemporary art at a national level and the site of the most official and influential contemporary art exhibitions, could provide me with a space to exhibit, that space would inherently bring in a set of limitations. Why? Because the public that goes to the China Art Gallery consists of either people from the academies of fine arts or people who are otherwise connected to the art world. Other people in China very seldom go to the China Art Gallery to see art. Ask your neighbors. They probably haven't entered a museum for years, if ever. And earlier there wasn't even a China Art Gallery. Now that there is one, it serves as a site of government propaganda. It is certainly not a space for artists to exhibit their works.

In the recent past there was no art market either, no commercial art. So the artist would exist in a space that did not belong anywhere: on the one hand,

Zhang Dali. Demolition, 1998. Beijing. Courtesy the artist.



you don't belong to the masses, since people don't understand what you are doing because you have no space in which to exhibit--no space in which to explain to them what your work is about. On the other, the government doesn't support you. So where does one exhibit? You can put your work in the streets; this is the only and the best way. During the last ten years of modernization, Chinese society has become more tolerant. You can do your work in the street, and the authorities don't care too much. The pace of life is also much quicker. Passers-by may or may not have a glimpse; it doesn't matter, for at least you have a place to show. I like the fact that the number of people seeing my work keeps growing, and so, I think, does the number of people looking at art.

In 1999 I began another type of work--a project related to the demolition of the old parts of the city of Beijing. Demolition sites were ubiquitous. I started demolishing buildings already destined for destruction, carving out holes in the walls in the shape of my logo, the bald head that I used in my previous work, Dialogue. In this case, more people would see the work, and I could use the context of the demolition of old Beijing as part of it.

Dal Lago: Zhan Wang, how is that related to your Ruin Cleaning Project (1994) ?

Zhan Wang: In 1994 I was also thinking of how I could relate the art-making process to what I was seeing around me. I was interested in ways of connecting the two, because apparently art is art and life is life. When the last wave of the large-scale destruction of the city began in 1994, I chose to clean and repaint some of the decorative details of a building in the process of being razed. During a pause in the demolition, I started a sort

of restoration process, conceiving the larger physical and spiritual environment of the city as the most convenient space for my work.

Eventually my strategy was to confront more directly what I saw taking place around me. That's why I started doing the Artificial Mountain Rocks, which are not about the limitation of the exhibition space, but a reflection on a habit that Chinese have had since the past. My exclusive problem was the definition of real and fake in Chinese cultural terms, both in the past and in the contemporary world.

Dal Lago: We could say there is a common practice in both your work and Zhang Dali's. Zhang Dali chooses a simple symbol, which he repeats all over the center of Beijing so that people will see it and get used to it. In your case, you use something to which people are already very accustomed, something everybody knows, and then you transform it into something different. If it was something strange, new, and incomprehensible, people would not even look at it. I would say that these works present a new possibility of dialogue with a larger audience.

Zhan Wang: This has to do with the renovation of Beijing in the last twenty years. In my work, I confront the changes in old concepts and opinions--how something that you have been used to for centuries undergoes a radical change in a very short time. In this process, you start looking at your position, but you also have to consider the problems of everyone around you, the changes they also are experiencing. For example, Chinese people traditionally had a special idea of nature, while now they are mostly looking for material gains. I think this is part of the same process: nature has turned into material gain. But imagination, aspiration, and hope have not changed. The reality has changed, but the structure hasn't.

Dal Lago: Wang Jianwei, could you elaborate on the new possibility of exchange with the environment to which you referred earlier?

Wang Jianwei: The space around us is an artificial, constructed space which also includes what we know. The material elements that affect us and that we can experience are all artificially created. Artists process this reality differently. Now, is it necessary for an artist to think about the audience before he begins his creative process? I doubt it. Producing your work for some ideal public is meaningless, even though this is not to say that we are not concerned with the question of audience.

Social space is very large: drawing forced boundaries within this realm may be quite unsuitable. For example, when you talk about East and West, collective and individual, public and private, you use classifications in which every concept stands for a method. That's why recently at the Sidney Biennale I presented a video installation titled I and We? that addresses the difference between public and private spaces in urban China. I suggested that space is created within a framework that turns on continuously produced relationships. The way in which each artist treats his subject is microcosmic. When you talk with Western critics or people from the art world, they immediately assign you to a space with specific characteristics: first, your work must be different from that in the West; second, it must possess a specific character that makes it different. But this

specific character needs a specific type of knowledge in order to be assessed: the Chinese artist's relationship to his environment, the richness of which is largely beyond the understanding of most Western critics. If all the site-specific works in China are read as an attack against the legality of the exhibition space, then this is a problem.

