

Uncompromising Female Aesthetic Subjectivity in
Western and Chinese Contemporary Art

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements of the Royal College of Art for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy

July 2018

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparison between the work of Tracey Karima Emin and He Chengyao in global contemporary art of East and West. My original contribution to knowledge is, firstly, this comparative research of Emin and Chengyao, secondly, to demonstrate how and why their work constitutes an ontological identification relationship between subjectivity and art practice that exhibits three aspects of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity: performativity, visibility, and univocity, and thirdly, to claim and to offer an exposition of how and why their naked self-portraiture is a new nude. I argue that an 'ontological identification relationship' occurs when their subjectivity merges with art practice, where an intimate relationship between artist and work is established in which the being of the artist is deeply imbued with the being of the artwork: there is an ontological relationship between them when they identify themselves with art practice and work.

After explicating the thesis in the introduction, the ontological identification relationship between artist and work is addressed in chapter one, which unfolds the reasons why their ontology of being embodies the three aspects of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity. Chapter two is devoted to the first aspect of subjectivity, performativity, which will draw from Butler's idea of performativity. Juxtaposing their artwork will exhibit how their naked self-portraits draw our attention to their female subjectivity, the lack of female subjectivity in global art practice, and to question a patriarchal society in the twentieth-twenty first century. Emin and Chengyao's work not only refracts as a new kind of nude to resist the male dominated aesthetic realm but to attempt to address a female lack in the artistic realm. The third chapter explicates the second aspect of subjectivity: visibility, analysing particular works of Emin and Chengyao that exhibit how visibility discloses invisibility. Their subjectivity in artwork exhibits a personal history in the public sphere, which invites interpretation not only from a local audience but also a global one. The invisible to the visible is a journey of becoming through an actualisation of subjectivity within art practice. Actualising subjectivity as female artists is reflecting on the self ontologically; it is a way of being with one's body and art as one, and a way of making sense of things. Chapter four addresses the third aspect of subjectivity, 'Univocity of Faceless Bodies,' which parallels Deleuze and Guattari's idea of bodies without organs (BWO) for univocity, and explicates why 'faceless bodies' is a crucial feminist depiction of the female body. They draw our attention to a lack of subjectivity in univocity, but a univocity that is not universality.

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For My Mother Kiu

Acknowledgements

It has been a privilege and an honour to make sense of my thesis as a female artist in the twenty first century. I am enormously grateful to my supervisors Jonathan Miles and Catherine Dormor for their guidance. Deep thanks to He Chengyao and Tracey Emin for their contribution to global contemporary art practices, and to all the artists who kindly gave me their time and interviews. Immeasurable thanks to my family and friends for their constant love and support. Special thanks to those who supported me one way or another along my long march for freedom, and to all at the RCA.

Author's declaration

During the period of registered study in which this thesis was prepared the author has not been registered for any other academic award or qualification. The material included in this thesis has not been submitted wholly or in part for any academic award or qualification other than that for which it is now submitted.

Signature: *kkleung*

Date: July 2018

Introduction

I hope to be able to find a way that can merge my inner self – that is, everything I just mentioned – as well as the outside environment, together into one. This way, I will be able to feel a natural oneness, with the world.¹

This thesis is a comparison between the work of Tracey Karima Emin and He Chengyao² in Chinese and Western global contemporary art. My original contribution to knowledge is, firstly, this comparative research of Emin and Chengyao, secondly, to demonstrate how and why their work constitutes an ontological identification relationship between subjectivity and art practice that exhibits three aspects of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity: performativity, visibility, and univocity. Thirdly, it reveals how and why their naked self-portraits create a new kind of nude.

The process of this thesis has been formulated firstly the similarities between Emin and Chengyao that led to reflection on a number of juxtapositions, China and the West, female aesthetics and politics, theory and practice, subjectivity and objectivity, which in turn led to the development of a hypothesis of an ontological identification relationship with three aspects of subjectivity in their work for this thesis. In undertaking a project of comparison there are formidable intellectual obstacles to overcome, namely (1) the problem of cultural difference between China and the West: to what extent are they comparable if they are so different? (2) whether it is possible or desirable to compare across cultures, given the difficulty of reconciling cultural differences? And (3) what do we understand by such comparison? Since Emin and Chengyao's work has not been compared previously, it is an advantage to contribute the possibilities and desirability for a thesis. It will convey a global perspective of

¹ He Chengyao interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016. See Appendix.

² Emin and He's names will be used as Tracey Emin or He Chengyao, but since 'He' sounds very much like an indefinite article 'he' or refer to a male, and to avoid confusion Chengyao will be used instead of 'He', thus it will be used intermittently. In China the family name usually comes first, e.g. He Chengyao rather than Chengyao He; opposite to the West. Furthermore, Chengyao means 'pure jade', jade is treasured in Chinese history. She was also He Li meaning 'beautiful' until her father changed it to, 'Chengyao'. This is also used by Eva Kit Wah Man in 'Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: The Case of He Chengyao' *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art* (Boston, Brill 2011), pp. 171-190. Also note, quotes from other scholars may still use "He" rather than "Chengyao" as their preference.

Chinese and Western contemporary art in postmodernity, which brings to light the reasons why they create the work that they do as global female artists in this era. This complex relation has drawn my attention to their ontological relationship, the self in artwork, which means it necessitates an ontological interpretation of their work. This formulation provides evidence that will explicate how and why Emin and Chengyao's work not only crosses boundaries of cultural difference and similarities, but how and why they desire to explore their subjectivity without compromise. This in turn highlights how their exploration of self in art practice through an ontological identification relationship, which results in their ontological stance of being with artwork instead of confessional means of being. Their exploration of self relates to the history of female subjectivity and the lack of subjectivity, it is the desire to identify themselves with an art profession. The art profession that once privileged men became a discourse for female artists in the professional aesthetic realm, not as a hobby, or a woman longing for something, but being in the practice of art as an artist. At the core of this, their subjectivity becomes a foundation of their work, which is in a constant process of becoming, their desire to use their naked body as self expression contributes to the disruption of the stable exploration of the female nude by male artists.

The exploration of self in art practice is a constant process of being and becoming in art practice not only for male artists but female artists, female artists have their own bodily experience. Emin and Chengyao's exploration of self in art practice becomes an ontological identification relationship, where self and art is a relationship rather than a tool or an object without subjectivity. Thus the question: what is an ontological identification relationship in Emin and Chengyao's work? The answer to this question is crucial to understand what underline their art practice and why, not only the surface of the artwork, but what is the foundation of their work? And the evidence has revealed in this research that there is a relationship between Emin the artist and her artwork, and between Chengyao the artist and her artwork, where the self is not only embedded in it but the self becomes the artwork. Through this analysis an ontological identification relationship has phenomenologically surfaced with three aspects of their subjectivity. A deeper sense of being has exhibited how they think ontologically, how they identified themselves with their art practice and artwork, and thus exhibit a strong bond between artist and artwork. This is the foundation of Emin and Chengyao's art practice that governs throughout their exploration of their subjectivity. Their naked self-

portraiture that is a new nude attempts to question not only the traditional nude but actualises and articulates the personal, which also reflects the feminist artists of the 60s and 70s. The personal agenda refracts as political. To build this intellectual apparatus that explicate their work in a global comparative context, I shall draw from my empirical research as well as draw from Eastern and Western scholars, which includes historical, philosophical, empirical, and feminist analysis of how and why their subjectivity is in art practice and what wider concerns and impacts that gives raise to their work.

For subjectivity, Judith Butler gives a good account of subjectivity being a consequence of desire, through her research on Hegel she discovers ‘I desire x’ in *Subjects of Desire*, she emphasises: ‘In the formulation “I desire x,” the “I” emerges as if by accident; subjectivity is unwittingly created and discovered through the concrete expression of desire.’³ This means subjectivity is both created and discovered, which is crucial in identifying Emin and Chengyao’s subjectivity as a ‘consequence of desire’ and how ‘subjectivity’ is something rather than nothing. They desire to identify themselves with art practice, they desire to merge their personal memories with art practice, and they draw our attention to the notion of possessing subjectivity when they exhibit the self that embraces a relationship with art practice. Butler’s concrete expression of desire is the foundation of subjectivity, hence when Emin and Chengyao’s subjectivity constitutes ‘I’ desiring x, becomes something, for example they desire to create a particular artwork such as *My Bed* 1998 for Emin, and *Opening The Great Wall* 2001 for Chengyao. But ‘I desire x’ is also complex, it is both I want something such as I desire to create something, or ‘I desire to be x’, which means I want to be something, such as I desire to be a musician or a composer and so forth. Similarly, subjectivity is a desire to actualise, to reflect, to create, thereby creating and discovering. Butler does not make this distinction but ‘I desire x’ can relate to both desire for object/artist’s material or a desire for a state of being, for artwork or being artwork, such as in performance art for example, the artist’s desire led to subjectivity that reflects the virtual to practice as actual. Butler writes, ‘If desire is a tacit pursuit of identity, then the experience of desire must be a way of posing the problem of identity; when we desire, we pose the question of the metaphysical place of human identity-in

³ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections In Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012 [1987]), p. 66.

some prelinguistic form and in the satisfaction of desire, the question is answered for us.⁴ She also emphasises an account of Hegel's notion of subjectivity: 'Through referring to the role of self-expression in desire, Kojève builds upon Hegel's notion that desire both forms and reveals subjectivity.'⁵ Here she read Kojève's reading of Hegel, Butler says for Hegel, desire is 'a project to become a self sufficient subject for whom all things apparently different finally emerge as imminent features of the subject itself.'⁶ Butler's reading of desire is the force that impels consciousness to become self-consciousness as subjectivity; as an abstract concept which actualises as reality outside of itself when the self reflects on art practice as the self intertwine with artist's material. This reflects Emin in Britain and Chengyao in China's abstract aesthetic art practice that are situated at the confluence of a number of currents in global aesthetic debate of contemporary art history, philosophy, and feminism. Their work not only exhibited as current female artists with subjectivity that identifies with artwork, but come to articulation more predominately in postmodernity. And postmodernity discourse of art and literature relation are linked more ways than we would admit,⁷ it is between subjectivity and art interfaces with other realms of discourse, in art feminism, philosophy, history, politics, and more poignant artists' discourse in art practice, furthermore, the artist's words, thoughts, and discussion constitutes their subjectivity. As Butler suggests 'Human desire articulates the subject's relationship to that which is *not* itself, that which is different, strange, novel, awaited, absent, lost. And the satisfaction of desire is the transformation of difference into identity: the discovery of the strange and novel as familiar, the arrival of the awaited, the reemergence of what has been absent or lost. Thus, human desire is a way of thematizing the problem of negative; it is the negative principle of human life, its ontological status as a lack in pursuit of being...'.⁸

Another crucial occurrence of subjectivity is in literature, the work of Sean Burke makes a crucial point in *The Death and Return of the Author* 2008, he argues how the trio of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida's '*death of the author/subject*' interpretation is untenable, and how the author is still very much active and alive in the event of their writing. For example, in the very fact that Barthes writes the words *Death*

⁴ Ibid, p 9.

⁵ Ibid, p. 66.

⁶ Ibid, p. 6.

⁷ Stephen R. C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2011 [2004]), pp. 3-4.

Of The Author, the author himself is not dead, his thinking and writing is subjectivity, while he favours the reader's subjective interpretation over the author, the reader is nevertheless reading Barthes' subjectivity.⁸ Burke is writing from a critical perspective within Literary Theory and offers a criticism of this view, while he does not relate this to the arts, his correlation of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida reminds us how their work is born at the same time as the 60s and 70s feminist artists' revolt against authority and patriarchy, but what is crucial here is how the feminist artists are fighting for subjectivity, and feminist rights, while Barthes, Foucault and Derrida write against subjectivity and authorship. The feminist of the 60s and 70s not only influenced Emin and Chengyao's work but their work became art history that has been documented significantly.⁹ Both Emin and Chengyao's work is influenced by feminism of poststructuralism in postmodernity, they not only responding to the feminist artists but also the postmodern era that has critical tendencies, which means they are also against authority. But what is crucial is the trajectory of Dadaists and Duchampian art practice, they foreshadowed postmodern art discourse if not actually being responsible for it with readymades and performance art, they were anti traditional art and anti authority paved the way for today's artists to explore new materials. Modernism and postmodernism are eras of revolution, the thinkers in literature, philosophy, and the arts have one theme in common, against authority. While male artists worked alongside 60s and 70s feminist artists, they did not see them as serious female artist colleagues or artists who wish to be more visible, or who desire to actualise their female subjectivity with performativity, but discerned them as protesters, both in the US and Europe, and they emerged as global feminist artists with a mission, which was also encouraged by globalisation.¹⁰ The freedom to engage with artists abroad became easier in the twentieth-twenty first century. Feminism took advantage of this.¹¹

The ideas around subjectivity and the death of the author/subject are persistent in philosophical aesthetics and in critical theory. We can trace back to the work of

⁸ Sean Burke, *The Death And Return Of The Author: Criticism and Subjectivity in Barthes, Foucault and Derrida* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press; 3rd revised edition, 2008). This work is from his Ph.D. thesis in 1989.

⁹ Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s; the Sammlung Verbund Collection, Vienna* (Munich, London. New York: Prestel, 2016). Schor bases this claim on a wide survey of sources, mostly feminist artwork itself as understood through the history of exhibition.

¹⁰ Roland Robertson, 'Glocalization or Globalization,' *The Journal of International Communication*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2012, pp. 191–208.

¹¹ Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s*.

Heidegger's essay who discusses 'The Origin of the Work of Art' that questions the centrality of the artist in favour of a new model in which the artist and the artwork exist in a dynamic relationship. In raising the question 'what is the origin of the work of art?' Heidegger's answer is that it is the dynamic of the relationship between the artist and the 'thing' that is the object. Traditional aesthetics had been from a perspective of the artist acting upon world as object.¹² Which means if subject and object are co-constituted then the aesthetic realm or the meaning of the artwork has to come from within it, through the artist-artwork dynamic. In Heidegger's time, the meaning of the artwork does not lie in subjectivity per se but rather in the interaction of subject, the artist with the object. Hence subjectivity itself is ignored. Although this does not directly concur with the death of the author view, it is a direction in philosophical aesthetics that supports a move away from the importance of the subject and the meaning of artwork as the result of the artist's intention. In a parallel way, Walter Benjamin in the school of Critical Theory questions the authority of the artist in the contemporary world in which mechanical reproduction was eroding the idea of the work of art being pervaded by the artist's 'aura'.¹³ This move towards viewing art independently from author surfaces again in Structuralism in which the objective structures of thought are important rather than the subjectivity of the artist, and then in the death of the author perspective of Poststructuralism. Again this also parallels the Duchampian trajectory.

What is crucial here is the work of Emin and Chengyao that questions the female lack, which constitutes female subjectivity, in order to understand why their female subjectivity constitute their art practice is a turning point in art history further, it necessitates an understanding of the idea of the death of the author, and also the death of the artist, is juxtaposed with what might be called the contemporary art inflation of authorship, pointing to me, me, me culture; the stress on individualism and sometimes outrageous excess, has been perceived in the work of the young British artists of the 1990s for example. But the philosophical heritage of the denial of the author is not necessarily contradicted by the inflation of the author/artist in contemporary art because in the case of feminist artists, the self emerges through performance, which itself

¹² Martin Heidegger, 'The Origin of the Work of Art,' in Gunter Figal (ed.), *The Heidegger Reader* trans by Jerome Veith (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), pp. 130-50. Also, Herbert Dreyfus, 'Heidegger's Ontology of Art,' in H. L. Dreyfus and M. A. Wrathall (eds.), *A Companion to Heidegger* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995).

¹³ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in an Age of Mechanical Reproduction* trans J.A. Underwood (London: Penguin, 2008).

highlights a subject-object dualism to becoming one in art practice since the 60s and 70s feminist artists, because in performance, self and art are merged together.¹⁴ Thus, the notion of performance can be linked to the abstract considerations of authorship because in their own feminist way attempt to show us how the body and mind dualism can be questioned, the artist's relationship to world creates a state of subjective balance, self and art are becoming an equilibrium that is more affective to voice, hence the body becomes voice, to be visible in exhibitions is to be in the public sphere to speak their thoughts to protest against the female lack. Which means in this trajectory, Emin and Chengyao not only convey their personal agenda but refracts a broader context of these philosophical and cultural developments in art history which constitutes the movement of Postmodernism, itself developing from Structuralism and Post-Structuralism, Critical Theory, and Feminism. The triangulation of Postmodernism, Critical Theory, and Feminism worked alongside the 'feminist artists' era, which in turn impacted upon Emin and Chengyao as global female artists that explore their subjectivity. But it is not only female artists who question the attempt to erode authorship and subjectivity by the male writers and artists since Dadaism, but male writers themselves such as Sean Burke or Simon O'Sullivan in this era.¹⁵ Furthermore, Emin or Chengyao's work not only draw out attention towards the female artists' subjectivity, but through the feminist artists' trajectory they have created a new nude. Their uncompromising naked self-portrait is the new nude that continues the feminist artists discourse that not only assert the importance of female artists' voices and to assert their subjectivity to confront patriarchy, but the personal refracts as political that questions the notion of a stable subject as a woman in world.

The exploration of subjectivity has privileged men since the nineteenth century but subjectivity was also predicated upon by Christianity. For example, Nietzsche's exploration of his complex life led him to claim the 'death of god', which was then followed by the postmodern 'death of man', which in turn led to the 'death of the author' trajectory, then this interfaced with male artists who were anti traditional art since Dadaism of the 1900s, this means the death of the author was anticipated by Dadaism's 'death of art' in which traditional aesthetics were not only challenged but were to be rid of. Not only this, the very idea of the artist as in a privileged position of

¹⁴ Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s*.

¹⁵ Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*. Simon O'Sullivan, *On the Production of Subjectivity: Five Diagrams of the Finite-Infinite Relation* (London: Palgrave Macmillan 2012).

creator of cultural productions was challenged. Feminist artists' new found freedom of desire/subjectivity was threatened and cornered to assign as unimportant, which female artists in the twentieth century are questioning again the lack of female authorship and subjectivity became personal for female artists.¹⁶

What this history also draws our attention to is the advancement of male artists and writers' thought of the twentieth century, and why they attempted to move forward to a new dawn, towards an abstract idea of annihilation of authorship and subjectivity in the arts and humanities, fine art, philosophy, and literary theory, with the *Death of the Author* concept; in fine art discourse, was Dadaism since the 1900s, Neo-Dadaism with Fluxus, Pop Art, and Nouveau realism since the 1960s. This also had global affect, China adopted a New Dadaism since the 1970s responded to Western Dadaism since the 1900s, creating Neo Chinese Dadaism, which claimed a political agenda to protest against oppression of human rights; this means a global interface and interaction is being practiced. Chinese female artists who were not acknowledged amalgamated themselves to participate in the protest against war and authority, but were only seen as in solidarity with their fellow male artists to salute peace, they had another extensive assignment to undertake – 'feminism' similar to the West. Since the first and second wave of feminism in the West, female artists had grown at a rapid rate, and feminists responded to the broader social and cultural context, which included a feminist critique against systemic patriarchy locally and internationally.¹⁷

This trajectory led to the work of Chengyao in China and Emin in the UK, who are both examples of global female artists, but in the emergence of the post-contemporary. The term 'post-contemporary' conveys the development of resistance in aesthetic philosophy that perceives the contemporary from a futuristic perspective of a society within a technological generation. The idea of the *post*-contemporary thus addresses a *contemporary* question, what is subjectivity today, or indeed what is female subjectivity? One response to this question is the art practice of Emin and Chengyao in their uncompromising, provocative new nude work, which exhibits a discourse of their own subjectivity; therefore, juxtaposing their work reveals a crucial dynamic in Chinese and Western post-contemporary art history.¹⁸ This perspective signifies a new, global

¹⁶ Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s*.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Jonathan Miles, 'Post-Contemporary' On futuristic view of the Fusion of Art, Technology, Architecture and Spectacle, Royal College of Art Lecture Series, Dec 2017. On resistance see Howard Caygill, *On Resistance: A Philosophy of Defiance* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2013). Gilles Deleuze,

formation of female subjectivity emerging from post-modern critique, revolution, and fragmentation. The terms ‘uncompromising’ and ‘provocative’ are used here to denote the way in which Emin or Chengyao articulate subjectivity with their naked-self-portraits against a backdrop of aesthetic reception that in China and the West has relegated women’s performance art to the margins. They gained international visibility with uncompromising new nudes from opposite ends of the world – the personal with cultural formation is at the heart of their practice, they are the artists, the creator, and the model – against the traditional nude.

My task is not only to examine the trajectory of Emin and Chengyao’s work phenomenologically but also the reasons why their subjectivities constitute an ontological identification relationship, which is the hypothesis, the data, and the evidence for this thesis. It will address a number of interrelated research questions. 1. How do we account for the uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity that Emin or Chengyao employed for their art practice, and why now? 2. What is the relationship between their life and art praxis and what are the similarities and differences in their artwork? 3. How and why do performativity, visibility, and univocity constitute their three aspects of subjectivity in an ontological identification relationship? 4. How and why their new nudes comprise faceless bodies? 5. How and why their work is a new nude within feminist context and discourse? 6. Does their work constitute confessional art as claimed?

These questions will lead the exposition of this comparison of Emin and Chengyao’s subjectivity in their art practice and artwork, by examining, interpreting, and comparing selected artworks. There is no room here to discuss all of their works, which will leave projects for me to further my research after this thesis ends. Emin and Chengyao’s respective cultural history will also be the focus to illustrate these

‘L’Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze, avec Claire Parnet, Directed by Pierre-André Boutang (1996). Overview prepared by Charles J. Stivale, Romance Languages & Literatures, Wayne State University, US’. ‘R for Resistance’, discussing Primo Levi. The term ‘post-contemporary’ first seems to have been used in literary studies in 1975. Jerome Klinkowitz, *Literary Disruptions: The Making of Post-Contemporary American Fiction* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1975), but its recent use designates a global aesthetic that is future orientated. Brandon Kralik, ‘The Post Contemporary Paradigm’, *Digital Huffpost*, Dec 6th 2017. Richard T Scott, ‘The Easy Guide To Post Contemporary Philosophy’, *Art Babel*, February 17th 2015: ‘Post Contemporary is not owned or originated by any one individual. Though, I am to blame for introducing the term to the world of painting, I do not propose to be the founder. I am merely trying to describe what I see already developing around me. PoCo emphasizes empathy for all, regardless of gender, race, sexual orientation, or creed. PoCo is not a movement, but an aesthetic philosophy within which many movements may take place - like modernism and post-modernism before it. PoCo values are not only expressed through the work of painters, but also in sculpture, architecture, literature, and film.’

questions, and my contribution attempts to unfold critically why their female subjectivity is in their art practice of the early twentieth-first century, through an ontological, epistemological, historical, and feminist lens.

Tracey Emin and He Chengyao

Tracey Emin and He Chengyao are female artists at the tip of the iceberg for academic research in a global era. Since this thesis is not a biographical account of the artists, it is crucial to acknowledge it will not be a memoir view of their lives nor will it be about their fame. Hence their history here will be from the perspective of this thesis.

Tracey Emin was born a year before He Chengyao in 1963 in Croydon, London to a British mother Pamela Cashin and a Turkish Cypriot father Enver Emin.¹⁹ Perhaps this research is not as controversial as it seems, because Emin could possibly be an Eurasian hybrid of East and West, as new research suggests Genghis Khan's Tamerlane clan invaded the Ottoman Empire of Turkey in 1402, and left their sperms everywhere, but that would be another research.²⁰ In Emin's experience, her parents were never married to each other but both married to someone else in the complex web of modernity and postmodern society.²¹ Her mother considered an abortion when she was pregnant with Tracey but changed her mind at the last instance and gave birth to twins Tracey and Paul, they also had a step brother Alan from their mother's first marriage. Similarly, He Chengyao's mother in China considered an abortion when she was pregnant with Chengyao in 1963. Emin's mother suffered poverty similar to Chengyao's mother in China, it began with a fire that burned down their parent's seventy bedroom Hotel.²² Their father lost his money, business, and left Margate. Emin seldom saw her father until much later in life, this complexity affected Emin's life and the way she developed some of her work.²³ After that they struggled and lived in a

¹⁹ Tracey Emin, *Strangland* (Britain: Sceptre, Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), pp. 2-4.