Dal Lago: There is a practical problem, too. In China there are no officially approved spaces for

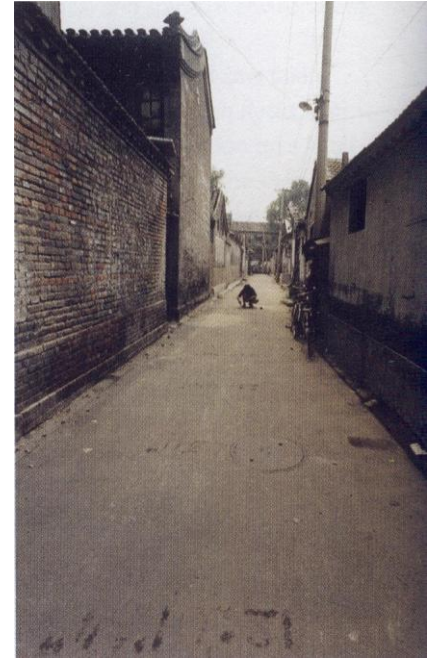


exhibiting experimental contemporary art, so it's not even a question of getting out of the white cube, since this kind of limitation in most cases isn't even accessible. But I'd like you to discuss how the resulting practices may eventually affect, directly or indirectly, a much larger public. Wang Jianwei, let's talk about your last work, *Living Elsewhere*, a video in which you investigate the concept of space from its many cultural and social connotations. This work addresses a larger audience; not just the art world, but economists, architects, sociologists, and others find an interest in what you're doing. I'm not implying that you are making art for the masses, but the relationship with the public is something you can't avoid.

Wang Jianwei: Making art for the masses is quite a touchy issue in China. One of the main arguments the government uses to justify its disapproval of contemporary art is to say that it has distanced itself from

the people. In the past, art, under the slogan "art must serve the masses of peasants, workers, and soldiers," was used to control the audience. Consequently, we are now skeptical of art that is said to be meant for the people. For example, the revolutionary culture of Yan'An, where during the 1940s most of the institutional, political, and cultural policies of the future People's Republic were shaped, was originally intended to serve the masses but eventually became a form of cultural dictatorship. And nowadays we see it every-where in the media: the cultural productions declared to be for the masses have become a way to attack contemporary art.

Song Dong: I haven't thought too much about for whom I make what I make. What I hope to achieve is an unpredictable effect, an unforeseen type of relationship. In the China Art Gallery, for example, the relationship is quite predictable. Perhaps the work I have done will not be seen by the people whom I have invited to see it; perhaps other spectators will see it and won't have any reaction, or perhaps they will feel something. This is not important for me.



Song Dong. Xi Si, Banshang Hutong 12:10'43", 1995. Performance in the hutong where the artist lives, Beijing. Courtesy the artist.

Perhaps there are people who will read a certain meaning or, after a while, will relate it to other events and rethink it. I like this indefiniteness.

Dal Lago: What I was trying to address was not the need to serve the people, but the importance of expanding your potential audience. The public visiting experimental art exhibitions in Beijing is generally a very restricted circle. Are you interested in engaging a wider audience?

Wang Jianwei: When you give up a specific artistic language, the audience who will see your work will naturally change. For example, when I ploughed the fields for a year for Cycle--Growing, only the peasants knew. The usual art circle wasn't present. The peasants might eventually establish contact with my actions, or they might not. There are two issues here: one is the attempt to break out of the art world, in which contemporary Chinese art is becoming a sort of masturbating, self-fulfilling activity. Although this is a problem, artists are continuously attempting to change the situation. In my case, I don't think that what I do is only for that closed circle. Another problem is whether the things you do are understood by the common people. We should consider the problem from a more individual point of view and just speak for ourselves, rather than as representatives of parties or cultures. Who has the authority to represent the "people"? If anyone can still say this, it is the central government. I think that most artists would never say that they represent such and such an audience. And, in fact, we could actually organize a discussion just on the way in which the word has been used, on how you can actually determine what "the masses" like or what they don't. This is a political problem and in an autocratic system this type of phrasing is even more common--one simply decides that he is not speaking for himself, but for a larger group of people. When one represents the "masses," then one can be said to represent legality; when one speaks for

legality, then one can tell us what is not legal. It thus becomes a question of power. Since you, as a contemporary artist, do not possess the legality that derives from the status of representative of the people, you are automatically an outlaw.

Zhan Wang: I have experienced many contradictions in my life that I don't know how to resolve. For me, making art is a way to experiment, to solve problems that I don't think are actually solvable. The problems you see around you can be solved in art, because art is a way to relieve oneself of a burden. But although you can find explanations in art, they aren't real explanations, just temporary dwelling places for the spirit. Art can solve them because it relates to the spiritual, not the material, world.