²⁰ Zerjal, T. (2003). 'The Genetic Legacy of the Mongols' *The American Journal of Human Genetics*, 72 (3), 717-721. Also, Razib Khan, 1 in 200 men direct descendants of Genghis Khan, *Gene Expression* Augusts 2010. Robin Mackie, 'We owe it all to superstud Genghis' Warlord Khan has 16m male relatives alive now. Science Editor, *The Guardian*, March 2003.

²¹ Emin, *Strangland*, p. 4.

²² *Ibid*, p. 8.

²³ *Ibid*, pp. 68-77.

cottage behind their hotel near the seafront of Margate.²⁴ Emin's mother struggled but worked as a chambermaid to support the family.²⁵ Tracy and her brother were often left alone. At age thirteen Emin was raped by someone she knew in Margate, this is another crucial point that developed some of her work. She left school at thirteen but returned to obtain some CSEs at fifteen, she said: 'one was drama, surprisingly I did quite well, I won an award. Then I went straight to London'.²⁶ But she had no inkling of becoming an artist until she left Margate for London, her dream was to become a dancer, but during a dancing routine she suffered polemic language from abusive gangs and later created a video call *Why I Never Became A Dancer* 1995.²⁷ In the 1980s with an artistic talent and some encouragement from boyfriend Billy Childish at the time, Emin graduated from the printing department of Maidstone College of Art in 1986 with a first class BA honours degree and claims it was the best time of her life. But she and Childish terminated their relationship soon after.²⁸ She then pursued an MA on painting at the Royal College of Art and graduated in 1989. One day, while feeling frustrated about the lack of space and an outsider at the RCA, she discarded her early collections of works with a sledgehammer.

Smashing up my paintings in the College courtyard came out of frustration with myself. My only regret was never having it on film. I used a sledgehammer and my paintings were on wood. I went ballistic slashing the sledgehammer around and no one could get near me. And it was simply because I had nowhere to put my paintings so they had to go. That was a mark of my own failure. I later destroyed all of the paintings I made at the RCA by throwing them into a skip. It wasn't because I didn't care about them. It was because I cared about them too much.²⁹

²⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

²⁵ Ibid, 11.

²⁶ Ibid, p. 48.

²⁷ Ibid, p. 42. Also, Arts Council Collection UK Online (DVD, 6 mins, 1997). Also, White Cube Gallery Collection Exhibition *How It Feels* 2012 - 2013. Video 5: 14 mins.

²⁸ Ibid, p. 167.

²⁹ Tracey Emin, interview with the RCA for the celebration of 175 Years of the Royal College of Art, the title of the exhibition was borrowed from Emin's work *A Perfect Place to Grow* 2001, was also exhibited at the RCA celebration. Also see Tate Collections.

After graduating from the Royal College, Emin later abandoned traditional art practice to explore life, and her place in the arts in-between an abortion, breaking up with her boyfriend, and having major dentistry in 1992, as exhibited in the works *The Week Of Hell* 1995, until she met Sarah Lucas in the same year and became involved with the Young British Artists (YBAs) of the 1990s.³⁰ She told Lucas when discussing opening a shop in London, ‘I don’t really want to be an artist... but I would come to a studio to write, make tea and chat,’³¹ little did Emin know she would go down in history like a beacon in the world a few years later, and excelled in notoriety and exhibitions. Emin often claims that Sarah Lucas saved her from a painful period. While we have not seen Emin and Lucas together often, Emin did attend Lucas’ exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2015, Emin had hitherto represented Britain at the Venice Biennale in 2007, and both became not only famous but impacted the arts globally. Emin achieved popularity and success with endless exhibitions year after year since *Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995 and *My Bed* 1998, nationally and internationally. She was awarded with a number of indicators of esteem: membership of the Royal Academy in 2007, first female professor of drawing in 2012, meeting the Queen, and earning a CBE in 2013. Emin received further honorary degrees, an honorary Doctorate from London Metropolitan University in 2007, a Doctor of Letters from the University of Kent in 2007, an honorary Doctorate from the Royal College of Art in 2007.³² While she was associated with the Young British Artists (YBA 1980s) in the 1990s, which includes Sarah Lucas, Rachel Whiteread, Cornelia Parker, Christine Borland, Damien Hirst (the founder of *Freeze* art events), Angus Fairhurst, and Michael Landy, she was also in her own microcosm and gained recognition and promotion by the gallerists such as Jay Jopling of the White Cube Gallery and Charles Saatchi of the Saatchi Gallery, London.³³

The predominant site of reference that illuminates Tracey Emin’s work in this era is her female subjectivity in her art practice. Since the 1990s Britain, not only female artists are new girls in the boy’s playground, but Emin drew men’s attention to discuss issues of sex, rape, depression, abortion, love, and voyeurism. But the society of Thatcherism since the 1980s was not only puzzled and unprepared for modern art, but

³⁰ Jojo Moyes, ‘How We Met: Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin’ *Independent*, 11- Oct 1997. Also see Tracey Emin, *Strangeland* 2005.

³¹ Kate Abbott, ‘Tracey Emin and Sarah Lucas: How we made The Shop.’ *The Guardian*, August 12- 2013.

³² Tracey Emin’s CV in Emin International and Emin Studio.

³³ Saatchi Gallery collections, London, and Tate Modern collections, London.

when they were presented with Emin's *My Bed* 1998 (Fig: 2.12) for the Turner Prize 1999 exhibited in Tate Britain gallery space, there was an uproar.³⁴ Similarly, two years later in China, He Chengyao's subjectivity is at the forefront of her semi-naked self-portrait when she walked up the Great Wall to create *Opening the Great Wall* 2001 (Fig: 2.11). She walked between an installation that comprised of one thousand figures made out of rubbish standing along the sides of the Great Wall of China, called *Trash People* 2001. He Chengyao had similar uproarious receptions as Emin in the UK, of shock and horror from the public internationally.³⁵

Both Tracy Emin and He Chengyao pay homage to their spectre idols such as Munch, Schiele, Duchamp, Kahlo for example. In 2010 Emin agreed to dress up as Frida Kahlo for the photographer Mary McCartney, thereby revealing a past feminist generation and perhaps refracts the possibility that the next generation will follow in Emin's footsteps. Emin's drawings of her abortions and *My Bed* 1998 are comparable to Kahlo's work *My Birth* 1932, in which she was giving birth to herself.³⁶ In the photo below (Fig: 1), Emin re-enacts the Bed of Kahlo and is dressed up in similar costumes to Kahlo of the 1940s-50s, which proclaims the idea of a bed for exhibition was first realised by Kahlo, and Emin had appropriated similar thoughts and ideas in *My Bed* 1998 for an exhibition in Japan before the nomination of the Turner Prize 1999 in Tate Britain, and the second bed is a four poster bed with floral prints and words *I Think It's In My Head* 2002 in Lehmann Maupin Gallery.³⁷ What the image below shows is that Emin not only embraced Kahlo's intimate works but pay homage to her by dressing up as Kahlo. Emin met another idol of hers, Louise Bourgeois, and co-exhibited with her with the work, *Do Not Abandon Me* 2009-2010, exhibited in Hauser and Wirth, London 2011; their sixteen gouache paintings highlighted corporeal discourse of abandonment, with predominately the body and phallus.³⁸ Emin exhibits her experiences similar to Kahlo and Bourgeois emphasising body, love, pain, sex, abuse, and pathos. This history is crucial in understanding how Emin's work follows this trajectory.

³⁴ Fiachra Gibbons, 'Scandal Sheets Envelop Turner Prize' *The Guardian*, Oct 1999.

³⁵ He Chengyao, interview with Monica Merlin, Beijing 2013, with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing 2016.

³⁶ Frida Kahlo, *My Birth* 1932, Mexico. Frida Kahlo Collection.

³⁷ Tracey Emin, *My Bed* 1998, Tate Collection, and in 2014 Charles Saatchi sold *My Bed* 1998 to a private collector Count Christian Duerckheim, on loan to Tate Britain 2014.

³⁸ Tracey Emin and Bourgeois, *Do Not Abandon Me 2009-2010* (New York: MoMa, 2010) Hauser & Wirth, London, from February 18 to March 22, 2011.

Tracey Emin Dressed As Frida Kahlo 2010

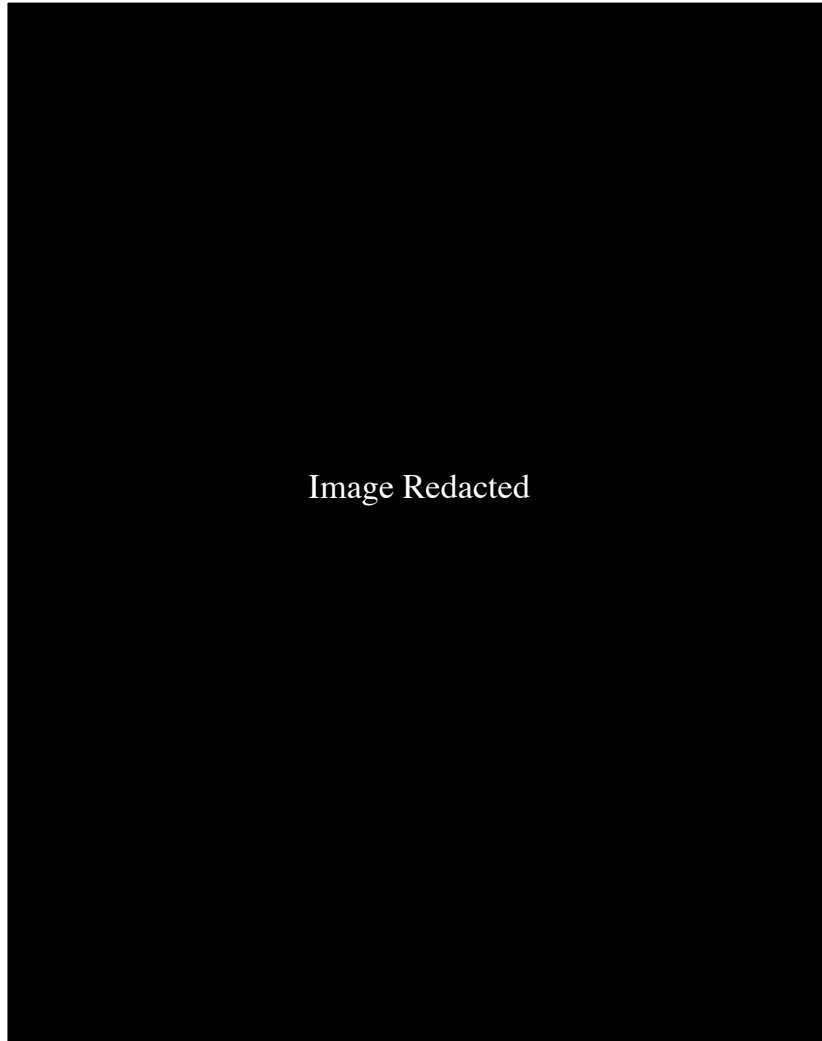


Fig: 1. Tracey Emin Dressed As Frida Kahlo 2010
Photograph Work by Mary McCartney. London NPG.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

He Chengyao, Teaching Young Buddhist Monks in Tibet 2012

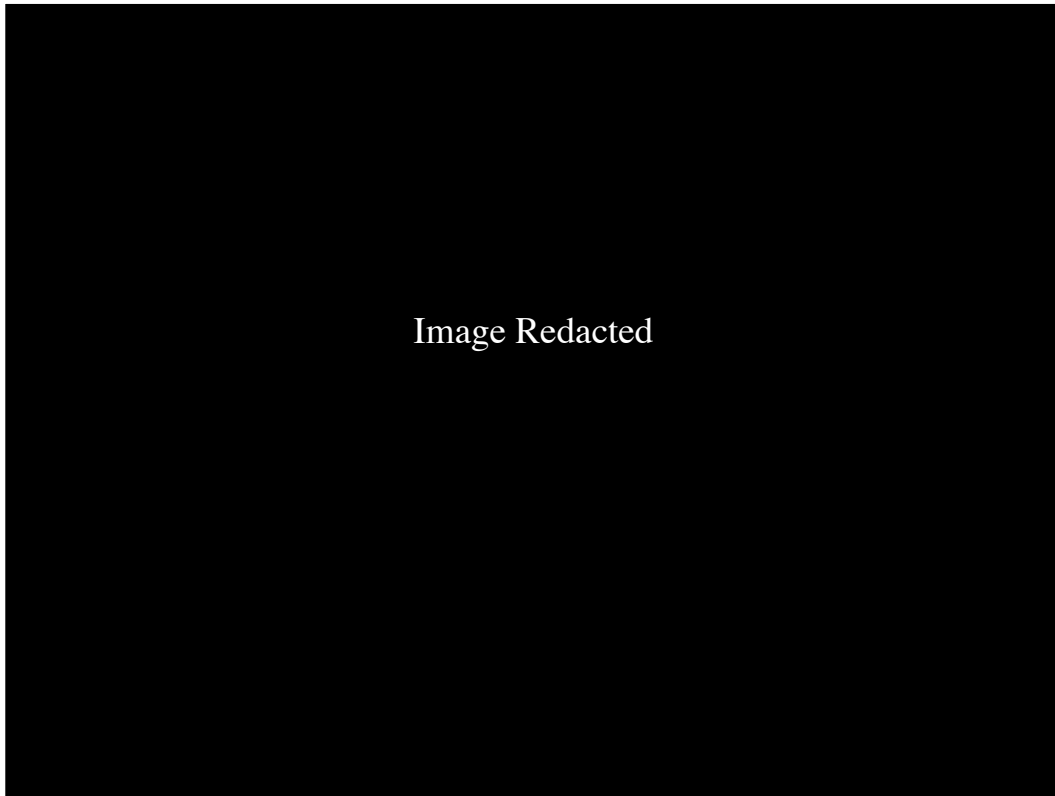


Fig. 2: He Chengyao, Teaching Young Buddhist Monks in Tibet 2012, Photograph, Tibet.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

As for He Chengyao in China, she was born a year after Tracey Emin, in Chongqing (traditionally known as Rongchang), Sichuan, China in 1964 to parents who were not married at the time, and they questioned their political situation.³⁹ They both worked in a pottery factory in Chongqing when they met, but when Chengyao's mother fell pregnant with her before marriage, the management of the pottery factory demanded her to abort her pregnancy. She considered her situation, but later refused to conform, and was dismissed from her work along with her partner who she later married after the birth of He Chengyao, and had two further children.⁴⁰ Chinese society in the 1960s was harsh, Chengyao's mother became mentally ill and could not fully cope with three children in Chongqing. The task was shared between grandparents from both sides.⁴¹ He Chengyao's family struggled for food and basic comforts for years. In the midst of this Chengyao's Mother's mental illness prevented her from working, but her father was able to support the family with different jobs but his political views were exposed and suffered political prosecution and was imprisoned, leaving the family to raise the three children.⁴²

Chengyao was influenced by her father who was an amateur photographer but managed to create a living from it. Against Chengyao's will her father changed her name from He Li (meaning beautiful) to He Chengyao (meaning become pure jade) because her father thought 'beautiful' was too common.⁴³ The culture and political situation were very different to Emin in Britain, but both countries were recovering from WW II. Although in China another internal war begun, the war of famine in Mao's Great Leap Forward 1958-1963,⁴⁴ furthermore Mao stipulated to launch a Cultural Revolution in 1966 against the so called bourgeois ideas. The wars impacted further on the poverty of families across China until Mao's death 1976.⁴⁵ Mao's Great Leap Forward, the cultural revolution, and the mismanagement of communism had bled the

³⁹ Eva Kit Wah Man, 'Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: The Case of He Chengyao,' Mary Bittner Wiseman and Liu Yuedi, *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2011), pp. 171-187.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Sasha Su-Ling Welland, *Experimental Beijing* (Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 206-236.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).

⁴⁵ Ibid. Throughout the book.

country to humiliation, with over forty million people died of famine and were abused behind the scenes during the 60s and 70s according to Frank Dikötter.⁴⁶

It is not surprising the situation in China had caused many illnesses and much distress that triggered the mental illness of Chengyao's mother until she passed away in 2009. The young Chengyao witnessed her mother's painful mental breakdowns; she recalls that when she was a child, she disowned her mother when she took off her clothes in public.⁴⁷ In 2001 Chengyao began her art career when she graduated from oil painting at the Central Academy of Fine Arts (CAFA), Beijing. She transitioned from oil painting to performance art that reveals her desire to exhibit personal traumas without an overt political agenda as a female artist. But her personal performance art practice that involves the naked body refracted as political attracted attention in China and abroad; it was interpreted as a political act of an impetuous feminist artist.⁴⁸

Chinese politics had changed after Mao's death in September 1976, with Hua Gaofeng, Deng Xiaoping, Chen Yun, Jiang Zemin, Hu Jintao, and now Xi Jinping, who changed economically and educationally but continued Mao's vision of communism. China is still governed through a democratic centralist Communist Party of China (CPC) that Mao and his confederates fought for. In the 1980s Deng Xiaoping paved the way for China's economic uprising to reopen primary, secondary, and university education, especially in the arts, which was lacking after the Second World War and the Cultural Revolution.⁴⁹ Within the arts, the Stars movement and the '85 movement were born, they adopted a Dadaist trajectory called Chinese New Dadaist Movement, with a glocalised perspective. They were able to flourish until the government perceived a threat from them and protesters that included artists and students, as a result the tragedy of the Tiananmen Square massacre June 4th 1989 occurred.⁵⁰ He Chengyao did not attend this movement but was studying and teaching art and mathematics in state schools, and also continued to teach art in the Academy of Art, Beijing.⁵¹ She

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Yeh, Diana, 'Chasing the Moon, or, Naked Confrontation', *The International Artist Database*. November 2016.

⁴⁸ He Chengyao interview with Monica Merlin, Beijing 2013.

⁴⁹ Michael Dillon, *China: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), pp. 367–9. Also see The history of China's Cultural Revolution for a historical background, Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–62* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

⁵⁰ Li Shengzhao, 'Xiamen Dada: The Most Radical Group of the '85 New Wave' (Goethe Institut, Beijing, China, July 2016).

⁵¹ Welland, *Experimental Beijing*, pp. 206-236.

remained in China while some of her contemporaries such as Xiao Lu were among the students that were caught between art and the state, therefore Xiao Lu took refuge in Australia as a diaspora artist for nine years after her work *Dialogue* in February 1989 was disrupted, which caused the shutdown of the entire exhibition. Some claimed Lu's two gunshots in February were the first gun shots of June 4th 1989.⁵² Chengyao continued to live in China to develop her work locally but with an international frame, thus her performance art features hybrid of East and West. While building an international portfolio something else lurks in her soul, and she implored to teach in Tibet 2012 (Fig: 2). Not surprisingly in July 2017, she retreated to Nepal in India to become a Buddhist nun and does not know when she will return to normal society.⁵³ Chengyao explores her notion of subjectivity in her work such as *Opening The Great Wall* 2001 and *Ninety Nine Needles* 2002 revealing her childhood. To understand further why Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity constitutes their art practice, it necessitates a discussion about the notion of subjectivity that underlines their reasons to embrace the self in their art practice as female artists in this era.

Part I – The Notion of Subjectivity

The idea of the subject derives from the Latin *subiectum*, the neuter noun of *subicere*, 'to throw under',⁵⁴ or, in the historian of the self, Seigel's phrase, an 'underpinning, giving support to some entity.'⁵⁵ The philosophical usage also refers to Aristotle's notion of *hypokeimenon*, meaning that which underlies.⁵⁶ Within a European context, there was always the sense that to be a subject was to be subjected to a force outside of it, so to be subject to a monarch is to be under this power; 'the subject "lay beneath" some constituted authority, such as a king or prince.'⁵⁷ In turn, this connects with the notion of alienation or estrangement of the self, as if forces congregated on the outside can reflect upon the subject in ways that lead to its fracture. Subjectivity is itself

⁵² Xiao Lu, *Dialogue* trans, Archibald McKenzie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

⁵³ He Chengyao interview with Kwankui Leung, December 2013. Confirmation from close friends of He Chengyao, Sept 2017.

⁵⁴ C.D. Costa and Mary Herberg, *Langenscheidt Latin Universal Dictionary* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1966), p. 220.

⁵⁵ Jerrold Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 14.

⁵⁶ Michael J. Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (London: Blackwell, 1992), p. 280.

⁵⁷ Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, p. 15.

a term in use only since the nineteenth century by philosophers such as Hegel or Kierkegaard,⁵⁸ but it has entered common discourse and has been used particularly in the context of feminism, such as Butler on Hegel; she says, ‘The nonactual is at once the entire realm of possibility. The negative showed itself in Hegelian terms not merely as death, but as a sustained possibility of *becoming*.’⁵⁹ Emin and Chengyao’s experiences are memories, and they are actual and nonactual, they experience them with less intensity, their negative experiences showed themselves to them and they turned their negatives into ‘sustained possibility of *becoming*’, and through their art praxis they attempt to create something affirmative; this is an affirmation by negation in a dialectical process that Butler draws our attention to in Hegel.⁶⁰ In Seigel’s exposition, the notions of subjectivity is an awareness of self-reflectivity.⁶¹ As mentioned earlier, according to Butler, subjectivity derives from desire.⁶² Subjectivity is also the way a person experiences oneself and the ways in which that experience changes over time. According to Foucault, philosophy concerns the history of subjectivity, ‘if what is meant by that term is the way in which the subject experiences himself in a game of truth where he relates to himself.’⁶³ But within the conception of aesthetic subjectivity it is far more personal, especially when the self is performing the self, where the self is the aesthetic subjectivity with in the aesthetic realm, but what is implied by the notion of aesthetic subjectivity specifically?

One cannot omit the history of Kantian thoughts of subjective aesthetics, which led to modern aesthetics, and in turn led to postmodern aesthetics within a Western secular society. But this in turn affected a global system of art praxis in the twentieth-century first century. According to Howard Caygill’s reading of Kant, ‘Art and beauty were considered to be the highest sources of meaning, reconciling humanity with themselves and with nature. Withdrawing from similar early enthusiasms, Hegel extended reflective judgement into a speculative logic which eventually exceeded aesthetics with its proclamation of the death of art. For him the configurations of art

⁵⁸ Georg Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Sylvain Auroux, ‘Subjectivité,’ *Encyclopédie Philosophie Universelle: Les Notions Philosophiques Dictionnaire* vol. II (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1990)., pp. 2477–80. This useful article traces the history of the term in European languages.

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p62.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Seigel, *The Idea of the Self*, pp. 28-29.

⁶² Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 66.

⁶³ Michel Foucault, ‘Foucault,’ in James Faubion (ed.), *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology, Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984* vol. 2 (New York: The New Press, 1998), p. 461.

were inadequate for the presentation of the absolute (see Hegel, 1835).'⁶⁴ Caygill suggests Kant has influenced contemporary aesthetics discourse.⁶⁵ What is crucial then is the aesthetic turn in the theory of Kant, he claimed 'aesthetic' is subjective. Caygill emphasises '...seeing the experience of pleasure in the beautiful as arising from the subjective, sensible perception of such perfection.'⁶⁶ Kant posits a dialogue between beauty and the sublime; this is a dialectic, the beautiful is pleasure and the sublime is pain.⁶⁷ They are predicated upon the different configurations of the faculties and this implied an aesthetic subjective turn within philosophy⁶⁸ because the faculties are reflected within the mind from whence the categories constrain human experience of the beautiful as one experiences it or the sublime that is either mathematical or dynamical that we subject ourselves to. From this view, what is crucial in contemporary art is the relationship between the perceived subject and the intended artist's material and the actual dynamics of the interplay implied within subjectivity and art practice is a two-way confluence between subjectivity and art practice that led to the possibility of a collapse of the subject-art material dualism, as it is with Chengyao or Emin's work. Similarly in China, the notion of subjectivity can be recognised in self reflection, I am, I want, I desire as in Butler's terms.

But the complex notion of subjectivity itself is a philosophical terms stipulates on the one hand there is the idea of the self as an unchanging substance but dualistic of mind and body, as Descartes conceived of it in the seventeenth century, or arguing against Descartes is Spinoza's idea of the self that is one substance embodies two aspects of space and time, or in the eighteenth century even not a substance but essence of a transcendental self as Kant conceived of it, or in the nineteenth century as desire and spirit as Hegel conceptualise it. Then later another view would locate subjectivity as non-essence since Marx and Nietzsche who conceived of the subject as materiality and power relations in a general sense. On the other hand there is the idea that the self is a construct, an epiphenomenon of social and/or economic forces, a consequence of power relationships or discourse within a given society as Butler and Foucault conceive

⁶⁴ Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary Blackwell Philosophy Dictionaries* (London: Blackwell 2000), p 66.

⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 1.

⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 92.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 54.

⁶⁸ Christian Helmut Wenzel, *Introduction to Kant's Aesthetics: Core Concepts and Problems* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), pp. 3, 94-101. Also see Henry Allison in the forward, and Henry Allison, *Kant's Theory of Taste* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp. 106-107.

of it in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁶⁹ From this view, subjectivity is changing according to space and time, and subjected to culture and external powers or forces – as in the case of women’s subjectivity over the centuries – yet subjectivity is also an experiential constant and although it changes, there is a continuity through time such that we can use the word ‘same’ of a moral agent (e.g. ‘this is the same person who I met ten years ago’ or ‘although she has changed in many ways, age, and social forces, she is still the same person who is recognisable’).

If subjectivity can be affected (as physical or emotional pain or desire) then subjectivity exists even if abstractly (even though changing and becoming). If subjectivity is intimately linked to identity because of desire, as Butler says, ‘I desire x’ then subjectivity, even though created, constructed, and discovered, is an abstract process of changing and becoming.⁷⁰ Thus identity is a quality of subjectivity that has a philosophical referent, the ‘I’ is sameness over time as far as a *Homo sapiens* exists, that I am the same person as in the past embodied in the world (mind and body as one), and a sociological referent, the idea of a role intimately linked to gender expectations, such as being a housewife, a mother, or a wife. Furthermore, if there are different versions of subjectivity, and the different claims of subjectivity from the protagonists above since Descartes, then it is necessary to see there are different aspects of subjectivity, which Emin and Chengyao’s work draws our attention to, with three aspects of their subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity; this necessitates an exposition of each aspect in each chapter. But to further understand why subjectivity is crucial in the work of Emin and Chengyao, there is another level that is deeper than the surface; an ontological identification.

Butler’s view of de-centred subjectivity is founded upon the idea that subjectivity is not pre-existing, self-standing or autonomous entity but rather driven by a desire to be recognised by other human beings.⁷¹ Since humans are social beings,⁷² subjectivity is formation affected by external forces and thus subjectivity also entails intersubjectivity, it follows from this that subjectivity cannot mediate itself. Butler

⁶⁹ A. W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 25-39, pp. 107-142.

⁷⁰ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, pp. 41, 66.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Although this seems to be self-evident, human sociality is set within an evolutionary trajectory. See Agustin Fuentes, *The Creative Spark: How Imagination Made Humans Exceptional* (New York: Dutton, 2017), pp. 87-89.

suggests, 'For introductory purposes, however, it suffices to note that desire is essentially linked with self-knowledge; it is always the desire-for-reflection, the pursuit of identity in what appears to be different.'⁷³ The idea of 'desire-for-reflection' is what Emin or Chengyao appear to reside within that arena of perception where the artwork and the construction of the self merge almost within the sense of a narrative being told during the process of art practice, which is an ontological identification relationship, this shall be explicate in depth in Chapter one. Contained within this ambiguous space is the feeling of suspension that runs parallel to the simultaneous opening out of subjectivity. This is not simply born out of a critique of ocular (phallogo) centrism but a redistribution of powers across the registers of actualisation, performativity, visibility, and univocal discourse. Thus, linking the concept of subjectivity with Emin and Chengyao's work as autonomous and no longer desire to be represented by something or someone, their subjectivity as a consequence of desire.

I also draw from Deleuze's complex argument and his understanding of subjectivity as particularity, distinct from personality. His idea of particularity is also foreshadowed in his notion of bodies without organs. Through this concept Deleuze insists a reality underlying the usual subject, a deeper condition that contains the potential for various future possibilities that he contrasts with his description of ordinary persons as 'desiring machines.'⁷⁴ This claims we are more than machines, and desire constitutes the difference. This undifferentiated and non-hierarchical realm beneath appearance is what he later calls the 'plane of immanence,'⁷⁵ characterised by particularity but not personality or individuality. This will be explicated in Chapter four regarding the third aspect of subjectivity - univocity. Furthermore, the idea of the bodies without organs contributes to the thesis' understanding of subjectivity in pointing to a notion of subjectivity that is not linked to personality but to a deeper sense of subjectivity connected to others and to world in the third aspect of subjectivity (a connectivity that Deleuze refers to as the rhizome).⁷⁶ This leads to explore the ideas of subjectivity in art practice.

⁷³ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 7.

⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans by Robert Hurley et al (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2015), p. 20.

⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze, 'Immanence: A Life...' translated by Nick Millet, *Theory, Culture, Society*, vol. 14 (2), 1997, pp. 3-7.

⁷⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), pp. 6-7.

Part II – Subjectivity In Art Practice

Since Chengyao or Emin's art practice is an abstract ontological exploration of self, it discloses a synthesis of abstract aesthetic subjectivity with artist's material, to explicate the abstract interpretation of this merger of self and artist's material: X – subjectivity is thesis and Y – artist's material is antithesis synthesises as XY – artwork, in a dialectical of opposites/contradictions,⁷ is a 'relationship' between Chengyao and her art practice, and between Emin and her art practice, which means their art practice constitutes an ontological identification, where the self identifies with artwork and merge as one. This involves their aesthetic subjectivity and their material of desire, which means a 'relationship' in developing and happening during the process of their ontological art practice, this reveals their three aspects of subjectivity: performativity, visibility, and univocity. To clearly exhibit this reading in a summary, here is a petite formula to explicate their ontological identification relationship:

X – three aspects of subjectivity + Y – artist's material = XY – artwork

This ontological identification relationship comprises performativity, visibility, and univocity, in the uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity of Chengyao and Emin. Their ontological identification relationship is a foundation that underlines their artwork, it is their 'art practice' that explores the self. The above formula presents: a thesis subjectivity as X + antithesis artist's material as Y, synthesis as XY in artwork, is Chengyao or Emin becoming whole, equilibrium, emancipation, when synthesise together as the third thing XY. It is not feminine or masculine, it is a relationship without gender, it actualises the becoming of an artist. It is a relationship that produces their artworks. There is also another metaphor of X as a parent and Y as an art orphan (object/material) synthesising as XY to become artwork. This abstract idea also comes from modernity and postmodernity with *death of the author*, suggesting if the author is dead then the work/book/artwork becomes an orphan indefinitely. This is not dissimilar to how Burke metaphorically compares the relationship between author and book to father and child, Burke writes 'the liberation of writing attendant upon the death of the

⁷ Ludwig Siep, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 66-68.

author is all the more acutely registered if the author is reputed the Father to which the book is the child'.⁷⁸

The abstract aesthetic subjectivity of Chengyao or Emin in art practice is navigated in the above formula, revealing a relationship between the artist and art practice that reflects subjectivity as a fusion of the flow of movement between subjectivity and art practice; the self moves towards artist's material as the material of desire and explores something ordinary in order to create something extraordinary; for example from body to art practice, from body and artist's material to artwork in Emin's *My Bed* 1998 (Fig: 2.12) or *Waiting for Morning* 2015 (Fig: 4.15) or Chengyao's *Opening The Great Wall* 2001 (Fig: 2.11) or *Ninety Nine Needles* 2002 (Fig: 3.3-3.5). This infers a process of creation where the artist actualises and articulates the flow of their subjectivity through interacting with a flow of the artist's materials used during the process of an ontological identification relationship, a flow of self, experience, and memory enacted with an artist's material of desire. Thus, the flow of subjectivity in conjunction with the flow of artist's material of desire, results not only the artwork, but a relationship that create the artwork.

The process of creativity has always been complicated and has dominated and mystified art historians for centuries. In post-modernism Emin or Chengyao has adopted a new façon of actualising being in art practice. The ontological relationship between the artist and artist's material to create artwork for exhibition affects another in the public exchange of views space, in turn others affect their being, from subjective negative to appraisals criticisms of reception. In the article 'Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma' Griselda Pollock writes, 'Art can, however, seek the means to create matrixial alliances, to bring human subjects closer to the possibility of recognizing and being affected by the pain and hence the being of the other, and to assenting to carry some of its burden, to share a border space that may become a threshold'.⁷⁹ For Pollock art creates alliances to bring human subject together that have been affected by the vicissitudes of life, which can release some burden they carry. Art practices serve as affect, which Emin or Chengyao's work has affected others, when they highlight their personal traumas or experiences suggests female subjectivity is crucial in this era; this illuminates a female art discourse since the feminist artists of the 60s and 70s who

⁷⁸ Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, p. 25.

⁷⁹ Griselda Pollock, 'Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma' (EurAmerica Vol. 40, No. 4, December 2010), pp. 829-886.

fought for female subjectivity to highlight the female lack. I use the phrase 'lack of female subjectivity' not to imply that subjectivity is a thing or an object but rather that the abstract process of being a subject or self in the aesthetic subjectivity of Emin or Chengyao, which questions the restrictions of female subjectivity by phallogocentrism discourse. Subjectivity is less a 'thing' and more of an abstraction of becoming or in Butler's terms, the consequence of desire.

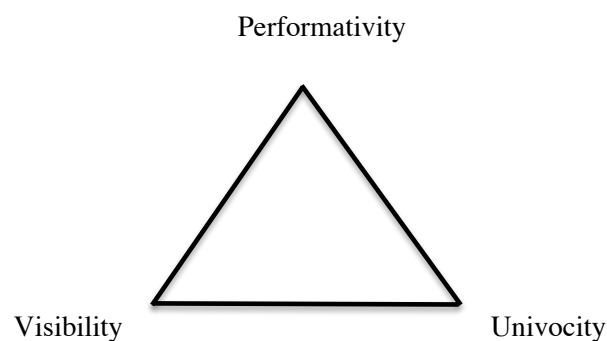
Another valid observation of subjectivity in art practice is stressed by Tim Ingold, inspired by Deleuze, makes a similar point of self and art practice. There is a flow of consciousness and a flow of materials, which we can depict as two parallel lines. One imagines the flow of consciousness suddenly stopping, and that is an image in the mind, and the flow of materials suddenly stopping, and that is the object outside the mind. Traditionally academic disciplines, such as art and architecture, have concentrated on 'shuttling back and forth' between image and object, object and image, but a different way of looking at this is in terms of the whole trajectory of the two flows, artist and concepts of artist's material.⁸ The relationship between the two flows or processes of subjectivity and artist's materials is ontologically relational because the being of the subject connects to the being of the flow of artist's materials. The flow of Chengyao or Emin's subjectivity connects with the flow of artist's materials, the artist's materials they are exploring extends the self and results in a relationship that creates the artwork. The ontological identification relationship is their art practice that reveals their three aspects of subjectivity. But what is three aspect of subjectivity?

⁸ See Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 20-21.

Part III – Three Aspects of Subjectivity

What, then, is an aspect in the notion of three aspects of subjectivity in Emin and Chengyao's ontological identification relationship that exhibits performativity, visibility, and univocity? An 'aspect' here is a modality of the human condition that denote three facets of the relationship between self and artist's material. There are precedents for using the term 'aspect' in relation to their subjectivity. Butler stresses a metaphysical idea of humanness, that we are interconnected and exceeds our world. To illustrate the three aspects of subjectivity here is a triangular diagram to demonstrate their relationship between each one, which is examined, analysed, and explicated in depth through the works of Emin and Chengyao's in the following chapters. The three aspects of subjectivity: performativity, visibility, and univocity triangular relationship diagram is drawn from reading their artwork. The triangulation illustrates how each aspect is equal in relation of subjectivity and each is connected to the other. The above diagram of XY to exhibit the ontological identification relationship, the diagram below exhibits the visual image of 'X', which is Emin or He's aesthetic subjectivity consists of three aspects. This is articulated in their artwork; this constitutes a concept of their abstract relationship between self and art praxis, from subjectivity into reality which exists in time: the flow of subjectivity interacts with the flow of the artists' material – 'Y' in multimedia – body, fabrics, videos, neons, drawings, paintings, sculptures words, and readymade expressed in three aspects of their subjectivity.

X = Three Aspects of Subjectivity



The first aspect of subjectivity is ‘performativity’ discussed in Chapter two, how is Emin or Chengyao embodied this? It requires their desire to actualise their thoughts, ideas, memories, or dreams, to be acknowledged as something crucial to put into practice, the virtual into actual, and the actual into virtual, as a performative with their body to deliver their concepts. Butler’s idea of performativity will clarify this further, in how one’s body moves, talks, and being oneself is performative.⁸¹ In a metaphorical sense, a naked self-portrait of Emin or Chengyao performing their own experience is performative, they are the model and the artist who narrates their history and experience with their artwork is performativity of the performative, but not as actors or the story of another or performance of another on stage. They express their own history, heritage, and experience.

The second aspect of subjectivity is ‘Visibility’ discussed in Chapter three, which articulates a desire to be acknowledged, to reveal the invisibility of female artists and women’s subjectivity in general. To be visible comes from self-consciousness of the history of the lack of female artists and their subjectivity; Chengyao and Emin take on board that women were not recognised with ideas or concepts of the self, desire, or autonomy. What the ontological identification relationship reveals is the autonomy of Chengyao and Emin when they inhabit their art practice and artwork that becomes an extension of self, the invisible becomes visible, but being visible is to put one’s self forward openly.⁸² It enters into a new mode of being, the female artist and their new materials, in which their subjectivity is visible and becoming voice, because the new nude is active rather than passive in the traditional female nude, this changes the future and temporal orientation of performance art in performativity. Being/becoming, I desire x-artist’s material takes centre stage in visibility, the consequence of desire to be acknowledged as artists.

The third aspect of subjectivity discussed in Chapter four is univocity from a Deleuzian perspective, a concept which indicates the unique, unrepeatability of the existence of the self: each instance of Being is unique and particular and, in this way, transcends individuality or personality to inclusivity; the consequence of becoming one voice of Being, Emin and Chengyao’s faceless bodies illuminate a desire to be

⁸¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Routledge Classics. New York: Routledge, 1990 – 2010), p. 34.

⁸² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: RKP, 1962), pp. 231–33, 409–11, 166–7.

inclusive.⁸³ The uniqueness of their three aspects of subjectivity articulates a desire not only to reveal their experience, or be acknowledged, but also to be inclusive of another. As Butler writes, ‘to be alive is already to be connected with what is living not only beyond myself, but beyond my humanness, and no self and no human can live without this connection to a biological network of life that exceeds the domain of the human animal’.⁸⁴

What is being rendered here is He Chengyao and Tracey Emin’s art practice that redefines their cultural expectations and formation of the female body relationship between subjectivity and art practice in ontological terms; the difference in multimedia will highlight the difference in time of a global culture in China and the West. Emin and Chengyao attempt to avoid politics through exploring the self within an aesthetic realm, contributing to a global voice with ethical consideration ubiquitously, and the political implications are subject to cultural formations. They remind us of an implicit and explicit feminist trope that holds the flag of the personal as political,⁸⁵ when their naked self-portrait narrates their memory in different countries, not only to critiques a patriarchy society, but a global society, and in solidarity with female visibility of subjectivity in the arts. This also influences Emin and Chengyao’s uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity in naked self-portraits. The female naked self portraits as evidence of how they question a patriarchal art practice that objectified the female body, hence the female naked-self-portraits is a tell-tale sign of a new kind of nude in female art practice where the personal refracts as political since the 60s and 70s, which continues to influences today’s artists.

⁸³ Deleuze, ‘Immanence: A Life ...’.

⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, Harvard University Press 2015), p. 43. Also, in *Gender Trouble* (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 195–6.

⁸⁵ Carol Hanisch, ‘The Personal Is Political’, Barbara A. Crow (ed.), *Radical feminism: A documentary reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), pp. 113–115.

Part IV – The New Nude

The new nude cannot be explicated without acknowledging the anesthetisation of the traditional nude. The traditional nude has generally been portrayed by male artists for artistry, objectification, pleasure, and subjected to the male gaze as voyeuristic. The modern traditional nude began to confront society with *Olympia* 1863 by Édouard Manet to *L'Origin Du Monde* 1866 by Gustave Courbet. Manet exhibited the work of the prostitute *Olympia* as the nude model for the Paris Salon in 1865, it attracted an uproar from the public because the eyes of *Olympia* confronted the viewer with a direct gaze, the exhibition was disrupted by the police who had to tame polemical behaviour from the audience.⁸⁶ *Olympia* has been debated and questioned since the day it was exhibited in Paris 1865, or Courbet's *L'Origin Du Monde* 1866 that exposed the bottom half of a woman's naked body that epitomises eroticism of its time, but it was never exhibited until 1995. Hervé Lewandowski wrote, 'The almost anatomical description of female sex organs is not attenuated by any historical or literary device. Yet thanks to Courbet's great virtuosity and the refinement of his amber colour scheme, the painting escapes pornographic status.'⁸⁷ It was commissioned by the Turkish diplomat Khalil-Bay but it is not clear what happened to the painting when he died, but the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan owned it until his death in 1981. In 1964 Duchamp created *Étant Donnés* 1966 in response to *L'Origin Du Monde* before he died 1968, and in 1989 Orlan also responded with a C-Print photograph using similar tones to Courbet's *L'Origin De Monde*, with her version *L'origine De La Guerre*, that was exhibited in La Musée d'Orsay, juxtaposed together in 2014. How we have changed since Kenneth Clark's work on *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* 1956, Clark claims, 'to be naked is to be deprived of cloths'.⁸⁸ John Berger emphasises in *Ways of Seeing* 1972, 'The first nudes in the tradition depicted Adam and Eve...in Genesis' 'in modern art the category of the nude has become less important. Artists themselves began to question it.'⁸⁹ Lynda

⁸⁶ Charles Bernheimer, 'Manet's Olympia: The Figuration of Scandal', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 10, No. 2, Art and Literature II, Duke University Press, Summer 1989, pp. 255-277. Also see Tracey Emin talking about *The Origin of the World* by Gustave Courbet, at the foundation Beyeler in Riehen, Switzerland, 2014.

⁸⁷ Hervé Lewandowski, *The Origin of the World* 1866 Grand Palais Musée d'Orsay collection and exhibited since 1995.

⁸⁸ Kenneth, Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (Bollingen Series 35.2. New York: Pantheon Books, 1956).

⁸⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972). pp. 47 – 64.

Nead's *Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* 1992, and Frances Borzello's *The Artist's Model* 2010 and *The Naked Nude* 2012,⁹⁰ uncover the master's artistry, pleasure, and exploitation of the female model for the traditional nude argues that the nude has changed, if not recycled.⁹¹ Francois Jullien declares in *The Impossible Nude* 2007 that the nude in China was impossible owing to their philosophical ideas of the body, the body was more than idealisation of beauty.⁹²

One can draw back further and see Kant's idea of aesthetic judgement that includes '...solely because it is a mere play of presentations which produces in the body an equilibrium of the vital forces.'⁹³ Instead of interpreting the new nude as purely a protest of body politics against patriarchy, they desire equilibrium with the new nude self-portraits, to not only acknowledge but to claim back the female body, which belongs to women and their vital forces. Emin's naked self-portraits are vital forces to question who the female body belongs to. When I posed a question about Emin's self-portraits as nudes at her interview with Tim Marlow in Hong Kong Art Basel 2016, she emphasised, how it is not about the nude, it is about the body, it is about nature, and how she is nature. Tim Marlow points out how Jackson Pollock, said something similar, he is nature.⁹⁴ But yet in the program *What Do Artists Do All Day* 2015, Emin reflected on creating, she said she wanted to do 'some nudes'.⁹⁵ This contradiction is confusing but a vital transitioning to explore a new kind of nude by female artists, to reinterpret the female naked body for themselves. To borrow Andrew Moore's term, she is 'making sense of things'⁹⁶ through the process of looking for equilibrium; through this, Emin is looking for balance. Alongside this she is also searching for spirituality in nature; Emin married a rock in March 2016 in her house in France. Historically, a rock is an artist's material that goes back thousands of years, a rock is nature that might give

⁹⁰ For a recent history and account see Frances Borzello, *The Artist's Model* (Faber and Faber 2010), *Naked Nude* (New York, New York: Thames & Hudson, 2012); Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity, and Sexuality* (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁹¹ Frances Borzello, 'The Recycled Nude' Hay Festival, *Talk, Hay Festival*, May 27 2013

⁹² François Jullien, *Then Impossible Nude* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

⁹³ Immanuel Kant, *Critique Of Judgement*, trans Warner S. Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing 1987), p. 203.

⁹⁴ Tracey Emin interview with Tim Marlow, March 24th 2016, Hong Kong. See also interviews with David Tang, *Hong Kong Tatler*, March 2016, pp. 225–31, and 'Tracey Emin in Hong Kong: exclusive preview reveals why she married a stone, why she wishes she was a Roman', Art Basel 2016 in *South China Morning Post*, 21st March 2016.

⁹⁵ Tracey Emin, 'What do artists do all day?' BBC programme 2nd June 2015.

⁹⁶ A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

her the equilibrium she seeks.⁹⁷ Similarly, He Chengyao in China is looking for balance, this is evident when she became a nun in 2017.⁹⁸

While feminist artists of the 60s and 70s are striving for equality, in the twenty-first century Emin and Chengyao are in search of equilibrium while defending the feminist artist's alliance. Advancing not only in responding to patriarchy but also to understand the self as female artists that desire to be visible and inclusive. Their new nude informs us of how the 'nude' is not dead and nor should it be, akin to subjectivity that Burke argued against the death of the author. Emin and Chengyao's new nude exhibits subjectivity to redefine the female body. But while they object to the traditional nude, they are also enacting an ontological interpretation of a new kind of nude with desire, subjectivity, and agency. Emin's *Waiting for Morning* 2015 (Fig: 4.15) for example, brings our attention to a women's metier, the figure is drawn with thread, sewing on calico, traditionally a female occupation, but this is Emin's body as voice in this era. It is both the expression of Emin's critique of the traditional nude with her body as the model and the artist who created this work.⁹⁹ Jonathan Jones writes, Emin is 'an artist of the nude.'¹⁰⁰ Emin also writes, 'But I dream of exercising my taste. I dream of living somewhere with space. Often in my life, when I have really wanted something, I've made it up. Like, it's all I've thought about, dreamt about, craved and believed, and how it became a reality.'¹⁰¹ Emin's words here are her thoughts and desires to actualise her subjectivity visibly. 'I dream of exercising my taste' is the 'I desire x' theory that I have borrowed from Butler to further understand Emin and Chengyao. The new nude exhibits subjectivity of female artists as well as the lack of female subjectivity.

This new nude is Emin's sensibility in the ontological relationship process that is framed by an edited truth; as she says during an interview with Laurie Taylor 2012, she edits her work to how she wishes to exhibit it, not to re-enact the whole truth in only one piece of work. Similarly, in China He Chengyao's work is a new nude with an artist's sensibility in her ontological relationship that narrate an edited truth, at one level is a spontaneous reconstruction of her memory of an authentic experience in the

⁹⁷ Jonathan Jones, 'Stoned Love: why Tracey Emin married a rock' (The Guardian, March 2016).