Song Dong: When you do something, you first think to express yourself; then after you have done it, you think, "Perhaps this will be a new possibility." If this new possibility can make a person stop for a moment and interrupt for even a very short time the usual flow of his or her life, I think this is already quite interesting. From my side, apart from making my art, I also teach and use different methods to tell people that things can be observed from other perspectives. Zhang Dali: I don't have such a strong sense of responsibility. When I work, I don't think of anybody and anything else: I only want to do my work. Whether or not it can affect people, I have no way to imagine. But isn't my work called Dialogue? Eventually people will establish some sort of relation with it. Some can't stand it, condemn me for what I do, and want to have the work removed. It doesn't matter to me, as long as it is seen and instigates some sort of reaction.

Dal Lago: Site-specific art establishes a close relation between its subject matter and the reality of the place in which it is situated. The content of the work --social, spiritual, or architectural--is eventually determined by the specific characteristics of the place. Many changes in the last two years have completely transformed Beijing. How does your work reflect on the changes in the environments you inhabit? Why did you choose this as a subject of your work? Zhang Dali: It has a lot to do with my personal experience. I lived abroad for a long time, and when I returned, I noticed how many physical changes the city had undergone. In the beginning, I was trying to follow the changes. I would take a map and try to retrace them around the city center. After some time, I could not follow them anymore; they were too many and too sudden. If I don't go to the western part of Beijing for a few months, I now have a hard time recognizing it. This constant demolition still shocks me. I take part in it in order to create a direct link with what is happening. I use the same process: demolition. I destroy what is being destroyed while it's being destroyed and take pictures of what I do as documentation.

Zhan Wang: The Communist Party basically created a break within the development of Chinese tradition, thinking that it could start anew and that what had happened before did not count. But much of what the Chinese Communist Party has done is in fact very similar to what was done before. For example, demolition. As someone who has lived all his life in Beijing, I have seen this

regime demolishing nonstop. They don't let you choose a place and make it special and meaningful; sooner or later, they will take it down. By trying to reach a level of Western-oriented modernization, we are destroying the continuity of our own tradition. They have their way of preserving certain things: if it's a very good courtyard house or a very distinguished piece of architecture, they spare it. But this type of preservation is only symbolic. Because if you extract these relics--a courtyard, for example--from their environment, you totally void them of meaning. The whole street is an entity, together with the people who live inside those buildings.

Zhang Dali: Think of that new avenue they are creating across Beijing called Ping An Avenue (Peace Avenue). They said they wanted to remake it as a Ming- Qing-style street. But it was a Ming-Qing street to start with. They tore it down and then rebuilt it into a theater set, using old-style bricks and tiles.

Zhan Wang: There is a terrible contradiction here. On the one hand, they oppose tradition and destroy the old culture; on the other, they attempt to revive it in a very artificial way. We cannot simply oppose this current modernization. If we look at the destruction of traditional buildings from the point of view of the vast numbers of people in need of housing, it is a great improvement in their standard of living. And, moreover, your oppositional voice has absolutely no chance to be heard. This brings you to a state of total helplessness. My Ruins Cleaning Project emerged from such a condition. I started cleaning and restoring a building during its demolition, when the bulldozers had stopped for a few days. This was not about nostalgia, but about my state of embarrassment and impotence, knowing that nothing I could do could change or stop this process.

Dal Lago: The most important result is the change of the microcosms that used to form the old grain of the city plan. By demolishing old architectures, you essentially destroy the way of life and the spirit that inhabited these spaces. Zhang Dali: The word nostalgia isn't appropriate. We're talking about ways of life: if the physical environment changes, the resultant change in the style of life eventually affects your way of thinking. My work has intersected this process, has even become a part of it, but what is going to be the result? I don't know. There is no way to know.

Zhan Wang: Perhaps the mistake is to think that modernization necessarily equals high-rise architecture. In other countries, old architectures could never be demolished this way.

Dal Lago: I have thought a lot about this problem. China has little if any tradition of conserving old architectural artifacts. The spirit of preservation is very strong with regard to paintings and vases, of course, but it does not apply to architecture. In China such material artifacts are not so important. Most often a name and a plaque are enough to symbolize the spiritual presence of a monument; it doesn't matter if it's not physically the same or whether those bricks aren't several hundred years old. Why do you want to reflect on this reality?

Song Dong: I have always lived in a hutong, a traditional Beijing alley. The hutong represents a way of life and subsistence. Among people living in the same hutong there exists a very special degree of familiarity. Regarding the issue of demolishing the old city, I have had contradictory thoughts that have evolved over time. Now, for example, I am learning how to drive, and I see that large streets are much better for automobile traffic. But practical issues are not everything; people also have spiritual needs. I did an installation using the street number plates of houses that have been demolished in the old neighborhoods of the city. The plates relate deeply to my childhood experiences with other children from the same hutong. We would throw stones at these enameled plates, which would chip away to illegibility. The plates were considered the symbol of the house, a trademark of the compound behind that door, and that's why we had such fun destroying them.