⁹⁸ He Chengyao, interview with Leung Kwankiu 2017, and discussion with Tong Pui Yin, Beijing.

⁹⁹ Tracey Emin interviewed with John Wilson, on Front Row studio, Radio 4, 1 Nov 2017.

¹⁰⁰ Jonathan Jones, 'Between the Bed and the Clock,' in Tracey Emin, *Works 2007–2017* (New York: Rizzoli, 2017), p. 13.

¹⁰¹ Emin, *Strangeland*, p. 132.

past. The new nude attempts not only to liberate themselves as female artists, but it illuminates female subjectivity and the lack of female subjectivity in this era. By using their own naked bodies to articulate the self, Emin and Chengyao are emptied bare of body accretion in being visible, in public, and without compromise: they attempt to make visible the invisibility of female subjectivity.¹⁰² The new nude is the ontological identification that is explicated through the illustration of Emin and Chengyao's artworks in performativity, visibility, and univocity; a way of making sense of things and also to voice a cause – the lack of female aesthetic subjectivity.

In the last few decades we have also seen male artists attempting to create a new kind of nude such as Lucian Freud, or Anthony Gormley. Freud interprets his own kind of nude with works such as the *Benefits Supervisor Sleeping* 1995, that has been compared to the Venus of Willendorf nearly 30.000 years ago.¹⁰³ Freud's claim 'My work is purely autobiographical. It is about myself and my surroundings. It is an attempt at a record.'¹⁰⁴ However biographical Freud's work such as *Self Portrait: Reflection* 1993 is, most of his portraits were of other sitters. This resonates the style of traditional nudes and differs from the new nude of female artists. Another example is Anthony Gormley's work that casts his own body for his sculptures exhibit a masculine mechanical figure of this era. In line with modern industrial characteristics; often look strong, a moment of stillness among the landscape, a human machine,¹⁰⁵ not dissimilar to the idea of *David* 1501-1504 by Michelangelo, reputed as being strong and ideal. Again, his work is not about his own personal experience or the rejection of the traditional nudes in patriarchy. Perhaps there is a cusp between the traditional and the new nude in its transition. Even in China male artists such as Ai Weiwei attempts to execute performance art with his own body as naked self-portrait, it is not a new nude because there is no critique of the traditional nude with his body, it is on a cusp, a movement of transition from traditional nude to new nude.

Emin and He's naked-self-portraits in performativity are explicit examples of the new nude with subjectivity that are influenced by the feminist artists of the 60s and

¹⁰² Gillian Perry, *Difference and Excess in Contemporary Art: the Visibility of Women's Practice* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

¹⁰³ O. Soffer, J. M. Adovasio, and D. C. Hyland, 'The "Venus" Figurines: Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic,' by *The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research. Current Anthropology* Volume 41, Number 4, August–October 2000.

¹⁰⁴ Bob Duggan, 'How Lucian Freud Painted Himself by Painting Others' Big Think Article (nd).

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Gormley, at anthonygormley.com.

70s. The new nude differs from male artists' naked self-portraits in that the new nude displays a double refraction from the female artist's naked self-portraits. Double refraction refers to the new nude that articulates both the subjectivity of the artist explicitly and also simultaneously critique of patriarchy. The new nude embodies a female artist's corporeality as voice that critiques and attempts to claim back the female body for women, and there are precursors since the 60s and 70s, artists such as Carolee Schneemann and Marina Abramović, while their work is discussed in this thesis, much of the feminist artists of this period have been discussed widely, hence I will not be discussing other feminist artists' work in this project. This leads to an explication of methodology that governs this thesis.

Part V – Methodology

The methodology for my thesis is based on an interdisciplinary approach to the research questions above. As an artist myself interpreting Emin and Chengyao, my first task is to juxtapose Emin and Chengyao's artworks, which highlights a global female art practice, my second task is to draw upon the work of critical philosophers, art historians, feminists, and empirical research. Through further investigation I found that their work has never been compared before. In *The Ontological Turn* 2017, Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen emphasise the 'turn to ontology' in Anthropology which asks the question 'how do I enable my ethnographic material to reveal itself to me by allowing it to dictate its own terms of engagement ...?'¹⁰⁶ The word 'dictate' is strong, but the sense of what my ethnographic materials will show to me stands. In a similar way, my question is 'how do I interpret what Emin and Chengyao's artworks evince to me and what is the ontological relationship between them?' And the answer is in the question itself, that I would interpret the artwork as data to guide my perception phenomenologically. The epistemological data aids my research and my ontological interpretation of what is shown to me, which constitutes my methodology. Ontology is also what Heidegger calls *Dasein* – Being there and *Mitsein* Being with another.¹⁰⁷ By juxtaposing Emin and Chengyao's work, their particularity necessitates a deeper reading than a surface scanning, and henceforth my ontological interpretation is a way

¹⁰⁶ Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen, *The Ontological Turn: An Anthropological Exposition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 5.

¹⁰⁷ Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time*, trans John Mcquarrie. Oxford: Blackwell, 1964.

of making deeper sense of things in Moore's terms.¹⁰⁸ This led to developing a philosophical hypothesis about aesthetic subjectivity as an ontological relationship of their subjectivity with artwork – in their new nudes – in an ontological identification relationship with three aspects of subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity, as my original contribution to knowledge. Drawing from Philosophy, Art History, Feminism, and interviews from my empirical research are methods I adopted to explicate this critical analysis.

The analysis will be in relation to the thesis' argument above. While Emin and Chengyao's work is the crucial focus, the philosophical, historical, and feministic parameter also substantiates a global interpretation in a twenty-first century art practice. The theoretical framework is on the one hand philosophical, deriving from the philosophers such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Giles Deleuze, Merleau-Ponty, and François Jullien, while on the other hand it is feminist art history, drawing on work by Ameila Jones, Griselda Pollock, and global art historians Gao Minglu, Wu Hung, and Paul Gladston. Their particularity will contribute to my theory of art interpretation – Tracey Emin and He Chengyao's aesthetic subjectivity in their art practice articulated as artwork. Borrowing from Butler's idea of the dialectical philosophical contradiction of the self and world, will lead the theory of how the self (subject X) is identified with artist's material (material Y) to form artwork (XY). This is to render an ontology into an epistemology in the service of methodology by formulating this particular epistemology to frame and shape the methodology. Butler's ontological thesis about performativity – that gender, for example, is created through its performativity – is used here to reformulated in terms of an epistemological framework, what it can tell us about Emin and Chengyao's artwork and practice. The epistemology comes from the evidence of the artwork as data, and how it corresponds in the theory of ontological identification, it aligns with my research questions and addresses them directly. By rendering an interdisciplinary discourse, subjectivity in art practice is explained in terms of an ontological identification relationship, with performative, visible, and inclusive particularity. This turns into an epistemology that will contribute to the understanding of how Emin and He identify subjectivity with artwork in their naked-self-portrait. This epistemology becomes a methodology that phenomenologically (used as an adverb rather than a discipline) exhibits the deeper structure of Tracey Emin

¹⁰⁸ Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*.

and He Chengyao's global art practice, with illustrative examples of selected artworks as data and evidence for the thesis. The analysis of their actual works evinced a deeper connection between the process of subjectivity and the ontological relationship exposed, suggesting their work as 'confessional art' is problematic and questionable.

Since this thesis is a comparison between two global artists, Tracey Emin and He Chengyao, the research also included travelling between China, Hong Kong, and the UK, in which I interviewed He Chengyao and have also interviewed the following artists to gain a wider empirical perspective and knowledge of He Chengyao and Chinese contemporary art: Zhang Bin Bin, Yu Hong, Xiang Jing, Xiao Lu, Liao Wen, Hu Yifei, Chen Jing, Dong Jinling, Cui Guang Xia, Cheng Guang, Wang Zang, Cheng Clara, Chen Shisen, Feng Wei Dong, Wang Dandan, Wu Weihe, Yim Monique. These interviews also provided data for my paper that I gave on *The Self in Chinese Contemporary Art* for The EAAA conference in Zurich 2017, which I did not submit for publication but to wait until I finish my thesis. My direct interviews provided supporting materials for this thesis, but as for Tracey Emin, hard as I tried to reach an interview with Emin, by emails, phone calls, exhibitions, or book signings did not result to an interview with her. I often received polite and respectful emails to say, Emin is too busy for interviews, meetings, or studio visits. But I was not too concerned because the disadvantages of a direct interview with Tracey Emin were offset by the large amount of interview material available for research compared to He Chengyao. There was also huge amount of data on the YBA artists. I did however attend a group interview with a VIP pass and contributed a question, where Tim Marlow interviewed Tracey Emin in Hong Kong Art Basel Festival 2016. After the interview I thought I would have a chat with her, but the crowd of audience suddenly jumped up for selfies with Emin akin to bees surrounding the queen bee, even Emin was overwhelmed and left urgently. Another example was in the exhibition, *The Last Adventure Is You* 2014, White Cube, London, I attended a book signing opportunity, and had hoped to chat with Emin, but an argument broke out between Emin and a journalist, she was in no mood for more interviews. Perhaps we were not meant to meet at present, not yet. While Emin does not have the time to assist my research, I am very grateful to all her materials available. He Chengyao who is akin to Emin very busy, said to me, 'I did not wish to

give interviews to anyone anymore because in some interviews, my words were contradictory, but since it is you, I feel you will understand me more'¹⁰⁹

This thesis is not a defence of Emin or Chengyao's work, for they do not need me to defend them, they do that rather well on their own. Furthermore, by juxtaposing their work will unfold contemporary art practice in China and the West in the context of global art practices, and hence an opportunity to illuminate an original contribution to knowledge in the field. My primary task is to examine and analyse artworks as data – *épistémé* – how and why – methodology and ontology; this will analyse and explicate my research findings and discoveries. This research has been undertaken through a process that involved an initial formulation of the thesis that has resulted from a preliminary survey of the selected artworks of Tracey Emin and He Chengyao that has rendered the discoveries made in this thesis. This preliminary survey was followed by the formulation of the hypothesis that their work is characterised by an ontological identification with three aspects of subjectivity in art practice and artwork. It is this identification, for example, that explains why their naked self-portraits, which I call the new nudes, are performative, visible, and univocal; it also explains why often their works have faceless bodies. The face can be read as a sign of subjectivity and its erasure indicates both the erosion of female subjectivity and re-inscribing the centrality of the body beyond the schema of a Cartesian dualism. Through analysing and interpreting each selected work in their context of history, philosophy, and feminist theories, their work also phenomenologically discloses themselves. This thesis discovers how and why Emin and Chengyao's art practice encompasses an ontological identification relationship with three aspects of their subjectivity: this thesis reads their artwork through the lens of the hypothesis of an abstract aesthetic subjectivity as an ontological relationship in their uncompromising naked-self-portraits or new nudes.

This methodology consists of the data of the artworks, the words of Emin, Chengyao, and other artists, the work of philosophers, art historians, and art feminist theorists mentioned above. This interdisciplinary formation is crucial in reading these two global artists. For example, Butler has emphasised the performativity of gender and Irigaray also has emphasised the ways in which gender becomes expressed and women controlled through society. There is a contradiction between Butler and Irigaray, Butler

¹⁰⁹ He Chengyao interview with Leung Kwankiu, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, correspondence with emails and conversations in-between.

regards all gender, even sex itself, as socially constructed whereas Irigaray regards 'sexuation' as natural and innate. Methodologically, this is relevant because the analysis of the works of Emin and Chengyao also show how their work is situated within a patriarchal system that both Butler and Irigaray's work emphasises. Their work illustrates the tremendous edifice of patriarchal relegation of women to the margins of society. Viewing such works through the lens of feminism exposes the broader context of occlusion in which they occur.

The method and methodology of Emin and Chengyao's work are explicated throughout the thesis but in brief here, they have adopted an introspection that renders an ontological relationship between self and art practice, from actualisation of subjectivity to art practice that creates their artwork. Their creative process involves making sense of things, they investigate their lives in different global cultural formations, artist's materials, and the audience there are presenting to. The thought process and decisions of what subject, topic, or materials to use for a particular project is complex and often difficult but can be spontaneous. The relationship between self and art practice is the ontological identification, the self identifies and interacts in art practice to create the artwork. This leads to Chapter One that discusses their Ontological Identification relationship.

Chapter 1 – Ontological Identification Relationship: Anticipation of Performativity, Visibility, and Univocity

The fake feeling of confessional, and the temporary relief of bare-it-all media, is not what Emin is about. She wants to go deeper than that, and she can. The question, when looking at her work, is not how to judge it but how to feel it.¹⁰⁰

The above quote from Carl Freedman reminds us Tracey Emin's work necessitates a serious reception. The introduction presented this thesis and explicated how and why a comparison of Tracey Emin and He Chengyao's global contemporary art practice is crucial in contemporary art history. Again, my original contribution to knowledge is comparing Emin and Chengyao's work that reveals an ontological identification relationship, which reflects three aspects of their aesthetic subjectivity: Performativity, Visibility, and Univocity. This chapter illustrates how and why their creative process from their subjectivity to their art practice that interacts to create artwork personifies an ontological identification relationship.

There is an ontological relationship when Emin or Chengyao explores their subjectivity that interacts with artist's material constructed under the lens of identification. This philosophical art practice transpires as an edited truth of the artists' deep personal memory of their own experience. They make decisions during the creative process as to which journey they wish to explore; for they cannot elucidate all their experiences in one piece of artwork, hence they select which segment to exhibit that best presents their personal encounters. The constitution of their experience can only be told as edited truths and this process involves making sense of things, which brings me to the work of A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* 2012, who insists on how metaphysics is 'making sense of things' and examines and writes a chapter on Deleuze and remarks 'Deleuze believes that metaphysics is a creative exercise; he could scarcely make his position on that any plainer. Indeed he follows Bergson in seeing it as a creative exercise of the purest

¹⁰⁰ Carl Freedman, Honey Luard, *Tracey Emin, Works 1963-2006* (Rizzoli International Publications 2006), p. 7.

kind'.¹¹¹ Moore also discusses this in the chapter on Heidegger's idea of *Dasein* (Being) and claims Heidegger is 'making sense of things' during his creative writing.¹¹² Heidegger himself claims that ontology is philosophy itself.¹¹³ Emin and Chengyao's work constitutes making sense of their lives, memories, art practice, materials, concepts, communication, society, politics, humanity, and meaning. Again, here is a formula to explicate what is an ontological identification relationship:

X – three aspects of subjectivity + Y – artist's material = XY – artwork

This ontological identification relationship anticipates performativity, visibility, and univocity, in the uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity of Tracey Emin and He Chengyao. The flow of subjectivity – X as thesis, connects to the flow of artist's material – Y as antithesis, to synthesise as artwork – XY that creates a dialectical formula as discussed in the Introduction ($X+Y=XY$), this formula aids the idea of a creative process of making sense of things within the exploration of self and art, which suggests an ontological identification relationship; how the artists relate to and interact with their art practice, to what material they desire to use, to their abstract intentions, and to concepts of use, their reconstruction of their memories will result in a movement of the self towards artist's material, this movement is an active relationship of becoming. In their making sense of things as female artists, they constitute performativity regardless of whether the artist's body is present or not, actual or virtual in Deleuzian terms, to create a new kind of nude.

Tim Ingold encapsulates subjectivity with materials in his work, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* 2013. He points out, on the one hand there is a stream of subjectivity (Ingold calls this a stream of consciousness) while on the other there is a stream of materiality.¹¹⁴ This indicates these two streams of 'consciousness and material' interact and overlap each other in an anthropomorphic state, referring to a movement of subjectivity and art material which can embody each

¹¹¹ Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, p. 579.

¹¹² A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 470-471.

¹¹³ Martin Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1982), pp. 275-276.

¹¹⁴ Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 20-21.

other in artwork. Such bond amalgamates an ontological identification relationship where the self, Emin and Chengyao, identifies with the artist's desired material. Their consciousness identifies with art material of their choice, which means there is an abstract movement in the process of becoming that intersects with their art materials when they identify with their artwork and practice. Their abstraction of subjectivity provides a signature of cultural formation onto the abstract concrete tangibility/intangibility of the different artistic materials of Emin in the West or Chengyao in China. Different aesthetic, subjective consciousness of memory is reflected, perceived, recognised, and acknowledged in order to identify with their art practice constituting their creative process. Thus, their ontological identification relationship not only involves self actualisation of aesthetic subjectivity but they also identify themselves throughout the making sense of things in the creative process and the finite/infinite in Deleuzian terms, of the artwork. This suggests an abstract action is working while the self actualises the thought process to move towards art practice with concepts, materials of desire, and with intention in the ontological process of $X+Y=XY$.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* 2005, Butler quotes Foucault and presents an account of the self that illustrates the self needs to be conscious and mediated through the other in the creative process. The 'Self-mastery takes place in an address to an other or in an exposition before the other, contextualized and facilitated by a pedagogical relationship.'¹¹⁵ Butler quotes Foucault:

These exercises are part of what we would call an "aesthetics of the self." For one does not have to take up a position as that of a judge pronouncing a verdict. One can comport oneself towards oneself in the role of a technician, of a craftsman, of an artist, who from time to time stops working, examines what he is doing, reminds himself of the rules of the art, and compares these rules with what he has achieved so far.¹¹⁶

The above illustrates an ontological identification relationship. Since 1987 in *Subject of Desire*, Butler continues to characterise subjectivity as a desire for something, as emphasised previously the 'I desire x'.¹¹⁷ From this angle, when Emin and

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Judith Butler, *Giving an Account Of Oneself* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 128.

¹¹⁷ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, 2012 (1987), p. 66.

Chengyao's work is in the process of the ontological identification relationship, the 'I' identifies with art material of desire, 'x' that results in artwork. But what is crucial here is the becoming of the different cultural formations that Emin or Chengyao inhabit in the twenty-first century, which they bring to the wider spectrum of art practice; this is not only local formation with local culture but a transnational formation of culture with localised views.¹¹⁸ While they did not live abroad they nevertheless exhibited internationally in China, America, Europe, and Asia, expressing a desire to be transnational artists in a mode of metaphorically transforming and reconstructing themselves beyond indigenous endeavours. In Emin's work she embraces her Turkish Cypriot background in her art practice and follows the trajectory of American artists such as Bourgeois but who is from French origin similar to Duchamp, and her reference to Kahlo who lived in Mexico, and likewise her idols, Edvard Munch from Norway, and Egon Schiele from Vienna. As for He Chengyao, similarly, her work pays homage to Duchamp explicitly, who also lived in America but came from France, but she lives and works in China from a Chinese heritage but travelled to America, Europe, and Asia for exhibitions. This exhibits a global perspective with performativity, visibility, and inclusivity as in univocity.

Butler argues that subjectivity is being formed in social and historical contexts; if subjectivity could be affected by internal and external forces,¹¹⁹ then subjectivity exists as a formulation of concrete expression of the 'I desire x' in a constant movement of construction as suggested in her discussion of Kojève and Deleuze.¹²⁰ Subjectivity for Butler is created and discovered, but concrete in an abstract sense of being, rather than an object such as a body or a tangible material, it is becoming and involving another, which means the 'I desire x' requires an acknowledgment of subjectivity as discovered (actualisation) then creates what has been discovered (process of subjectivity). This means Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity can be openly affected abstractly, such as pain, or emotions, or feelings, or subjection, and thus can merge with their chosen art

¹¹⁸ Randolph Bourne, 'Trans-National America' (1916). pp. 1-11. Emin and Chengyao are not artists with only vision of locality but a global perspective of their work. Also see Roland Robertson, *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture* (London: Sage, 1992); 'Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity,' in Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson (eds.), *Global Modernities* (London: Sage, 1995), chapter 2. Robertson coined the term 'glocalization' to indicate the way in which global forces and adapted to local conditions.

¹¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 5.

¹²⁰ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), pp. 66-70, pp. 206-207.

material of desire. The ontological identification relationship of subjectivity mediates with art material in order to further understand and recognise one's self, and if this is the case, in the same vein Emin or Chengyao's subjectivity with their chosen art material identifies themselves in art practice with a global perspective in the twenty first century.

Again, their globalised ontological identification relationship involves not only local perspective and vision but global cultural formations. The ontological identification relationship is not only the embodiment of the self in art practice, but also the active movement between this relationship, the self – 'I', and the desire, x – artist's material. Abstractly the aesthetic subjectivity of Emin and Chengyao's art practice constitutes the mechanism of subjectivity-X and art material-Y; and identifies themselves with their artwork, XY.¹²¹

The ontological identification relationship requires actualisation of subjectivity, which necessitates awareness/consciousness between aesthetic subjectivity and art practice in its process. Through the process of actualisation, invisible aesthetic subjectivity becomes visible for a finite period of time, which implies there is a life cycle to the process in which aesthetic subjectivity lies dormant or ignored before actualisation, but nevertheless it is always lurking indefinitely if consciousness constitutes subjectivity.

In *A Brief History of Humankind: Sapiens*, Yuval Harari argues that we *Homo sapiens* are towards the end of our existence and we will have to cope with losing our past to embrace a new future with technology.¹²² Harari writes: 'Yet the real potential of future technologies is to change *Homo sapiens* itself, including our emotions and desires, and not merely our vehicles and weapons. What is a spaceship compared to an eternally young cyborg who does not breed and has no sexuality, who can share thoughts directly with other beings, whose abilities to focus and remember are a thousand times greater than our own, and who is never angry or sad, but has emotions and desires that we cannot begin to imagine?'¹²³ While this could be possible sooner than

¹²¹ Ibid, p. 211. Butler writes that the Hegelian subject refuses the world outside itself while its very self is enslaved to that world: 'the Hegelian subject can only fear or appropriate the features of an external world, but because its fundamental project and deepest desire is to attain the self-identity of reflexive self-consciousness, it cannot enter into that world of alterity fearlessly, joyfully, creatively.' This is alienation until the self realises in and for itself, and merges as one.

¹²² Yuval Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History Humankind* (Canada: Penguin, 2014), Part four: The Scientific Revolution, Section 20, The End of *Homo Sapiens*.

¹²³ Ibid.

expected, we have been engaging with technology since we welcomed cars, trains, airplanes, radio, and television into our lives, if we go further to the past, we have the iron age, where weapon and tools were part of human existence. We are entering into an era of beyond human. It is no longer a 'boy's toy'. As Donna Haraway says, 'I rather be a cyborg than a Goddess.'¹²⁴ Stirring in similar directions of desire to become other or another. If human desire wishes to become other than *Homo sapiens* then it is not dissimilar to identifying oneself with artwork in the case of Emin and Chengyao.

While Butler and Irigaray's warnings are crucial for today's feminism, Harari's findings claims happiness underlines the desire to change *Homo sapiens* to cyborgs, involving the ending of diseases, weaknesses, unhappiness, and pain.¹²⁵ Is this Nietzsche's Superman (Übermensch) in 1896, we becoming beyond human?¹²⁶ The idea of reconstruction of the self that Butler claims and also indirectly Irigaray's wish for women to embrace subjectivity for themselves, is futuristic thinking.

Chris Townsend and Mandy Merck write of Emin: 'The nudes may represent the artist's body and the poems describe her state of mind, or they may not. But drawing and writing are neither flesh nor emotion, and the apparent immediacy of Tracey Emin's work is both artful and ambiguous, the product of formal, technical and generic strategies that are anything but unmediated.'¹²⁷ Townsend and Merck make a crucial point, that supports the mediation between Emin and her artwork. Emin's work has been read through a psychological lens, a class lens, and a gendered lens. Here, I am reading Emin from an ontological identification lens, of being through and with her art practice and work, to reveal the movement in her creative exercise, involving another side of her female subjectivity that is often neglected. The same can be said of He Chengyao in China. By comparing their work in this thesis, attempts to further explicate why their subjectivity is in their art practice visibility. Again, the hidden, invisible dimension of subjectivity behind their work has implicitly refracted as a critical gesture towards patriarchy.

¹²⁴ Donna Haraway, 'The Cyborg Manifesto,' p. 181, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women: the Reinvention of Nature* (London: Free Association Books, 1991), pp. 149-81.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Yuval Harari, *Homo Deus: A Brief History of Tomorrow* (New York: Vintage, 2017), pp. 234, 254, 268.

¹²⁷ Chris Townsend and Mandy Merck, 'Introduction: Eminent Domain, the Cultural Location of Tracey Emin,' p. 6, in Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend (eds.), *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), pp. 6-20.

Part I Actualisation of Aesthetic Subjectivity

In *Body Art: Performing The Subject* 1998 Amelia Jones' identification in art theory emphasises how female artists' performance art is not narcissistic but self-aware and self-conscious.¹²⁸ This means, global female artists such as Emin and Chengyao, are exposed to the possible accusation of narcissism, but Jones emphasises how female artists are only beginning to realise their self-awareness, and suggests they are no more than being self-aware or self-conscious of their bodies.¹²⁹ In *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* Butler argues for Performativity as a gender construction and formation involving the way socio-cultural and political forces shape female identity.¹³⁰ While In *Je, Tu, Nous: toward a culture of difference* 1993, Irigaray argues for the vital acknowledgement of binary in the case of gender, and claims that unless we take 'sexuation' seriously the human race would come to an end.¹³¹ These serious consideration of female desires and identities in world involves the actualisation of aesthetic subjectivity, which constitutes the notion of awareness and desire. In *Subjects of Desire* Butler writes after discussing Stanley Rosen on 'structure of absolute reflection',¹³² under section on 'Ontology of Desire':

'Desire is *intentional* in that it is always desire *of* or *for* a given object or Other, but it is also *reflexive* in the sense that desire is a modality in which the subject is both discovered and enhanced. The conditions that give rise to desire, the metaphysics of internal relations, are at the same time what desire seeks to articulate, render explicit, so that desire is a tacit pursuit of metaphysical knowledge, the human way that such knowledge "speaks."¹³³

¹²⁸ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 46–52.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

¹³⁰ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, especially pp. 1–34.

¹³¹ Luce Irigaray, *Je, tu, nous: toward a culture of difference*, trans. A. Martin (New York: Routledge 1993), pp. 86–9.

¹³² Butler, *Subjects of Desire*. p. 24.

¹³³ Ibid, p. 25.

With a Hegelian understanding of subjectivity as desire¹³⁴ Butler renders a movement in ‘desire of or for a given object or Other’.¹³⁵ Drawing from the above, Emin and He’s ontological identification relationship involves a metaphysical movement in their desire for actualisation of aesthetic subjectivity and artwork; a creative process that is also dialectical. On page 10, she remarks, ‘In reading for multiple meanings, for plurivocity, ambiguity, and metaphor in the general sense, we experience concretely the inherent movement of dialectical thinking, the essential alteration of reality.’ This means, there is a movement in the concept of the dialectic when Subjectivity-X is thesis, and antithesis of artist’s material-Y synthesises as artwork-XY is posited onto the ontological identification relationship of Emin and Chengyao’s creative process in art practice through desire.

The above motion is activated by self-actualisation that constitutes the process of subjectivity in artwork and practice, in the ‘I desire x’ necessitates the ‘I’ to be actualised through a thought process of reflexivity that is then articulated in the material of desire. Butler writes:

Spinoza’s notion of desire (*cupiditas*), the human *conatus* and principle of rational self-actualization, prefigures Hegel’s own notion of desire. For Hegel, however, reason is understood as reflexive, and self-actualization requires the negative work of self-constitution. For both, desire serves the purpose of articulating and reaffirming a metaphysical monism, but Hegel’s criticism of Spinoza’s exclusion of consciousness’s own negativity suggests a way of understanding Hegel’s original contribution to the philosophy of desire. For Spinoza, desire is a modality of substance and is distinguished as the fundamental modality of human existence: “Desire is the essence of man” or “the endeavor to persist in one’s own being.” Further, desire is not a merely corporeal impulse, for “desire is appetite with consciousness thereof.”¹³⁶

This means desire constitutes self-actualisation with consciousness as it is in Emin and Chengyao’s ontological identification relationship. In *To Be Born* 2017, Luce

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Ibid, p. 19.

¹³⁶ Ibid, p. 11.

Irigaray argues for ‘becoming oneself’ this is a contemporary version of Maslow’s outdated ‘self-actualisation,’ in his pyramid hierarchy of needs.¹³⁷ Society has changed since Maslow’s ideas of the 40s and 50s. Irigaray articulates a feminist yearning in which the self becomes actualised: ‘becoming is a complex undertaking for a human being.’¹³⁸ Although she does not cite Maslow, the model of becoming oneself resembles self-actualisation but one in which the person incarnates her genetic inheritance, but this cannot be done in one action or motion (as it would be in a tree, for example), it needs a process of continual action and movement towards the fulfillment of one’s desire and potential. Thus becoming oneself is in line with actualisation of subjectivity that involves desire in one’s energy in a work of art as ‘a possible way of being faithful to oneself and discovering one aspect of one’s own face.’¹³⁹ Irigaray’s model also reinforces the ontological identification relationship in Emin and Chengyaoe’s art practice, that conveys the dynamic creative process, and the process of self-actualisation is desire for subjectivity to identify with artwork. According to Deleuze, there are two aspects of actualisation, he writes: ‘Thus we already have two aspects of actualisation here: translation-contraction and rotation-orientation.’¹⁴⁰ In Deleuze’s *Bergsonism* 1991, he recalls the virtual and actual, the recollection of the past is a recollection-image in the present, which entails a movement from past to present. This is actualisation of the memory that entails a process of translation, past to present image, and rotation, the turning towards the situation or relevance for the moment, for now. Translation is a contraction of past into present, and rotation is an orientation, and relevance of past to present. This movement from past to present actualisation brings with it a whole level of the past, thus recollection-image, in the present, refers back to perception-image in the past and perception-image refers to recollection-image, thus there is rotation in actualisation.¹⁴¹

Self-actualisation is self-knowing, desiring, and thinking – an idea that goes back to the ancient Greeks and Socrates – is a pre-requisite for creativity. Self-knowing, argues Irigaray, is ‘a return to oneself as the place where life is preserved and from

¹³⁷ Abraham Maslow, *Towards a Psychology of Being* (New York: Wiley, 1998).

¹³⁸ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 37.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, Trans, Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books 1991), p. 64.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 64-72.

which it can still germinate.’¹⁴² Self-actualisation is predicated upon the breathing self, the sexuated person from birth, as a necessary condition for creativity. Irigaray’s becoming oneself contains the qualities of a basic need of self-actualisation – having a sense of potential for survival, a sense of who one is, and a sense of becoming – but as a necessity rather than a luxury. Hence actualisation of subjectivity further informs the reflexive process of becoming oneself and while this may begin in childhood for most, it stays as a basic need throughout one’s life. In this sense, becoming oneself is not dissimilar to Deleuze’s subjectivity understood as particularity and the field of immanence, as it will be discussed in chapter four with Univocity as the third aspect of subjectivity.

Irigaray’s becoming oneself is also adopted from a Lacanian psychoanalysis of the mirror stage of a child’s development, she nevertheless argues her position as a female writer in this era for an independent reading from her own subjectivity. Her idea of a sexuated being between men and women is the ethical desire for social justice.¹⁴³ Following from a Lacanian trajectory, she argues that in the history of Western philosophy, men have been associated with subjectivity, from which women have been excluded as being the ‘other.’¹⁴⁴ In this traditional reading, women are identified as mothers, associated with matter, and defined as being outside male subjectivity, which means women, are reified in language to achieve subjectivity, and this is done not on the basis of ‘equality as women’, but on the basis of true sexual difference. The idea of sexual equality, Irigaray emphasises, is ‘a mistaken expression of a real objective,’¹⁴⁵ because it assumes something (men) to which women need to be equalised. Rather, what is needed is for women to achieve their own subjectivity, to understand their own desires, distinct from the expected roles of women. Women need ‘an initiation into subjectivity’¹⁴⁶ that can respect true sexual difference because human beings are ‘sexuated’, she claims, the idea of sexual difference is the main ontological issue of our age.¹⁴⁷ Irigaray suggests, the way to tackle it, is not through eliding difference and the production or construction of a genderless, general humanity, but through recognising

¹⁴² Irigaray, *To Be Born*, p. 41.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Luce Irigaray, *This Sex Which Is Not One* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 31.

¹⁴⁵ Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 4.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 99.

¹⁴⁷ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 3.

difference and giving it respect. This perpetuation and the future of the human race depends upon the recognition and acceptance of human sexuated nature, but within the actuation of creativity.¹⁴⁸ This predominant model is from Lacan for whom sexual difference is assigned to language and for whom the ahistorical master signifier of the symbolic order is the man, symbolised by the phallus. This has dominated the West, and even science itself favours substances over fluids, according to Irigaray, meaning and substance relates to the male and fluids to female,¹⁴⁹ she continues to argue for the independence of women for sexual difference. The recognition of the distinction between men and women means that both can achieve subjectivity. She claims subjectivity as something to be achieved. For Irigaray, subjectivity is a process of becoming and the attaining of subjectivity is a language of becoming, a telos that is to be striven for in our sexuated distinction.

But the work of Emin in Britain and Chengyao in China has exhibited an inclusivity that embraces an emergence to question gendered distinctions, which also propose is the Chinese ancient ideas of Yin and Yang for balance within each body, living alongside and within each other, rather than as opposite.¹⁵⁰ In general women always had subjectivity but they are either not conscious of it or were forbidden to exercise it, and do not realise they can actualise it within the domination of patriarchy. Perhaps many women have already shown us the way to female subjectivity, such as Western and Chinese suffragettes since the 1900s, female artists since the 60s, women writers in art history, and philosophers, such as De Beauvoir, Arendt, Butler, Irigaray, Kristeva and so forth across the disciplines in the last century.

In *Speculum of the Other Woman* 1985, Irigaray stresses a danger of women becoming masculine through participation in a masculinist discourse,¹⁵¹ that would, ironically, continue to erode female identity in a bid to catch up with the male: male language is treated as normative and the gauge of discourse against which women's language should be judged. Butler in *Gender Trouble* warns, 'identity categories for the purpose of politicisation always remain threatened by the prospect of identity becoming an instrument of the power one opposes'.¹⁵² In an essay on Irigaray, Butler says that

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Yang Peng, *Dao De Jing, Lao Zi* (New York: Wapner & Brent Books, 2016), Chapter 42.

¹⁵¹ Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

¹⁵² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. xxviii.

through her citation of the male philosophers with whom she engages, Irigaray is in danger of becoming stuck in a hermeneutic circularity from which she cannot break free; that ‘in her very practice of citation, Irigaray enacts an ambivalent relation to the power attributed to these texts, a power that she at once attributes to them, but also seeks to undo.’¹⁵³

Subjectivity has been interpreted and debated in many ways, and through many lenses and disciplines, but what is crucial here is how women claim subjectivity as a normal phenomenon rather than a prize to be won in comparison to male subjectivity. Even in Butler’s argument of the enterprise, Irigaray seeks to avoid or overcome the implicit complicity in patriarchal discourse by dislocating the (masculinist) philosophical tradition by relocating it within her own text. Irigaray questions the assumption of the universality of male discourse; that the one voice of reason is male and the non-one is the Other, particularly the female, who thereby has a subordinate position within language. She also wishes to disrupt this tendency to universalisation. This rupture is the feminine in language that exists as ‘a rupturing of the universal or what might be understood as a protest within the universal, the internal dissent of the feminine.’¹⁵⁴

With such questions Butler asks whether Irigaray’s text mimes ‘the grandiosity of the philosophical errors she underscores,’¹⁵⁵ namely the error that in the history of philosophy, woman has been nothing. Indeed, women in the traditional view are close to animals or goddesses and represent a descent into materiality, which is also a descent into passion,¹⁵⁶ which certainly, both Irigaray and Butler reject. But the fundamental ethical question for Irigaray is: ‘Who are you?’, a question, says Butler, that seeks to cross the masculine/feminine divide in a way that does not reduce the other to the one who seeks to know, and the one who seeks to know has traditionally been male. Butler’s critical reading of Irigaray is for focusing on ethics as sexual difference because it takes her away from an analysis and critique of the power relations that make the discourse of sexual difference possible in the first place. Would we, Butler asks, ‘be able to account for an ethical relation, an ethical question, between those of the same sex?’¹⁵⁷ How can ethics be generated from a power relation that has privileged the male, which

¹⁵³ Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), p. 150.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

¹⁵⁵ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 11.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

is only half of humanity? For women, as much as for men, being is also thinking. Butler critiques Irigaray's work that has depended upon male discourse to establish her own position, but do we not all do the same, even Butler herself, until women establish their own position, by taking a new angle from women's vision, ideas, and thoughts, with independent intentions? Butler herself, used male discourse in her work, *Subjects of Desire* for example. They both sustain their views to include the male discourse as collaborator rather than a hindrance. The above argument is precisely what Emin and Chengyao are in the midst of in this era.

In this respect, the actualisation of aesthetic subjectivity is a feminist ideal that attempts to resolve the problem of power and ethics, which ideally includes all women across the world. But perhaps a project that necessitates a univocity of women and men. Self-actualisation of subjectivity therefore, is a movement, akin to air that flows in our breath and body. Emin and Chengyao's 'I desire x' as subjectivity that moves towards an artist's material to create artwork, is a movement in an ontological identification relationship that reflects three aspects of their subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity to address power and ethics; when their personal work refracts as political.

Part II. Ontological Rather Than Confessional

Truth is such a transient thing... it's like with my work, people say, "Oh, the honesty and the truth behind it" – but it's all edited, it's all calculated, it's all decided. I decide to show this or that part of the truth, which isn't necessarily the whole story, it's just what I decide to give you.¹⁵⁸

In conversation with Tracey Emin, Rebecca Fortnum stressed 'Early on your work seemed subversive in a museum context, this slice of real life, real pain, real experience.'¹⁵⁹ Emin answered, 'Yes, but that's wrong. I didn't say here is a slice of my life; I said this is an artwork that I've made that is now going into the gallery' While Fortnum's question has a crucial point, Emin herself claims her work is edited. Hence

¹⁵⁸ Lynn Barber, 'Show and Tell' Interview with Tracey Emin. *The Guardian* 22- April 2001.

¹⁵⁹ Rebecca Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008), p. 61.

confessional art is a misleading term to label female artists. To suggest Emin's work is confessional is problematic because the work had gone through a creative process, that suggests an edited truth. The term 'confessional art' has been accepted widely during the 2000s, but this interpretation has been questioned by some who claim similar flaws to this term, Rosemary Betterton suggests: 'Emin's work is a form of "self-life drawing" or purposeful reconstruction of the past as a set of stories, rather than the "truth" of a life.'¹⁶⁰ Alexandra Kokoli points out how, Emin is often branded as a bad artist for her 'perceived formal shortcomings and tendencies toward literalism', which are 'condemned for an odd combination of embarrassing, unartistic earnestness and...cynical media savvy'.¹⁶¹ Betterton and Kokoli suggest Emin is often not taken seriously. In *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice*, Kokoli points out how Sue Rowley suggests a 'nuanced flexible and open-ended conceptual framework' is necessary for appreciating feminist practice in its full political potential as opposed to a form of confession or art therapy.'¹⁶² Kokoli raises a crucial point, on how female artists not only are compromised in history but as soon as a door opens for acknowledgement they have been misunderstood, and this necessitates a change in reading through a sociopolitical or philosophical lens, and we should refute a confessional entity reading of female artists' work.

Outi Remes claims Emin's work is under the umbrella of confessional art, but she remarks: 'Like our confessional culture, confessional art pretends exceptional honesty in its approach to subject matter. However, it seldom presents a factual account, rather it manipulates and even fabricates subjective memories. Importantly, therefore, it reconsiders the artist's and the viewer's position, and the relationship between commodity culture and high art.'¹⁶³ This highlights the problematic label of confessional art. As if by default, it begs the question, is Emin confessing? Despite Emin accepted a Professorship of Confessional Art in Switzerland, one would expect some of her work

¹⁶⁰ Rosemary Betterton, 'Why is My Art Not as Good as Me?' p. 33, in Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend (eds.), *The Art of Tracy Emin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), pp. 22–39. Christine Fanthome, 'Articulating authenticity through artifice: the contemporary relevance of Tracey Emin's confessional art,' *Social Semiotics*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2008, pp. 223–36; and Laura Lake Smith, 'Telling stories: performing authenticity in the confessional art of Tracey Emin,' *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2017, pp. 296–309. Both Fanthome and Smith point out that Emin is not confessional in a direct sense, but transforms experience into art.

¹⁶¹ Alexandra Kokoli, 'Sisters', p. 171, in Judy Chicago And Louise Bourgeois, Helen Chadwick, Tracey Emin. (London: Lund Humphries, 2012), pp. 169-177.

¹⁶² Alexandra Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 119.

¹⁶³ Outi Remes, *The Role of Confession in Late Twentieth-Century British Art*, PhD thesis, University of Reading, 2005. p. 9.

to be confessional in art practice in every sense of the word confession, a title which suggests as if it has arrived by accident, and we all ran with its interesting beginning.

Sally Munt observes that Tracey Emin was ‘Professor of Confessional Art’ at the European Graduate School, although noting that while ‘confessional art’ might indicate a naïve rendition of emotional truth, the works themselves are not simply expressive but rather ‘the works are produced by a professional artist and are inevitably more technically skilled and sophisticated in design than the ostensibly screaming content would belie.’¹⁶⁴ This suggests that Emin’s work is not confessional art even though the fact that Emin accepts a post as Professor of Confessional Art.¹⁶⁵ In agreement with the above scholars, to view Emin’s work in terms of confessional art is problematic and there is a need for alternative perspective of a nuanced critique. Of course, it partly depends on what is meant by the term ‘confession.’ If we view the word as a religious sense of the confession of a sin or wrongdoing, which is associated with guilt, then Emin’s work does not necessarily relate to this claim (after all, in *Strangelands* there are elements of guilt and responsibility that come into the work, whether justified or not). If Emin is in the mode of confession in her art practice, then perhaps all artwork in the history of art is confessional since Van Gogh. Joan Gibbons is another scholar who is against the idea of confessional art in regards to Emin, who suggests the works themselves do not relate to confession.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Munt, *Queer Attachments*, p. 212. Also see Christine Fanthome, ‘Articulating authenticity through artifice: the contemporary relevance of Tracey Emin’s confessional art’, *Social Semiotics*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2008, pp. 223–36. Fanthome presents an interesting argument that Emin’s confessional work is set within public mediation (through the ‘media’) and that the relationship between authenticity and truth is complex, in this case. Miguel Ángel Medina ‘Tracey Emin: Life Made Art, Art Made from Life,’ *Arts*, 2014, 3, pp. 54–72 [this article claims Paula Cashin and Envar Emin were married but they were never married and their relationship was filled with modern complexities]. For an argument that directly links her art to rape trauma, see Yxta Maya Murray, ‘Rape Trauma, the State, and the Art of Tracey Emin,’ *California Law Review*, 2012. vol. 100, p. 163. For a discussion of the relation of truth and authenticity to artwork in Emin, see Giulia Lamoni, ‘Philomela as Metaphor: Sexuality, Pornography, and Seduction in the Textile Worlds of Tracey Emin and Ghada Amer,’ p. 185, in Isabelle Loring Wallace and Jennie Hirsch (eds.), *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011) pp. 175–98. Melanie McGrath has an interesting discussion of the relation of Emin’s life to her work and the way ‘she challenges us to think of writing as visual art and visual art as a kind of text.’ ‘Something’s Wrong, Melanie McGrath on Tracey Emin,’ *Tate Magazine*, 1- October 2002, pp. 52–8.

¹⁶⁵ On Tracey Emin as confessional artist, see Miguel Angel Medina, ‘Tracey Emin: Life Made from Art, Art Made from Life,’ *Arts*, vol. 3, 2014, pp. 54–72. See also Christine Fanthome, ‘Articulating authenticity through artifice: the contemporary relevance of Tracey Emin’s confessional art,’ *Social Semiotics*, vol. 18, no. 2, 2008, pp. 223–36; and Laura Lake Smith, ‘Telling stories: performing authenticity in the confessional art of Tracey Emin,’ *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2017, pp. 296–309. Both Fanthome and Smith point out that Emin is not confessional in a direct sense, but transforms experience into art.

¹⁶⁶ Joan Gibbons, *Contemporary Art and Memory Images of Recollection and Remembrance* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 18–25.

Then the question is, does her artwork reveal confession of her past experience? And if there is a nuanced reading of this then I would claim it is related to complex visibility of self rather than confession of self in the mode of feminism. Her work is not produced from repentance, but from a desire to be visible and acknowledgement of being a female artist with subjectivity/desire, to exhibit an experience/memory of edited truths, which refracts and reveals the lack of female subjectivity. But if by confession we mean telling the truth about oneself, *parrhesia* in Foucault's reading of the Greeks,¹⁶⁷ still the phrase 'confessional art' is somewhat misleading in my reading. Emin's edited truth about herself is always filtered or mediated through the artist's materials.

The artwork presented is an edited truth; the truth of episodes/projects in Emin's life from her memory that is filtered or mediated through her art practice as an ontological identification relationship. These are formed in consonance with ambient cultural expectations, but with Emin's individual skills and ideas. Was the term 'confessional art' interpreted and projected upon the artists? If so then it is also projected upon Louise Bourgeois, and those with similar art practices. Some even mentioned Emin is manipulative, manipulations have multiple connotations, as artists with artist's materials, one would understand how to manipulate a marble into a sculpture for example, but beyond manipulating her materials I would argue Emin is authentic but with an edited truth, as John Haber who reviewed Emin and Schnabel's work says: 'Confession and spectacle – they explain why Emin and Schnabel, for all their failures, have me so intrigued. Ostensibly as opposite as the Brit pack's ironic manipulation and overblown human expression, they push the same buttons and probe the same dilemmas. Yet they also explain why I can never fully give up my own nostalgia.'¹⁶⁸

Integral to the ontological identification is narrative. Vanessa Corby emphasises how Emin gives meaning by narrating her experience through her work (through 'storying' it).¹⁶⁹ This making sense of things through narration in art is not simply expression but is similar to carving, akin to that of carving on gravestones, says Emin; sewing on tent nylon fabric, cotton, silk, or calico is no different to carving stones, like

¹⁶⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Courage of the Truth Lectures at the College de France 1983–84*, edited by Frederic Gross, translated by Graham Burchell, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

¹⁶⁸ John Haber, 'Confession and Spectacle', New York: Haber's Art Review', haberarts.com, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ Vanessa Corby. 'Something to Show for It? Notes on Creativity and termination in the Work of Tracey Emin,' in Griselda Pollock and Victoria Turvey Sauron (eds.), *Sacred and the Feminine: The Imagination and Sexual Difference* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), pp. 213-30.

a sculptor with a hammer and chisel. But many, such as Betterton, have claimed it is a craft, in the old-fashioned sense of sewing and making items.¹⁷⁰ While Betterton has a crucial point, Emin attempts to transform her craft into a fine art practice. Her naked self-portraits are not only crafts in an old-fashioned sense, but for her it is fine art, the work is semantic, with a deep sense of her subjectivity as a female artist that illuminates; many female artists attempt to be acknowledged and visible in the arts arena for many generations since Artemisia Gentileschi in the seventeenth century. Another example is Hilary Robinson's article on 'Louise Bourgeois' Cells: Looking at Bourgeois through Irigaray's Gesturing Towards the Mother', is not circularity but a hermeneutic spiral as a feminist gesture that recuperates the 'circle' that then becomes productive rather than reductive.¹⁷¹ As Robinson has observed, women have been condemned to being 'other' and have not been able to represent themselves in patriarchal cultures.¹⁷² 'Confessional art' is suggesting confessing something but Emin and Chengyao are exploring and presenting their history and self in art practice.