That's why I have such a special feeling for these plates, which are all that is left of what used to stand behind them. As the only surviving sign of what used to be a house, a traditional Chinese compound, a street, the plate number is like an epitaph on a tombstone. It represents a way of life that has been erased. The type of relationships I used to entertain with other people living in the same hutong, which was probably very similar to that of other people living in other ones, is slowly disappearing. Now everybody lives in three-dimensional compounds, in high-rise buildings. The relationships between family and family, between who is living here and who is living there, have changed. So have the relationships among individuals within the same family. Nothing is so multifaceted anymore; everything is much narrower and more clearly spelled out. Perhaps I am infatuated with a slowly vanishing type of relationship between people.

Wang Jianwei: I don't have such a specific feeling toward the city. I'm not so sensitive to the changes in the outside space, so it's hard for me to talk about works that have to do with Beijing itself. My work involves space in general. For almost two years, I have visited many different places around the country for my most recent work in ten episodes, *Daily Life Architecture*, a video project in which I investigate the nature of public spaces and how they are defined both by the people who design them and those who use them. I have to say that I have an interest in the space of all the places I have been. Beijing for me is just a part of this larger space, which I address in four episodes of the piece. In this work, I also consider the very recent migration from the city to the countryside and the destruction of the old parts of Beijing.

In 1998 I made a work called *Search*, in which I used more than three thousand name tags and several hundred photographs I collected over the course of about three years. This is to say that my interest in the city comes from another perspective, and in this case deals with the idea of the exchanges taking place in the urban environment. The information provided on the name tags creates a new system of values. After so many exchanges, the system and the standard of values slowly begin to change. In the past, people did not need name tags, but now everyone needs them for all kinds of public occasions. My interest is directed at the mode of self-presentation that appears on a name tag. On this piece of paper one can find lots of information about the reality of the life of

that person: the name tag explains who the person is. It may say "artist" in some cases, or even "contemporary artist," "famous poet," "manager," "director," "president," "vice-president," etc.

Exchange, discussion, action, and observation eventually make up the relationship existing between me and this space. This is how I experience a sort of exchange with my living environment, of which Beijing is a part. This is one of the feelings that the city and the urban space provide me, one of the different ways in which you can discuss the space of the city. So the connections I establish with this space become a part of my work. I need such a space to structure my problems, and I would say that all artists establish a connection with their space in what they do. In my video documentary *Living Elsewhere*, Beijing is one of the spaces I examine. What I inspect is not the growth of many new high-rise buildings, but why these buildings were built as they were. We are all quite familiar with the formal character of these buildings--how high they are, whether they are made with glass or mosaic, their shapes. But often we tend to overlook the fact that a cultural product is actually a sum of economic and social factors. When we observe these constructions from a formal point of view, we forget to ask why these things are done in such fashion. I observe them from an anthropological and a sociological perspective. Thus, most of the time I shoot scenes of daily life and interview or just record people's normal conversations. They talk incessantly about something connected to the space they inhabit. The interviews involve everyone who has a relationship with a specific space--those who use it, those who create it, those who have the power to decide over it, officials, rich people, etc. This is how I would say my work relates to the space of the city. I like works that do not show anything nice, that often pass unnoticed as artworks. I am quite interested in those things that you can't really see well.

--March 28, 1999

Francesca Dal Lago is a Ph.D. candidate in Chinese art history at New York University. Her research focuses on the art of twentieth-century China, with a special emphasis on the post-1949 period.

Song Dong graduated in oil painting from the Capital Normal University in Beijing in 1989. His work was recently included in the exhibition *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*, organized by Wu Hung for the David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, University of Chicago in 1999.

Zhang Dali graduated from the National Academy of Fine Arts and Design, Beijing, in 1987. He had a one person exhibition at the Courtyard Gallery in Beijing in October 1999, and also participated in Beijing in London at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in 1999.

Zhang Wang is a professor of sculpture at the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing. He recently participated in the exhibitions *Cities on the Move*, presented at P.S. 1: Institute of Contemporary Art in New York in 1998 and *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* in 1999.

Wang Jianwei has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including *documenta X* (1997), *Cities on the Move* (1998), and *Beijing in London* (1999). He is currently working on a theatrical play entitled *The Screen* for the *Kunsten FESTIVAL des Arts* which will premiere in Brussels, Belgium in May 2000.