As for Chengyao in China, when I asked her what she thought about confessional art and whether her art could be viewed under that category, she said she had been born in the sixties and the idea of repentance in art appeared in the late '70s after the end of the Cultural Revolution: 'Britain's idea of confession concerning my work does not coincide. But I do believe that repentance constitutes an author's artistic creation because salvation has a comforting effect.'¹⁷³ Chengyao's hesitation to adopt the term 'confessional art' to explain her work suggests it does not constitute her artwork. If confession correlates with purification, catharsis, law, and repentance in religious belief or rants from reality TV shows then we are judging it on moral grounds rather than from a creative biographical process of subjectivity, which is ontology of being in the ontological identification relationship.

When Emin and Chengyao are utilising their memory to create a work or narrate an event of their experience, the truth is edited before being visibly exhibited to the public audience. Through an ontological identification relationship process Emin and

¹⁷⁰ Rosemary Betterton, 'Why is My Art Not As Good as Me?' p. 38, in Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend (eds.), *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), pp. 23-38.

¹⁷¹ Hilary Robinson, 'Louise Bourgeois's Cells: Looking at Bourgeois through Irigaray's Gesturing Towards the Mother,' *n.paradoxa* 1997, no. 3, pp. 17-27.

¹⁷² Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray*, p. 75: 'Women cannot represent themselves to themselves as subjects (let alone represent themselves to other subjects as subjects) while they are stuck in a representational economy of same and other, in which they are doomed to be forever other of the same.'

¹⁷³ He Chengyao Interview with Kwankiu Leung, Beijing, Dec 2013.

Chengyao's work is also disruptive of identity in the sense of social role. They are not demure objects of attention or for the pleasure of the male gaze of imagination, but attempt to challenge through the personal body and are implicitly transgressive of social norms, that also questions the confessional plot. The confessional labelling had turned our heads towards a confession rant in art practice instead of serious consideration of Emin or Chengyao in a global society at a crucial moment of art history for female artists in the twenty-first century. This may not only have misread but may have endangered and deteriorated the advancement of female artists that attempted to highlight the erosion and the lack of female aesthetic subjectivity in art history.

The above evinced the problematic claim of confessional art, hence Emin and Chengyao's work is nuanced with implicit actualisation of their aesthetic subjectivity/desire that fortifies my argument for an ontological identification relationship that reflects three aspect of their subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity. They have identified themselves with their art practice as artwork through the process of an ontological identification relationship, hence it is ontological rather than confessional. There is an abstract mechanical movement in the creative process of their ontological identification relationship. Their aesthetic subjectivity constitutes subjectivity and artist's materials collapsed together as a single identity, but not as a self-love-centered entity but as great female artists making sense of things that may threaten tradition. But the exploration of their personal experience through art practice, uncovers different cultural formations in their female body with vicissitudes of a discursive global society. Imprinted abstractly with a desire for an ontology of being, to question, to identify, to interpret, to excavate akin to archaeologists, their deep personal experiences. Deleuze interprets metaphysics as a creative exercise,¹⁷⁴ as it is in the ontological identification relationship, the self identifying with their $X+Y=XY$ is a pivotal relationship for Emin and Chengyao's new nudes; they not only voice the traumas of their body, but they are being with their traumas, and being with another when audiences view their work. Furthermore, the absence of clarity of faces creates a dynamic of the lack of female subjectivity and inclusivity for an implicit univocity, both locally and globally.

The following works further illustrates how their ontological identification relationship is parallel and paramount. These works are exemplars of the ontological

¹⁷⁴ Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, p. 470-471.

identification relationship between self and work. The new nude, as explained in the introduction, is characterised by a double refraction, that articulates subjectivity on the one hand, and offers critique of patriarchy through an implicit critique of the traditional nude on the other. This highlights the feminist dictum that the ‘personal is political’. The first examples here are two sets of paintings by He Chengyao and Tracey Emin. Works from Chengyao’s *Extension of Limbs* (Fig: 1.4), in ‘Extension of Limbs’ exhibition in 2007 (Fig: 1.1) juxtaposed to Emin’s ‘Stone Love’ in 2016 (Fig: 1.2) and *Suffer Love* in 2009 (Fig: 1.3). In these two exhibitions there is a parallelism between Emin and Chengyao’s naked self-portraits – the new nude. There are a number of observations and interpretations. What is obvious here in both exhibitions are the faces of each figure which are either obscured or entirely absent, leaving the bottom half of the body exposed. They highlight two crucial factors in these works. Both images are naked figures, Emin’s figure (Fig:1.3) in monoprint blue ink drawing exhibits an exploration of sexuality, love, and the action of masturbation. Emin’s book of *One Thousand Drawings* 2009 of naked figures turned one hundred and fifty drawings into a film that loops with naked figures without faces or faceless bodies, which will be discussed further in chapter four. Emin is suggesting it could be anyone in the film, anyone who views the work, anyone can identify with sex, with or without another.¹⁷⁵ But this work was criticised as being too explicit by the public and critics, hence it was exhibited in a separate room; she attempts to invite the audience to explore the female body, to explore subjectivity/desire.¹⁷⁶

Chengyao likewise, exhibited images of her body in oil on canvas, grey and white in colour scheme, again with hands touching her genitals (fig:1.4), which communicated to the audience how the body necessitates exploration, to celebrate desire, and not to be feared, which attempted to stop the fear of sex discourse in China, but again audiences were puzzled. The limbs are extension of body and our limbs not only move in daily life but reveal sexuality, love, family ties, and bonding with another. Chengyao akin to Emin in the new nude performs a process, in which their body interacts with their artist’s material, their intentions, their thoughts, their subjectivity/desire, their edited process, their decision, and concepts of their project,

¹⁷⁵ Tracey Emin, *Suffer Love XXII* 2009, Ink on Paper, make into a Film that loops with naked figures, White Cube. London.

¹⁷⁶ Mark Hudson, Tracey Emin: Those Who Suffer Love at the White Cube, review, *The Telegraph*, 1-June 2009.

and their communication with their audience; the stream of subjectivity and the stream of artist's materials interact in Ingold's terms, which is the process of an ontological identification relationship.

Furthermore, the ontological identification relationship reflects Emin and Chengyao's three aspects of subjectivity: firstly, performativity in chapter two – the new nude creates a double refraction – as the artists and the model exhibiting the personal but critiques the traditional nude in a patriarchal society; secondly, visibility, in chapter three, is when their works are exhibited and acknowledged publically that reveal the invisible; thirdly, univocity in chapter four, is not a universality of modernity or postmodern thought, but a vision with futuristic construction and inclusivity, which explores the notion of female subjectivity/desire to construct as opposed to deconstruct. Emin and Chengyao's work seeks inclusivity.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷⁷ He Chengyao, Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing 2013, 2016, and 2017, interview with Monica Merlin, Beijing 2013.

Extensio[n] [sic] of Limbs 2007

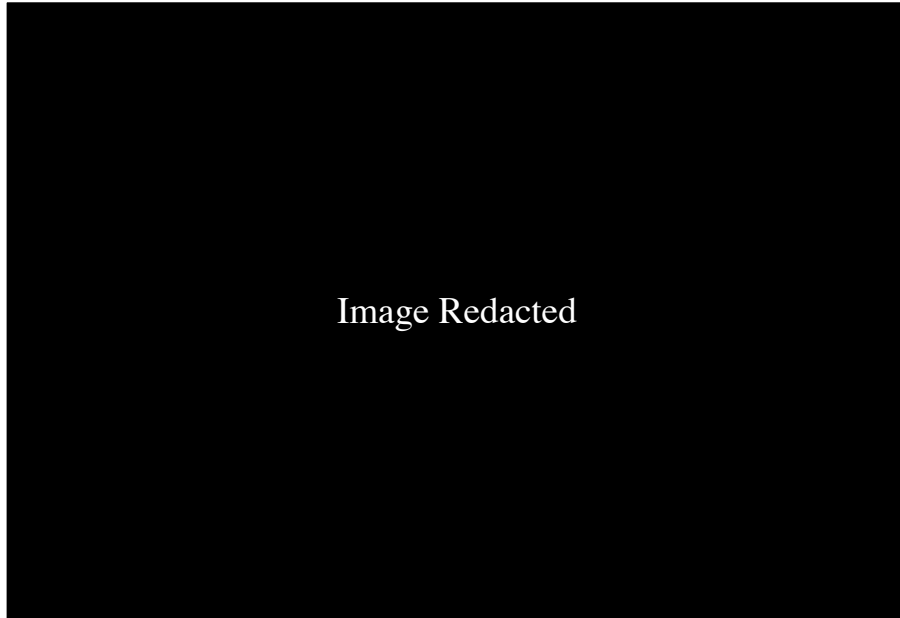


Fig. 1.1: He Chengyao, *Extensio[n] [sic] of Limbs 2007*, Solo Exhibition, Ju Hua Space Shanghai.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Stone Love, 2016

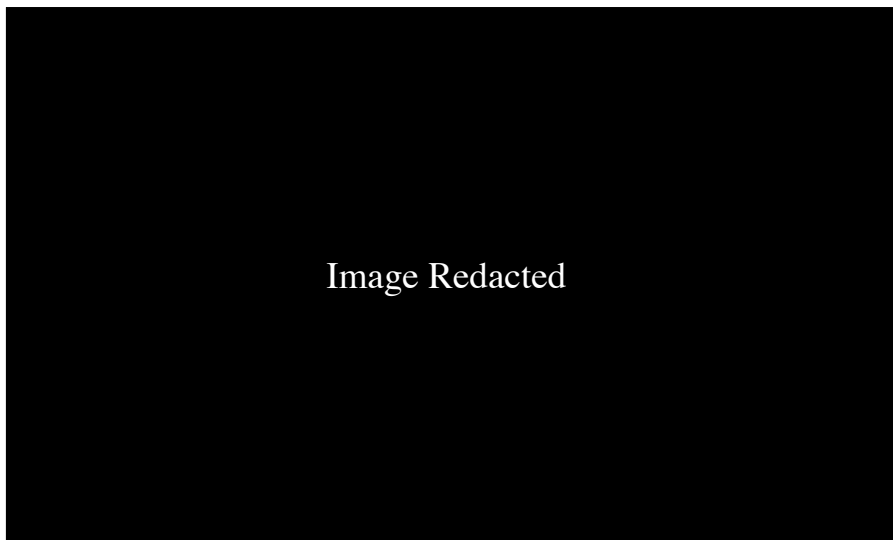


Fig. 1.2: Tracey Emin, *Stone Love*, 2016, Solo Exhibition, Lehmann Maupin, New York.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Suffer Love XXII 2009

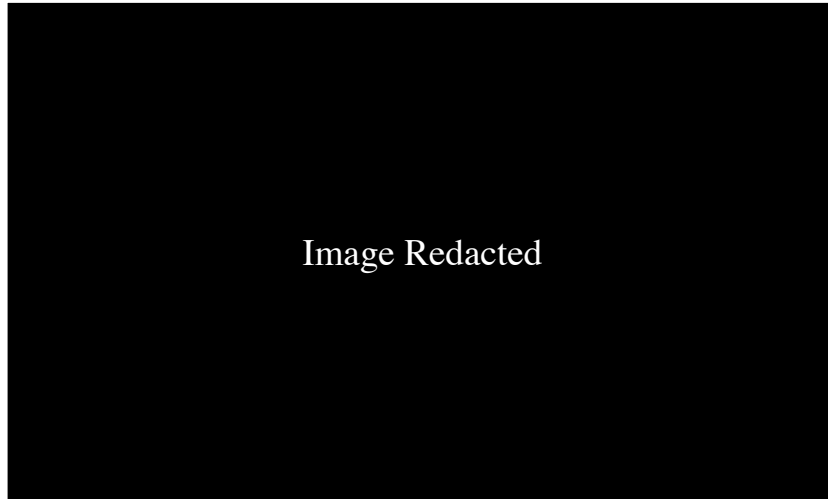


Fig. 1.3: Tracey Emin, *Suffer Love XXII* 2009, Ink on Paper, Film, White Cube. London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Extendsion [sic] of Limbs (P1)

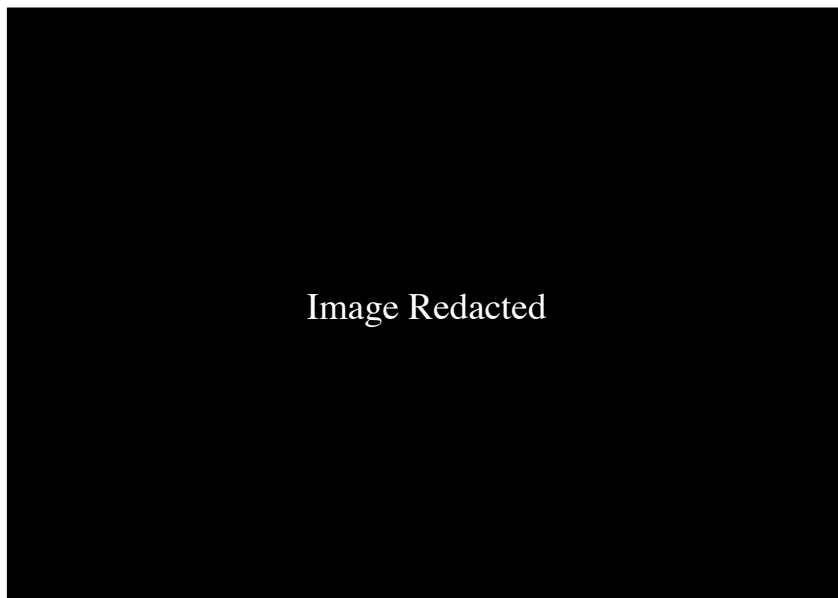


Fig. 1.4: He Chengyao, *Extendsion [sic] of Limbs (P1)* 2007, Oil on Canvas.
Shanghai. Photograph, Artron.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Part III. Ontological Became Political

Politics, wars, and across the disciplines have affected female aesthetic subjectivity, while they attempted to find their own identity since Dadaism arose in the 1910s around the same time as the suffragettes, but they were ignored as artists. From the Dadaist movement, Duchamp claimed he presented his urinal *Fountain* 1917 to question traditional art practices, but recent research has questioned this to claim it was a female artist who presented the urinal as *Fountain* 1917 (this will be discussed in detail in chapter two), in the same epoch, the suffragettes obtained the right to vote in 1918. It has been scarcely a hundred years since women can cast their first vote in a patriarchal world (which is being celebrated since February 2018). Female artists' work was not only ignored and unacknowledged but also lacked the idea of female subjectivity, which privileged men in history. While it is different in each country, feminism has been the backbone of feminist artists, but it has been complex and nuanced in different countries. Female artists struggled, for rights, acknowledgements, and visibility, which constitutes the first waves of feminism. In history, female artists entered the art-world by squeezing through a window and were often offered glass ceilings if successful, but most did not have ceilings to anticipate, which prevented them from being taken seriously. Their subjectivity has been eroded and ignored in the history of art, but as soon as they gain some form of recognition and space, they are reduced to being the confessors of wrongs rather than being acknowledged as exhibiting artists with great artworks that demonstrated an excavation of personal heartbreak and anguish. Emin or Chengyao's work further illuminates the trajectory of female performance artists of the 1960s and 1970s, who articulated and protested publicly for acknowledgment, recognition, exhibition, and contributed to the second wave of feminism. This occurred alongside feminists who advocated and maintained the use of contraceptive pill for women since 1950s. The sense of acknowledgement and recognition of what female artists want, was a new phenomenon in the public sphere, consequently, they necessitated to 'make sense of things', with their new circumstance, regardless of what Sigmund Freud and his confederates taught women at the time, female artists had to make sense of things for themselves. Their 'desire' for the right to be an artist is as much as the right to vote for women. Through the arts and politics of the second wave of feminism, their female voice was not heard, but their naked-bodies were witnessed, using their bodies as voices to protest against abrasion was not only

complex but often rejected as brash.¹⁷⁸ The disadvantaged female artists were highly motivated to set multiple narratives that this thesis has no space to cover, but some account of this history necessitates the understanding of Tracey Emin and He Chengyao's work to contextualise in art history.

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the second wave of feminism that female artists were visibly in the forefront of protest and outspoken about female subjectivity and desire in the arts. Performance female artists, not only drew attention to the arts but the rest of the world, in protest against patriarchy and the lack of recognition that forbade their exhibitions. Feminism interacted with broader intellectual movements, such as critical theory with Judith Butler, that sought to shift power to the oppressed.

Female artists who attempted to raise awareness of the lack of subjectivity and oppression, had only just begun to realise their potential to develop female subjectivity. The birth of feminist artists draws from the trajectory of this history and attempts to discuss it visibly that once only privileged men in the history of Homo sapiens.¹⁷⁹ The attempt to shift power from the author to privilege the reader denotes the Dadaists of the 1910s, such as Duchamp, who were similar to the death of the author of the 60s and 70s. The rejection of traditional art practice was reinterpreted with readymades from mass production as the new form of art practice, and until today they remain a strong influence in the art world.

They resisted the exclusion of female artists from art practice despite female artists' work being forced out of walls in galleries, removed from streets, ridiculed, and mocked by their colleagues, they continued their protest with feminist art in the 1960s and 70s of Britain and America.¹⁸⁰ China's new Dadaism began in the 1970s, with the Stars movement, then the '85 movement in the 1980s. Chinese artists attempt to break free from oppression but many were prosecuted for creating political art that protested against their government. Today the Chinese government is still selectively and silently monitoring Chinese artists' art practice. Chinese police are trained to prosecute any

¹⁷⁸ Olive Banks, *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of First Wave Feminism* (London: Prentice Hall, 1990). Also, the not-yet-published, Griselda Pollock, *Feminism, a Bad Memory?* (London: Verso, 2019).

¹⁷⁹ Merle Radtke, 'Presence and Absence: On the Legacy of 1970s Performance Art,' in Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s, the Sammlung Verbund Collection Vienna* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2010), pp. 79–83. See also Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between the Self and the World*, trans. by Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

¹⁸⁰ WACK 'Art and Feminism Revolution', Exhibition, MoMA, and Global Feminism in Brooklyn Museum, New York 2007. Also see Rebel Women, BBC Four, June 18th 2018. Also see Rebel Women, National Gallery throughout 2018.

political art that rebukes the government.¹⁸¹ Although vigilant and still questioning a patriarchal society, Emin in Britain does not need to fight the initial battle against patriarchy in her art practice, but He Chengyao in China faced strong systemic patriarchal society, hence they both from opposite sides of the world find solidarity in global feminist art practice.¹⁸² The erosion of female subjectivity is behind their art practice, their work cannot avoid a political interpretation when it is deeply rooted in global history. The 60s and 70s feminist ‘body voice’ attempted to directly critique inequality in society, gender, class, politics, and engage without compromise with a new kind of nude, in similar spirit, and solidarity with the earlier female performance artists, Emin and He’s work builds onto a feminist critique but is also inclusive of the other.

The 60s and 70s female artists began exhibiting in art galleries, particularly in the USA, which was a significant shift from a male-dominated occupation, but this was not welcomed with open arms, the complexity was hugely underestimated. As Cornelia Butler curated an exhibition with the intention of widening the impact upon a culture that eroded female artists and their subjects in MoMA New York 2007, she began an organisation called ‘*WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution*’. She wrote: ‘My ambition for WACK is to make the case that feminism’s impact on art of the 1970s constitutes the most influential international ‘movement’ of any during the post-war period.’¹⁸³ Among these early women artists who exhibited during this time were mostly performance artists who worked with the body as voice in disrupting gender expectations, social inequality, and to question the imbalance of inequality in the art-world. This was alongside the theorisation of feminism in philosophy and gender studies, female art history, and women studies in universities across the West. As we see in the work of Simone De Beauvoir, Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, and Julia Kristeva that contributes to philosophy, art theory, psychoanalysis, and other fields across the discipline in feminism.

¹⁸¹ Liao Wen, *No More Nice Girls*. Also see, Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiao yu chu ban she, 2002. And Harari, *Homo: Sapiens*.

¹⁸² WACK ‘Art and Feminism Revolution’. = should be Marck, Lisa Gabrielle (ed.). *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution*. Cambridge Mas: MIT Press, 2007.

¹⁸³ Cornelia Butler, ‘Art and Feminism: An Ideology of Shifting Criteria,’ p. 29. In Hilary Robinson (ed.), *Feminism Art Theory: An Anthology 1968–2014* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 28–43. Also Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s, the Sammlung Verbund Collection, Vienna* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2016).

Performance art in the 60s and 70s included artists such as Yoko Ono, Carolee Schneemann, Hannah Wilke, Mary Kelly, and Marina Abramović to name a few. They attempted to critique with their performance art practice, which constituted a trend of anti-traditional aestheticism that was revolutionised by Dadaism in the first world war by artists such as Duchamp. Duchamp expressed an anti-traditional aesthetic idea, an anti-traditional art movement occurred to critique the stable art practice and traditional forms of aesthetics. The female performance artists at this time ironically used this anti-traditional aesthetic to assert female subjectivity with their body as a voice, showing how the female body matters. When their body is performed in performance art it is their personal that turns political, this is called performativity that is claimed by Butler, she suggests in *Bodies That Matter* 2011: ‘Discursive performativity appears to produce that which it names, to enact its own referent, to name and to do, to name and to make’.¹⁸⁴ The performance artists are using their own body, which gesture towards a protest of being, with a feminist history in mind, but their body itself voices their own history and desires, and hence it is performative rather than performing an act on stage as an actor or for a play or a film, it is for performativity, to be oneself. Performativity is not acting out, but our body speaks who we are. Butler claims, performativity is identification that necessitate multiple expressions.¹⁸⁵ This is important for Emin and Chengyao, for whom performativity comes to be subversive, for example as the second part of the double refraction as political. In Emin’s work, there is repetition of performativity in relation to her work around sexuality and corporal traumas, for example abortions and rape. In China He Chengyao’s work with memories of her childhood, the corporal experience of her mother, she turns to performativity as a way of being in art-world, although not restricted, but liberated in the aesthetic realm; the self in art practice, is to be oneself with one’s material of desire. There is no political concern but the personal is refracted as political. Emin and Chengyao in opposite sides of the globe have adopted performativity as a way of being in their art practice, which is usually called performance art.

When the self meets aesthetics it is in a performativity mode of desire, whether to protest, to voice a personal memory, or voice an idea, the body is involved, the self identifies with an art material of desire. Donna Haraway asks, ‘Why should our bodies

¹⁸⁴ Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limit of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011 [1993]), p. 70.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 59.

end at the skin, or include at best other beings encapsulated by skin?’¹⁸⁶ A distinct relationship between performer and art emerged as female aesthetic body, and intends to becoming aesthetically performative. Until the Dadaist aesthetic discourse arrived in the 1900s, traditional paintings and sculptures dominated the art world and art establishment.¹⁸⁷ Several forces started to challenge the traditional way of viewing art, particularly with the idea of a counterculture that is anti-establishment after the Second World War, which included the emergence of the women’s movement, gay liberation, the anti-war struggle, post-colonial discourse, art libertarian, and anti-censorship discourses. Within this culture, new values started to be attached to notions around the body; it was as if the body was the central signifier of these shifts. This was often articulated as a site of difference between hip and straight culture. Bra burning, slogans such as ‘Make Love Not War,’ living theatre, and the idea that the body was a silent voice that exceeded cultural norms were all part of what was, in effect, the inauguration of a culture of excess, in which the dimension of protest and aesthetics merged together. This was a distinct shift within the paradigmatic structure of the social and aesthetic order and it implied a reworking of the relationships of politics, sexuality, discourse, and the body.¹⁸⁸

The question of a new subjectivity was at stake in this emerging set of cultural changes in a globalised system at the conjunction between the body and the voice, that desired to express its views, and drew on a signification that found new forms with performative gestures to create new images, and crucially images with thoughts go beyond gesture as Deleuze suggests in *Bergsonism*: ‘Recollection is actualized when it becomes an image. Thus, there is a circuit, with the present, the recollection-image, referring back to the perception-image and vice versa’.¹⁸⁹ It is actualisation of the female subject that fills the art space but female artists faced a battle with the patriarchal norms. Everyday life was in the process of being defined as a site for struggle, not only in terms of economics, but more importantly the definition of identity. Historically the

¹⁸⁶ Haraway, ‘A Cyborg Manifesto,’ pp. 149–82.

¹⁸⁷ Lucy Lippard writing in 1984 observes that activist art has its roots in the 60s and reacts against simplistic views of art, such as the formalist view of painting as ‘a flat decorated surface and that is all it can be.’ Lucy Lippard, ‘Trojan Horses: Activist Art and Power,’ p. 76, in Hilary Robison (ed.), *Feminist Art Theory: An Anthology 1968–2014* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 69–84.

¹⁸⁸ Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), p. 15. See also Alexandra M. Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory And Art Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 112–117. Also see Catherine Dormor, *A Philosophy of Textile: Between Practice and Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

¹⁸⁹ Gilles Deleuze *Bergsonism*, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 62–73.

traditional Left had always elected to focus on labour relationships as the site of struggle and largely ignored not only housework, but also questions related to subjectivity and identity, especially with regard to sexuality. Alienation or estrangement affected all spheres of society and the law of the commodity not only pertained to things but also to bodies and even expression. Thus, the idea of finding a voice or discovering the body anew became mainstream concepts in the new culture of resistance for post war 60s, 70s, and 80s female artists. Women's voices came to be heard, although in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, still a minority: 'Women, regardless of their numbers, are a minority, definable as a state or subset; but they create only by making possible a becoming over which they do not have ownership, into which they themselves must enter; this is a becoming-woman affecting all of human-kind, men and women both. The same goes for minor languages: they are not simply sublanguages, idiolects or dialects, but potential agents of the major language's entering into a becoming-minoritarian of all of its dimensions and elements.'¹⁹⁰

Within the aesthetic sphere the medium of performance became the site of an emerging female mode of expression, because on the level of form it was against the object and thus the commodification of art; it needed to be invented so was the site of innovation or new forms, it was invariably transgressive, and it was informal and thus open to new venues outside the restrictive codes of the formal art world (the Gallery). This constituted a free play not only of all the faculties, but also of the relationship of the body, gesture and voice. These were not only a new form of art, but also a new approach to authorship, so everything became a doubled-over order of bodily trace and the encounter of subjectivity. This implied not just the exposure of bodily economies within a newly-defined optics of performativity, but a newly articulated set of accounts theorising the subject. This was the major difference to most of the inherited notions of performance art that formed the syntactical base of modernist performance. However, performance art is often seen as non-verbal communication, it still needed the subject to actualise its form, hence performance art for visual artists is also related to performativity.

According to Amelia Jones performance art offers a new and dynamic mode in which to articulate a new experience of subjectivity in *Body Art* 1998.¹⁹¹ On this view,

¹⁹⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1987), p. 105.

¹⁹¹ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,

performativity exceeds performance art as a mode of being, a way of being who one is, and so is integral to subjectivity and the sense of being in and with the body. As Butler suggests, performativity is distinct from performance because it does not simply enact something but creates a reality. Gender, in particular, is an example of performativity that, comprising gestures, creates a reality. She writes: ‘Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express and fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means. That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality.’¹⁹² Performance art is performative in this sense.

Many critics and historians, such as the late Brian Sewell, have read performance artists as psychologically narcissistic,¹⁹³ but Amelia Jones gives us another interpretation that such narcissism should not be viewed negatively but rather as having radical implications because it implies the politicisation of personal life that was ‘so empowering to feminists in the late 1960s and early 1970s.’¹⁹⁴ Thus narcissism is simply the assertion of women’s subjectivity into the domain of patriarchal power, which means narcissism no longer conveys the traditional view of self-love, but necessitates the balance of power.

Amelia Jones emphasises how Carolee Schneemann’s naked performance work is a feminist critique of patriarchal values, and stresses objectification of women as objects of desire, and how the systemic patriarchal society erodes women from the realm of subjectivity throughout history.¹⁹⁵ The traditional nude, along with more overtly fetishistic works of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, bears witness to the objectification of women’s bodies that simultaneously strips away women’s subjectivity.¹⁹⁶ Schneemann’s work *Meat Joy* 1964¹⁹⁷ can be interpreted as the visibility

1998), p. 11.

¹⁹² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 185.

¹⁹³ Brian Sewell, ‘The Tyranny of Radical Conceptual Art,’ *Museum Management and Curatorship*, 16:3, 1997, pp. 227–32.

¹⁹⁴ Jones, *Body Art*, p. 46.

¹⁹⁵ Amelia Jones, *Body Art: Performing the Subject* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), pp. 1–5.

¹⁹⁶ Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory of Identification and the Visual Arts* (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 63–75.

¹⁹⁷ Carolee Schneemann, *More Than Meat Joy: Complete Performance Works and Selected Writings* (New York: McPherson & Co, 1979). pp. 247–50.

of the body in performance art, that the body has a voice in the public and is visible, but subjectivity requires actualisation that constitutes performativity of subjectivity.

Carolee Schneemann pioneered multimedia art practice in American performance art in the 1960s and 1970s, prefiguring Chengyao and Emin's performance practice. She trained as a painter but explored beyond her training, becoming interested in 'transmitting the gestural qualities of paint into live-body actions.'¹⁹⁸ The relation between body and language in her work strongly exemplifies the body as voice. The body became a way of exploring and expressing her subjectivity that was personal and visible in the public realm; her body became both subject and object of her art practice. Schneemann describes her work as the consequence of anguish and a way of working out her personal or inner suffering, which implies that subjectivity can be affected by external forces of personal experience. This suggests her subjectivity is merged with her work in her practice. In a letter to explain the origin of her work, she writes: 'When my life was mostly a nightmare ... the art – like a monster – gained a devouring strength for itself developing in spite of my misery and carrying me along, a crazed puppet...'¹⁹⁹ Schneemann saw herself as a magician vicariously feeding on her own suffering and transforming it into art. In 1964 Schneemann performed *Meat Joy*; her body performance is more focused on action rather than on the pose (as with Wilke).²⁰⁰ Schneemann's career in the early 1960s was associated with art movements such as Fluxus, Neo-Dada, and the Beat Generation. They often used their body to explore the world and the experimentation often linked to a feminist voice, protest, or simply questioning the status quo of art and society. In *Meat Joy* 1964 (Fig: 1.5) she and artists from the Kinetic Theatre interacted with animal organs, sausages, and fish in an 'orgy' of bodies interacting with animal body parts.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁸ Schneemann is quoted in Jenni Sorkin, 'Carolee Schneemann: Theater of Responsiveness,' p. 163, in Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant Garde*, pp. 162–7.

¹⁹⁹ Kristine Stiles (ed.), *Correspondence Course: An Epistolary History of Carolee Schneemann and Her Circle* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), pp. xxxviii–xxxix.

²⁰⁰ Jones, *Body Art*, p. 159.

²⁰¹ Anna Dezeuze, 'The 1960s: a decade out of bounds,' pp. 48–9. In Amelia Jones (ed.) *A Companion to Contemporary Art Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 38–59.

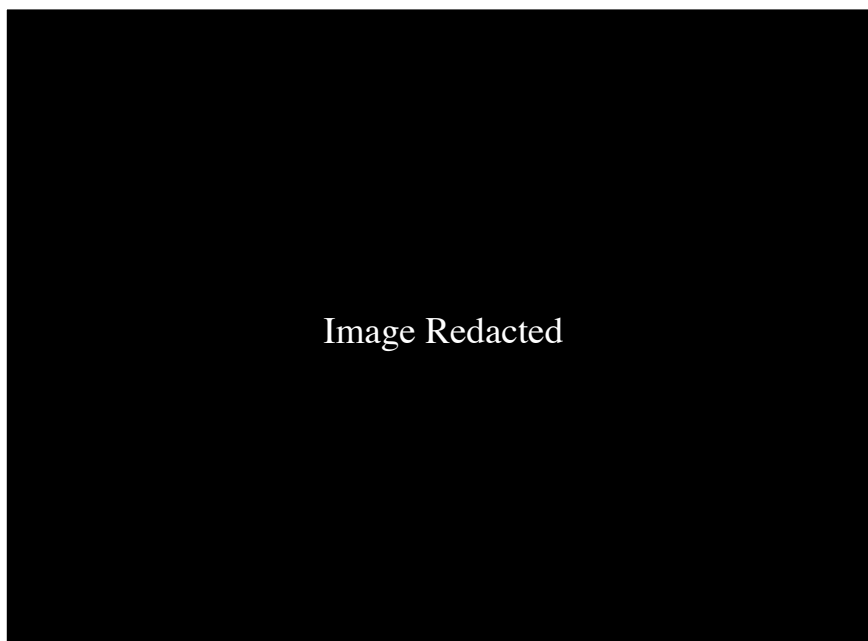
Meat Joy 1964

Fig. 1.5: Carolee Schneemann, *Meat Joy* 1964
 Performance, Photograph, Festival De La Libre Expression, Paris.
 [Image redacted due to copyright]

This performance attempts to suggest freedom of body expression with an experimental contingency; her body and other bodies are no different to that of animals, so it questions why society treats animals differently to humans, and why treat humans like animals? Similar to Schneemann, Marina Abramović performs her body as the model and the subject of her work. In 1974, in a performance piece called *Rhythm 0* 1974 (Fig: 1.6), Abramović sat in Gallery Studio Morra in Naples for six hours, where she provided seventy-two objects²⁰² laid out on a table in front of her accompanied with a note to invite the audience's participation to apply any object to her body as they wish. 'Instructions: There are 72 objects on the table that one can use on me as desired.'²⁰³ There were objects for pleasure, pain, and death. The objects consist of grooming tools,

²⁰² Seventy-two objects: apple, alcohol, ax, band aid, bullet, blue paint, brush, bandage, bone of lamb, bell, book, box of razor blades, bread, cake, comb, cotton, candle, chains, coat, chair, drinking glass, dish, flowers, flute, fork, feather, gun, grapes, hammer, hairpin, honey, handkerchief, hat, kitchen knife, lipstick, leather strings, metal spear, medal, matches, mirror, metal pipe, newspaper, nails, needle, olive oil, pocket knife, perfume, polaroid camera, piece of wood, pen, rose, red paint, rosemary branch, scissors, sheet of white paper, saw, stick, spoon, safety pin, salt, sugar, soap, shoes, sulphur, scarf, scalpel, whip, white paint, wine, wire, water, yarn.

²⁰³ Catherine Wood, *Tate Collections* (London: Tate, 2010). Also Klaus Biesenbach (ed.), *Marina Abramović: The Artist is Present*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York 2009.

food – an apple, a gun, household objects, dress-up clothes, and so forth. She became an object or a puppet for the audience to do with as they wished, although she said, ‘I don’t want to die,’ and wondered how far the audience could go.²⁰⁴ In February 1989 China, Xiao Lu also used a Gun in her performance piece *Dialogue* 1989 (Fig:1.8) in which she fired two shots at her own installation and created an uproar and prosecution.

***Rhythm O* 1974**

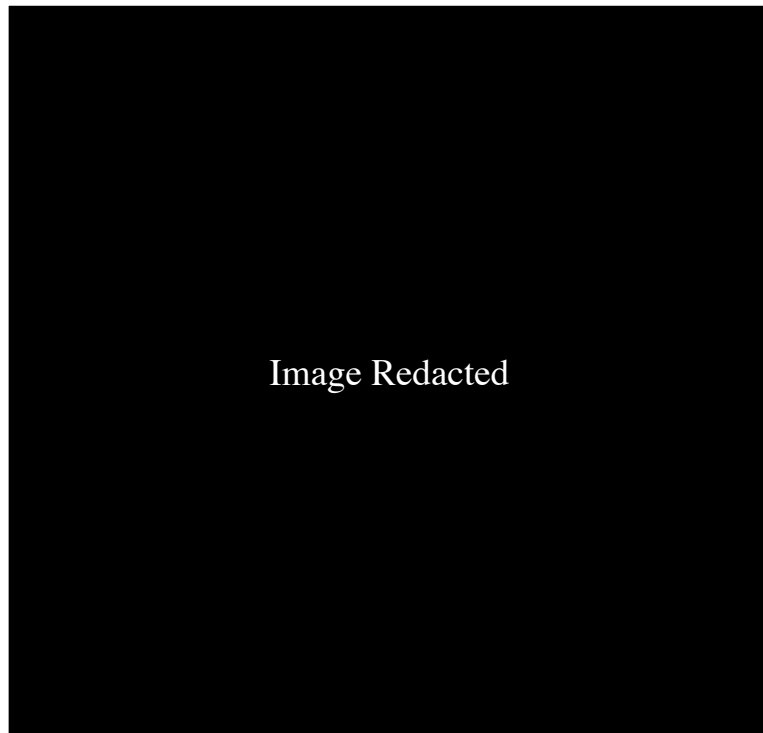


Fig. 1.6: Marina Abramović: *Rhythm O* Belgrade, 1974.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

²⁰⁴ Milica Zec, *Marina Abramović*, Video, <https://vimeo.com/71952791>.

As an artist, Abramović wanted to push boundaries that stifled her, but she also responding to the polemic language towards women, this challenges and pushes her body, energy, and danger in art practice to its limit. The event came to a close after six hours of performance; it was stopped when a member of the audience held a loaded gun to her head.²⁶⁵ But crucially what these works highlight is how Abramović's performativity challenges the diminution of women's identity in the history of art. Indeed, along with her partner Ulay, her early performances were, she said, the assertion of subjectivity.²⁶⁶ But her desire is at the heart of this work, desire to be acknowledged. Abramović's self meets aesthetics here, and these objects she has chosen are her art materials that merges with her body to question society, her readymades, and a mirror for the audience who have reacted as instructed by her suggestions. She has emptied herself into her art practice to question metaphysically what is an oppressed life in a patriarchal society? She is 'making sense of things' in this work through performativity. This not only suggests the personal as political but the ontological became political.

The 60s and 70s feminist artists' voices echoed a feminist revolution that included artists such as Carolee Schneemann and Marina Abramović above, along with Hannah Wilke, Ana Mendieta, Louise Bourgeois, and later in the 80's Cindy Sherman to mention a few. They demonstrated how crucial female artists' work is and how crucial to make a stance to contribute towards the different waves of feminism. Performance art is a western phenomenon in its origin and came to be absorbed in China since the Stars and '85 movement, but it was still at its infancy,²⁶⁷ until the 1990s. They have been female artists that helped to shape another wave of feminism for the twenty-first century. The history of feminism continues to voice how we should continue to build on feminist artists becoming ubiquitous in contemporary art, and beyond; how there has been a 'paradigm shift.'²⁶⁸ The 60s and 70s were a minor and major revolution

²⁶⁵ Sally O'Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009), pp. 202–204.

²⁶⁶ Jones, *Body Art*, p. 140.

²⁶⁷ Hung, Wu. *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005.

²⁶⁸ Schor, 'The Feminist Avant-Garde,' p. 71. Assessing the impact of the feminist Avant-Garde, Schor writes: 'One of the far reaching and abiding achievements of the artists of the Feminist Avant-garde is that their collective awareness enabled them to deconstruct the image of woman that has served male artists throughout the centuries as a vehicle for their projections, stereotypes, desires, and fantasies. Severing this one-dimensional relationship in which woman was the object to men's subjectivity, they create a plurality of female identities' (p. 71).

in Deleuze's terms: on the one hand we see how they have changed the arts' arena that paved the way for Emin and Chengyao to become acknowledged and visible. Much work has been undertaken on this second wave of feminist artists, who often employed voice and text with their work to protest against male artists' dominance, which is no longer merely gestural.²⁰⁹

As for Chinese female artists in the 60s and 70s: most were tired and retreated to home, family, and traditional chores of being a woman, some were creating paintings for solace rather than for commercial gains in a new communist state. It was not until the late 1970s and 80s led by male artists of the Stars group, and '85 movement, that the art-scene anticipated female artists, but being mostly dominated by male artist, female artists were intimidated by their claims of artistry. But after the tragedy of June 4th '89, female contemporary artists began to surface as supporters and contributors, that nurtured the wounds of their male artists who were involved in the tragedy. Many female artists began to embrace modernity and explore the possibilities of becoming serious artists of their own right. The political predicament divide had also created solidarity among female and male artists, furthermore, global sympathisers came to rescue the tragedy against the communist regime, especially after the oppression of protesters during the tragedy that was world focused after 1989.²¹⁰ Thus resulted diaspora artists around the world.

This work *To Add One Meter To An Anonymous Mountain* 1995 exhibited solidarity between female and male artists (Fig: 1.7), this included female artists, in support of the victims of oppression during the June 4th atrocity. During this time, female artists began to emerge to explore a possible career in the arts, this included He Chengyao during the late 1990s, she later graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Art in Beijing, in 2001. A moment of truth was to test her boundaries. Despite solidarity, there was competition among male or female artists after 2000s, they joined forces to defend artistic rights in multimedia practices on the contemporary art stage, but it was becoming more and more individualistic in practice, with some political concerns and views of the art-world in China.²¹¹ But the shift nevertheless began to

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Barmé, Geremie and Linda Jaivin (eds.), *New Ghosts, Old Dreams: Chinese Rebel Voices* (New York: Times Books, 1992).

²¹¹ Zhang Bin Bin, interview with Leung Kwankiu Beijing 2016.

welcome the contribution of female artists' work in all shapes and forms during the 2000s.²¹²

To Add One Meter To An Anonymous Mountain 1995

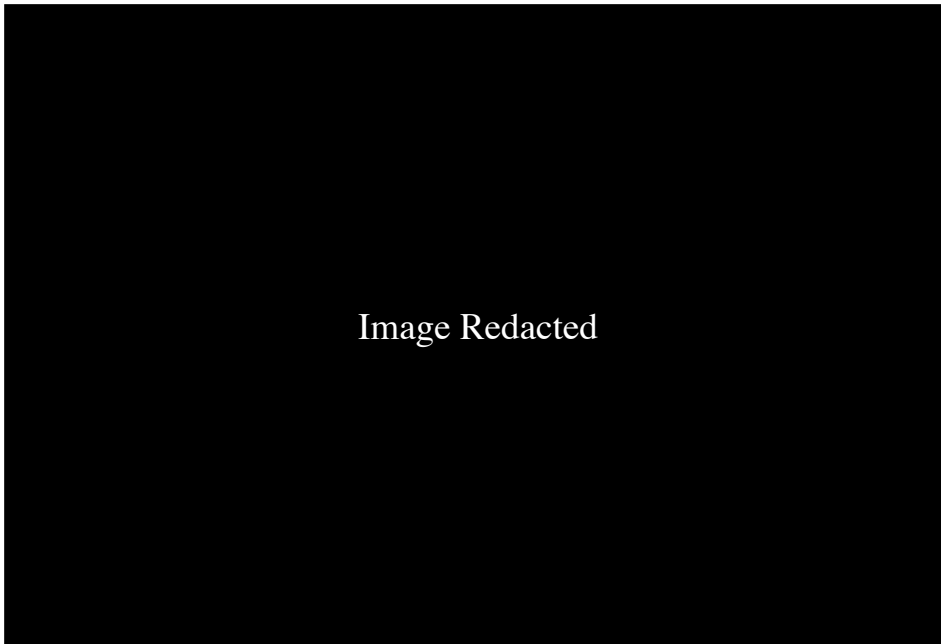


Fig. 1.7: *To Add One Meter To An Anonymous Mountain* 1995. Performance in Mentougou District, Beijing. In collaboration with artists, Cang Xin, Gao Yang, Zuoxiao Zuzhou, Ma Zonyin, Zhang Huan, Ma Liuming, Zhang Binbin, Yingmei Duan, and Zhu Ming.²¹³
[Image redacted due to copyright]

It was so spontaneous. That work came about in the right time, right place, and with the right people. In this time and age, it's not to say that collective art is no longer a possibility, just that the collective art produced now wouldn't be like the past. Back then the way we felt towards our surrounding environment was very deep and impactful, and so every single piece of work we did was about a very personal experience that we had towards life.²¹⁴

²¹² Gao, Minglu. *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth-Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: London: MIT Press!; in association with China Art Foundation, 2011), pp. 24–6.

²¹³ Diane Fortenberry, Rebecca Morrill, and Josephine New, *Body of Art*, (London: Phaidon Press 2015).

²¹⁴ Zhang Binbin, interview with Leung Kwankiu Beijing 2016.

Zhang Binbin was one of the naked bodies on this photograph in 1995, she said the group dispersed when the police controlled their movement. The earlier Stars art movement of the 70s, and the '85 Movement that included New Dadaist ideas, responded to China's problematic situation with a Western art practice. Even the tutors from art establishments embraced the trajectory of a Duchampian aesthetic practice, the readymade, and performance art, they adopted a western worldview. *To Add One Meter To An Anonymous Mountain* 1995 was also rejected by the government and artists were summoned to face questioning, Zhang Binbin said, that was the last piece of work she did until recent years.²¹⁵ There are two female artists who participated and intertwined with eight male artists in this work that shows intimacy, humility, affinity, association, affection, comradeship, friendship, bodily harmony, body exposure, and solidarity with the naked body that constituted a mountain and nature.²¹⁶ A few artists in this work were victims of oppression of June 4th. This reflects the mood of the 90s for female artists and male artists, they were attempting to embrace female artists as never before, but treated as colleagues, not as a threat or a distant colleague but as respected human artists; it was artists against the government, male or female, but despite such solidarity, female artists remain second class in every art establishment's agenda. Zhang Binbin said:

Even with nudity – if you think it's a big deal, then it will be a big deal, and you'll probably feel guilty when doing a piece of art that involves nudity. But nudity is about the self, and it doesn't have much to do with other people. So I would feel that, if I were to do something, then I would be prepared to take responsibility and face all consequence from it. So if I know that I can't handle it, then I wouldn't. Others discriminate you, but if you are strong enough, discrimination wouldn't mean a thing to you. This is how I've always lived my life.²¹⁷

A wise thought from Zhang Bin Bin. Young Chinese artists (YCA's) have to first graduate with a painting or printing degree,²¹⁸ similar to the British art schools from which Tracey Emin and her contemporaries (YBA's), graduated from; printing,

²¹⁵ Ibid. Zhang Bin Bin, interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing 2016.

²¹⁶ Fortenberry, Morrill, and New, *Body Of Art*.

²¹⁷ Zhang Binbin, interview with Leung Kwankiu Beijing 2016.

²¹⁸ Xiao Lu, *Dialogue* (Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

painting, photography, or sculpture were still the artistic norm. But dissimilar to the traditional ways of learning and creating, techniques were to learn realistic paintings (influenced by Soviet realism), and hence performance work were never taught; the artist/student had to acquire these skills on their own without a teaching-master at hand, but again this was depending on who is the teacher, so foundational skills were compromised if the teacher did not teach skills, and Britain was very similar during the 70s, 80s, and 90s. Body performance art was outside of the art school curriculum in China, but it was explored against traditional art practice of imitation, within materialistic modernity.²¹⁹ But in some art schools in China, copying Old Masters paintings is still a learning skill and technique to be celebrated today.²²⁰ The Stars and the '85 movement are examples of Avant-Garde art in China which rebelled against traditional aesthetics, akin to Dadaism in the 1910s, which lead Chengyao to performance art in the 2001.²²¹ It is not surprising that Chengyao identifies herself with the Duchampian trajectory as a tradition that resonates with many Chinese artists' anger toward oppression. China's Neo Dadaism, 'Xiamen Dada'(厦门达达) gave another phase of contemporary art a new art lift.²²² Li Shengzhao discussing Dadaism with enthusiasm said:

In September of 1986, following the *Xiamen '86 New Dada Modern Art Exhibition* at the Xiamen New Art Museum, Xiamen Dada and the spirit of Dadaism made a formal and unapologetic debut in China, an occasion which also marked the official beginning of the group. The practices of Xiamen Dada were not limited to acts of anti-traditionalism, but more importantly, the group's philosophies and actions were a manifestation of a questioning and critique of existing institutions of art history, art galleries, and art works. This was an important distinction that separated them from the other groups of the '85 New Wave movement.²²³

²¹⁹ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 14–15.

²²⁰ For example, the realism of Chen Yifei, Clunas, Craig. *Art in China*. Oxford History of Art. Oxford!: New York: Oxford University Press, 1997. p. 222.

²²¹ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 200–202.

²²² Li Shengzhao, 'Xiamen Dada: The Most Radical Group of the '85 New Wave' (Goethe Institut, Beijing, China, July 2016).

²²³ *Ibid.*

Li highlights the '85 movement as a philosophical action and manifestation to question and critique art institutions, art galleries, and art works, similar to that of Dadaism in the 1910s, or the Neo Dada of the 60s in the West but with a local formation of China. Ironically, Mao's rebellious character is not dissimilar to the Dadaists, when he protested against tradition began with his younger self during the Autumn Harvest Uprising of the 1920s to becoming a leader of the communist party in 1949, and later commanded the Great Leap Forward in 1958-63, and the cultural revolution until his death 1966-76, that ended in the death of on a monumental scale of approximately forty million Han citizens who helped him win the war and placed him as the leader.²²⁴

Despite prosecution, Chinese artists continued to draw from their Chinese heritage, that Mao attempted to annihilate. Gao Minglu writes that 'the 85 Movement artists presented themselves as wounded people whose scars covered over wounds dealt in the past. They attempted to transcend the old, to be reborn as new beings, modern beings.'²²⁵ This theme of wounded people carried on in the 1990s with a group of artists led by Zheng Linajie wrapped in black bandages. The artists staged a funeral for the Great Wall that mourned the deaths on the Wall throughout history, the *Big Explosion Series* (1992), and protested against the Tiananmen Square oppression of its citizens. These performances, focused on the Great Wall, suggest 'the body of the artist became at once a symbol of the sacrificial in the past and of the living man mourning the sacrificial in the present.'²²⁶ This emphasises a depth of cultural memory coming to the fore and being brought to life in the present.

In a similar vein, Xu Bin's *Ghosts Pounding the Wall* 1990-91, his second major installation as a three-story high ink rubbing, taken from a section of the wall and exhibited in USA, claims the Great Wall as a symbol of death that questions human effort – including the building of the Great Wall – in the face of death.²²⁷ Other artists who have used the Great Wall include Cai Guoquiang, whose *Project to Extend the Great Wall of China by 10,000 Meters*, 1993, formed a line of 'energy' (*qi*) to awaken the Great Wall, and Zhan Wang who recreated the wall with fake, golden bricks in 1997.²²⁸ Similarly, Chengyao evokes these historical memories in her performance

²²⁴ Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine*. Through out the book.

²²⁵ Gao, 'The Great Wall in Contemporary Chinese Art,' p. 776.

²²⁶ Gao, *Total Modernity*, p. 12.

²²⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 230-31.

²²⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 14-15.

Opening the Great Wall 2001 (Fig: 2.11) along with memories of her mother. These examples demonstrate how modern Chinese artists have used the historical heritage and cultural memory of China to inspire their work that becomes crucially important for Chengyao's performativity. Furthermore, The Great Wall is a trope of memory for Chinese people and symbol of patriarchal oppression for some contemporary artists such as Chengyao. But since the memories of the famine during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution that took so many lives, the government's priority is financial security, this takes precedence over human rights for the communist government. The general public surrenders under oppression to its dictatorship and use financial freedom as a tool to gain liberty of a new kind of human rights, materialism.

The anthropologist Liu Xin in *The Mirage of China* 2012 wrote, 'If a history of the present may be written as a history of mentality, it must be, simultaneously, a history of sentimentality, for which, in the case of China, a narcissistic selfhood and a materialistic metaphysic have supplied the life vitamins for the present moment. Against the Maoist sentimentality, which was humanistic in its own way, the delivery of a new sentiment was made, on the ruins of the Maoist revolution, as an immediate reaction or rebellion.'²²⁹ Liu's criticism of China is statistically justified and alarming at the same time, crucially in a culture that has experienced catastrophic cultural and political upheaval in the twentieth century that he points out. But one burning question comes to mind, if Maoism is in decline as Liu claims, why do hoards of people queue up to see Mao's mausoleum on national day 1st October each year? So I wrote to Professor Liu and he kindly replied and said:

Maoism is declined epistemologically, especially for the official view of the world, but the mass, the ordinary people, often return to it emotionally. Emotion is not epistemology, and that is why many scientists, such as Newton, still believed in God.²³⁰

Liu Xin claims here that greed, narcissism, and materiality can surface and override humility in China in the twenty-first century. But as for Chinese artists in my research, as a result of my interviews with female and male artists in China, Hong Kong,

²²⁹ Xin Liu, *The Mirage of China* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 180-200.

²³⁰ Xin Liu Personal Communication, Emails, August 2017.

and Britain, I have not found narcissism in terms of self-love but the desire to survive as artists under an oppressive regime in China, because their work often involved others, their history, their experiences, and their Chinese heritage which they feel has been lost during Mao's reign. But at the same time, I also discovered competition is on the rise among artists but that is in every country and not only in China, which would need further research.²³¹ This thesis focuses on a comparison between Chengyao and Emin, but it will also illustrate indirectly some of the encounters of other artists in China.

While Chengyao and her contemporaries are revealing sensitive issues through art practice in China; indirectly they and some writers were the means of political and cultural critique, but artists are confused when faced with a government that behaves in a contradictory manner. On the one hand they wish to oppress their citizens and on the other they wish to encourage trade with the West, this provides a mixed message, often with problematic demands of loyalty and obedience from their citizens since June 4th '89. But Deng's government failed to see the desire of the human condition or nature, as did Marx, suggests Peter Singer.²³² This underestimated the need of human rights and the desire of its citizens, which resulted in the deaths of over forty million in the great leap forward, cultural revolution, as well as the tragedy of June 4th '89.²³³ Since China opened its door to the world in the 80s, artists began exploring Western culture and reading Western philosophy. By studying Western art and philosophy, and engaging in exchange programs with Western universities and artist's residencies, artists were encouraged to adopt a new way of thinking about art practice since the 1980s.²³⁴ China's political situation is still in transition since the atrocities of the 1960s. According to Dillon when discussing the 1960s China 'it has been called the "decade of disaster", the "decade of turmoil" or the "decade of internal chaos".'²³⁵

²³¹ Chinese artists that I interviewed in China, Hong Kong and UK: He Chengyao, Yu Hong, Xiang Jing, Xiao Lu, Liao Wen, Dong Jinling, Zhang Bin Bin, Hu Yifei and Chen Jing, Cui Guang Xia, Cheng Guang, Wang Zang, Cheng Clara, Chen Shisen, Feng Wei Dong, Juan Juan, Liu Nanxi, Wang Dandan, Wu Weihe, Yim Monique, Wang Ruobing. From 2013-2017.

²³² Singer, *A Darwinian Left*, p. 23.

²³³ Michael Dillon, *China: A Modern History* (London: Tauris, 2010), pp. 367–9.

²³⁴ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 27–8; Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio, *Contemporary Asian Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2010), pp. 21–2. Also see Jiang Jiehong, *Burden or Legacy: From The Chinese Cultural Revolution to Contemporary Art* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2007); *The Revolution Continues: New Art From China: New Art In China* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2008).

²³⁵ Michael Dillon, *China: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), p. 325. Also see Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958–62* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010).

Chengyao grew up in these conditions, in her view China's political system has not improved in 2010s.²³⁶ Thus Duchamp's ideology against war, traditional art, establishment, has awakened philosophy to connect with art practice in the Dadaist movement of the 1910s is pertinent to Chengyao and her confederate's development. Influenced by these movements, Chengyao meets aesthetics in art practice exemplifying the process of glocalisation in the arts between China and the West. The erosion of authorship and subjectivity, instigated within the plastic arts by Dadaist of the 1910s, is both an inspiration and a criticism of war and society. By rejecting the pure retinal vision of art (mostly against paintings and establishments), he exhibited a vision of the mind playing with objects, similar to death of the author, in the process of Duchamp creating his artworks with ready-mades, his own subjectivity is interacting with his artist's material.²³⁷ While standing within the tradition of Duchamp re-contextualised in a Chinese setting, the performativity of Chengyao's subjectivity engages with her material of desire, the external objects of table and chess performing a synthesis of the identity of subjectivity with art materials or an event in artwork; this creates a dialectic of Chengyao's ontological identification relationship where thesis subjectivity-X, antithesis art material-Y, synthesises as artwork-XY in self meets aesthetics.

Chengyao is not a diaspora artist like Ai Weiwei or Xiao Lu who left China for refuge abroad after June 4th, although this does not imply an extreme relativism for which there are no analogues between notions of self in China and the West. There are parallel or analogous conceptions of self in China and the West. For example, Neo-Confucianism traditionally has a notion of mind close to the Western concept of self, as 'the carrier of conscious awareness, knowledge, and reason, as well as being the source of moral judgment.'²³⁸ But such a person was within a social context as 'the node of a multiplicity of specifically defined social relationships.'²³⁹ Feminism has changed most of this; what influenced Chengyao is a self with conscious awareness, making judgments and self-examining, while also being set within a web of social relationships.

²³⁶ He Chengyao interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016, December 2013. Also, He Chengyao interview with Monica Merlin, Beijing 2013.

²³⁷ Dalia Judovitz, *Drawing on Art, Duchamp and Company* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1968), pp. 3–8.

²³⁸ Mark Elvin, 'Between the Earth and Heaven: Conceptions of the Self in China,' pp. 156–7, in Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (eds.), *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 156–89.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

Furthermore, a global criticism of China after 1989, June 4^a, meant self-consciousness was linked with the rest of the world. This is not so different to that of the West, despite the specific historical trajectories of ideas of self and subjectivity still privileging a male subjectivity in the arts.

Chengyao's and her confederates' work not only implies their history with *Opening The Great Wall* 2001 (Fig: 2.11) and *Ninety Nine Needles* 2002 (Fig: 3.3, 3.5), and artists such as Ai Weiwei's Ming themes in his work but they also implicitly reference the monk Hong Wu, who rose from poverty to lead the Ming Dynasty, hence these example of the past posit huge threat to the communist government. Not surprising that Chengyao's work is often interpreted as political by scholars such as Wu and Gao.²⁴⁰

Chinese contemporary art is not only political, but an escape to a culture with human rights, such as Western culture that tolerates artists of the Avant Garde. And thus a hybrid version of postmodernism, to use Gladston's phrase, is created in which there is also a deep sense that Chinese contemporary art is Chinese, through an indigenous culture.²⁴¹ There is continuity in art from past tradition and so a distinctly Chinese ethos in the aesthetic realm even today. An analysis of twentieth and twenty-first century Chinese art might therefore distinguish between realism – realistic painting, for example, as documented by Julia Andrews and Michael Sullivan²⁴² – and conceptual art – of the Stars in the 70s and '85 Movement, for example – as documented by Gao Minglu and Wu Hung. According to Gao, the idea of abstraction that occurred in Western art with Malevich or Mondrian did not happen in China. Rather, there is a third type that can be distinguished, which Gao calls 'Chinese Maximalism' (*Zhongguo jiduo zhuyi*).²⁴³ In the 1990s Maximalism constitutes 'apartment art' that is performed in domestic settings, is 'labour-intensive and repetitious,' involving 'both personal meditation and social critique in both Chinese and global contexts.'²⁴⁴ Maximalism questions assumptions about the meaning of art and asks, who confer meaning on it and

²⁴⁰ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 311–13.

²⁴¹ Paul Gladston, 'Deconstructing Gao Minglu, critical reflections on contemporaneity and associated exceptionalist readings of contemporary Chinese art,' *Journal of Art Historiography*, vol. 10, 2014, pp. 1-19.

²⁴² Michael Sullivan, *Modern Chinese Art: The Khoan and Michael Sullivan Collection*. Oxford: Ashmolean Museum, 2001. Julia Frances Andrews, *Painters and Politics in the People's Republic of China, 1949-1979*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.

²⁴³ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 311–13.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 311.

how is meaning presented? Gao identifies five features of Maximalism. First, it is against expression and representation, the artwork has nothing to do with its creator once finished, an idea close to Barthes' death of the author and its Duchampian trajectory. Second, it deals with 'metaphysical operations,' a term coined by Zhu Xiaohe to indicate that his painting is about just seeing, not seeing that leads somewhere, to an understanding, but simply seeing in itself. Similar to Duchamp who painted over the Mona Lisa, Zhu repaints older art in a dense mass of lines such that the older image is hardly recognisable and sees this as a kind of writing through which he understands reality.

The third feature is that meaning does not lie in the objects of art but in the process: the meaning of the work is not arrived at but lies in the constantly changing instance of its realisation. Gu Dexin in the 1980s thought that the meaning of his work could never be reached. The fourth feature is fixed quantity and infinity; the maximalist strives for very large numbers implying infinity, such as Qiu Zhijie's *Copying the Orchid Pavilion Preface 1000 Times* or Li Qing's very long scroll painting. Lastly, the fifth feature of Maximalism is that it has an affinity with Chan (Zen) Buddhism, because meaning lies only in personal experience in a similar way to meditation in Chan.²⁴⁵ While this last feature seems to contradict the first – that meaning does not lie with the creator of the work – it is obvious to see Chan emphasising the meaning in the *process* of creation rather than the end product.²⁴⁶ While this history of contemporary art was active in the 1990s that stems from Chinese Neo Dadaism of the 1970s, the self that is present is nevertheless related to the work of Chengyao's performativity indirectly and uncompromisingly.

After promising to liberate women from oppression during the revolutions of the 60s, Mao's democratic centralism oppressed citizens in general. As a general rule, if anyone, men or women, is directly critical of the government, they will be questioned, searched and in some cases detained by the police.²⁴⁷ Feminism in China attempted to emerge alongside Western feminist in the 1900s. New research discovered by three feminist academics in 2013, on *The Birth of Chinese Feminism*, suggests that it began with a theorist called He-Yin Zhen in the 19th century and early-20th century. He-Yin

²⁴⁵ Ibid, pp. 315–51.

²⁴⁶ D. T. Suzuki, *Essays in Zen Buddhism (Third Series)* (London: Rider and Co., 1953), pp. 318–19.

²⁴⁷ Chiu and Genocchio, *Contemporary Asian Art*, p. 22: 'art fairs and museum shows are still censored and internet is heavily policed.'

Zhen was deeply concerned with the relationships between patriarchy, capitalism, imperialism, and gender subjugation in a global culture.²⁴⁸ In 1903, in a text called *The Women's Bell* (*Nujie Zhong*), there was a call for women's rights in order that they could be patriotic, stressing how important it was to stop things such as foot binding for women and how women should be educated.²⁴⁹

At present feminists are revealing a deep and problematic paternalism, in Mao's words, that women in the communist movement must 'hold up half of the sky', but if women can do this, why were they not allowed to hold up half of the government?²⁵⁰ Wang Zheng has given an account of this history and how feminism fought against both gender differentiation and gender segregation in Feudalism, since 1900. Wang observes:

Against the Confucian ideal of *nannü youbie* [gender differentiation] and *nannü shoushou buqin* [gender segregation], Chinese feminists expressed a different imagining of a better future: a more humane society that centred on social justice and equality, a modern society that allowed individuals to break free from the constraints of Confucian patriarchal social norms embedded in kinship relations as well as from the control of an imperial polity, and or a stronger nation that turned China from being the prey of imperialist powers into a sovereign state.²⁵¹

Chinese feminism was not a new idea to the Chinese intellectuals since the 1900s but the two world wars, the Great Leap Forward, and the cultural revolutions had compromised their advancement more than we can imagine.²⁵² There is now a global

²⁴⁸ Liu, Lydia, Karl, Rebecca, Ko, Dorothy (eds.), *The Birth of Chinese Feminism: Essential Texts in Transnational Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013). See also Susan Brownwell and Jeffrey N. Wasserstrom (eds.), *Chinese Femininities, Chinese Masculinities: A Reader* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For a history of women in modern China, especially good on marriage and property law, see Gail Hershatter, *Women in China's Long Twentieth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). On gender and the function of sex in Chinese civilization, see Susan L. Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011). For an anthropological study of gender, focusing on silk producers, see Lisa Rofel, *Other Modernities: Gendered Yearnings in China after Socialism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Didi Kirsten Tatlow, 'Chinese Women's Progress Stalls on Many Fronts,' *The New York Times*, 6th March 2012.

²⁵¹ Wang Zheng, *Finding Women in the State: A Socialist Feminist Revolution in the People's Republic of China 1949-1964* (University of California Press, 2017), p. 3.

²⁵² Ibid.

feminism that Chinese feminists are contributing to in China, and which is contextualised in the larger picture of global feminism.²⁵³ Chengyao's work as performativity of subjectivity with wider concerns contributes to their raising up in recent decades. In present-day China, both male and female artists are encouraged to stay communist in alignment with state policy; any artist creating work that rebukes the government is warned and if they speak against the regime's policies they are arrested and punished in some cases with torture by state officials, as we saw in the case of Ai Weiwei's imprisonment in 2015 and the official charged him with an excuse that he did not pay his taxes. Ai Weiwei then created works according to his experience, which were exhibited in the Royal Academy, London 2016.²⁵⁴ Performance artists Hu Yifei and Chen Jing in Beijing, who never lived abroad said in our conversation:

Fear looms over everyone in China but the artists wish to continue as much as possible despite threats from the police and government. Sometimes people disappear without warning and no one knows where they have gone. The police often practiced this. China might be growing economically but it is still about survival beneath the surface. The artists long for freedom of speech, some have gone spiritual and stay out of politics, but still hopes to challenge human rights from within.²⁵⁵

Their words are poignant contributions here, we see a China that is growing financially, but art and culture have become secondary unless it provides a commodity, or face value, hence performance art is under scrutiny because it is seen as a threat and not a commercial value. Additionally, since there are more Chinese millionaires and billionaires in the last few decades who are interested in collecting art globally as a commodity, could perhaps impose a change in the arts and its market of collectors. Thus, feminism in China, especially in relation to art practice is set within the broader

²⁵³ Yet there are some voices critical of Chinese global feminism, especially in contemporary art. Min Dongchao claims that transnational feminism, far from being a global and democratic network, is underpinned by capitalist and neoliberal hierarchies of power imposed on the third world by the West. Min Dongchao, *Translation and Travelling Theory: Feminist Theory and Praxis in China* (London: Routledge, 2017), pp. 39–66. See also the review by Linda Jean Pittwood, *Yishu*, March/April 2017 vol. 16, no 2, pp. 99–103. Also see, WACK exhibition in MoMA, and Brooklyn Museum, New York, 2007.

²⁵⁴ Ai Wei Wei, Exhibition Cat. Royal Academy, September 2015.

²⁵⁵ Hu Yifei and Chen Jing, Interview by Leung Kwankiu, March 2016.

parameters of state control of individual rights of self-expression. There is, in a sense, an attempt by the state to colonise subjectivity with propaganda materials.

Liao Wen's book *No More Nice Girls* describes her research on Western feminist artists as an attempt to understand the critique of patriarchy; this book was written in Chinese, but it has been banned in China. It is seen as a threat to the government who rejects Western liberation that may influence Chinese women.²⁵⁶ Mao's promise to emancipate women who 'held up half of the sky' was for his own liberation not for women. But when women discovered from the late twentieth century onwards that Mao's promise was only a propaganda tool to gain support and votes for the Marxist and Leninist ideology. Chinese feminists began to propagate protest against this by joining forces with the global feminist troop, including Chinese men and women living abroad. But since the Chinese Communist Party government is still mostly men, (although at times, a glimpse of spokeswomen appears to be politically active as representative of the communist government), feminists are conscious of a building block for any activists to enter into any debates for human rights, including creativity in the visual arts. The ideas of 'held up half of the sky' constituted men who supported Mao and his confederates. Some men and male artists are also feminists in China whose frustration is hidden, as is for female artists and some women in general.²⁵⁷

Indeed, the 'iron girls' propagated as liberated women in Mao's regime came to be castigated as un-feminine after Mao.²⁵⁸ Liao Wen stresses that women need to be free to pursue their own goals, and by comparing the feminist movement in China to the West during the 60s, 70s, and 80s, through her interviews with feminists in America and China in her book, concludes that the style of feminism in the USA was very different to that of China. Although there are overlaps of issues, she discovers the phrase 'nice girls' was coined by an American feminist critiquing 'southern belle education,'²⁵⁹ that taught girls how to dress and behave properly, similar to the finishing schools for girls in Europe. Her interviews showed how America's female artists' movement reacted to extreme conditions for women at the time, extremely long working hours, with low pay.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Liao Wen, *No More Nice Girls* [*Bu zai you hao nu hai le*] (Beijing: Hebi Education Publishing House, 1991).

²⁵⁷ Ibid. Also Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, 2016.

²⁵⁸ Zheng, *Finding Women in the State*, pp. 221–8.

²⁵⁹ Liao Wen, *No More Nice Girls*. Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, 2016.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

According to Liao Wen, Chinese women ‘regressed’ in their thinking who wished to return to traditional roles in the 1970s and 80s, just as the explosion in contemporary art was beginning to emerge in the West. In contrast to male artists, many female artists were tired after the war and had a desire for peace and returned to painting traditional topics, such as flowers, animals, and mothers and children, in a number of mediums including oil paint on canvas.²⁶¹ Liao Wen called this ‘new style art’ (新规格画); although new, it had ‘a traditional feel’ to it, but their work was ignored and never taken seriously by male artists or art establishments. Many female artists who wished to exhibit were turned down, and if they were hung alongside men’s work, they would refuse to exhibit alongside them, hence the removal of female artists’ work in favour of male artists in many galleries in China at the time.²⁶² When the Stars and the ’85 art movements revolutionised Chinese art, women certainly participated but they were not seen as distinctive female work; ‘there was no female art,’ during the 1980s, but female art begin to surface in the 1990s. Female artists developed a kind of expression that was different to male artists, such as the work of Lin Tianmiao and Cai Lin, and Chengyao came on the scene after she graduated from CAFA in 2001.²⁶³ There is no doubt that contemporary art since the 1980s in China was strongly influenced by the West.²⁶⁴ Another artist to this equation is Xiao Lu’s famous work that woken up the entire world in the morning of 5th February 1989. No matter how cynical the rest of the art-world were at the time, no one could ignore the cultural shock of two gunshots that Xiao Lu used to fire at her installation *Dialogue* 1989, which she did not realise was an art performance.

In the National Art Museum, Beijing, at approximately two hours after the show opened to the public at 11.10am on 5th February 1989, but before the opening Xiao Lu ‘standing in the ground floor of the exhibition hall, suddenly raised a handgun without warning and fired two shots at her installation work, *Dialogue* 1989 which precipitated

²⁶¹ Ibid.

²⁶² Ibid.

²⁶³ Another example would be Yu Hong’s work where she charts the story of her life through traditional oil painting, growing up, having her own children, juxtaposed with photographs of contemporary political events. Yu Hong, *Witness to Growth* (Beijing: East Modern Art Centre, n.d.). Also see Li Xuan and Cheng Guan, *The Power of Frustration*, exhibition Catalogue (Beijing: International Culture Development Ltd., 2015).

²⁶⁴ Liao Wen interview with Leung Kwankui Transcript, March 2016. For a comprehensive history, see Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 101–39.

the closure of the exhibition by officials' (Fig:1.8).²⁶⁵ Xiao Lu said, it was interpreted as an act of violence and criticism towards the political order by asserting an illegal act without permission.²⁶⁶ She recalls, when she executed the shots, she was reflecting on her own experience without a political agenda.²⁶⁷ Xiao Lu was arrested along with her then boyfriend Tang Song, but both were soon released without further charges after one day of detention.²⁶⁸ They both took refuge in Australia in 1989 until they returned to China in 1997.

Dialogue 1989

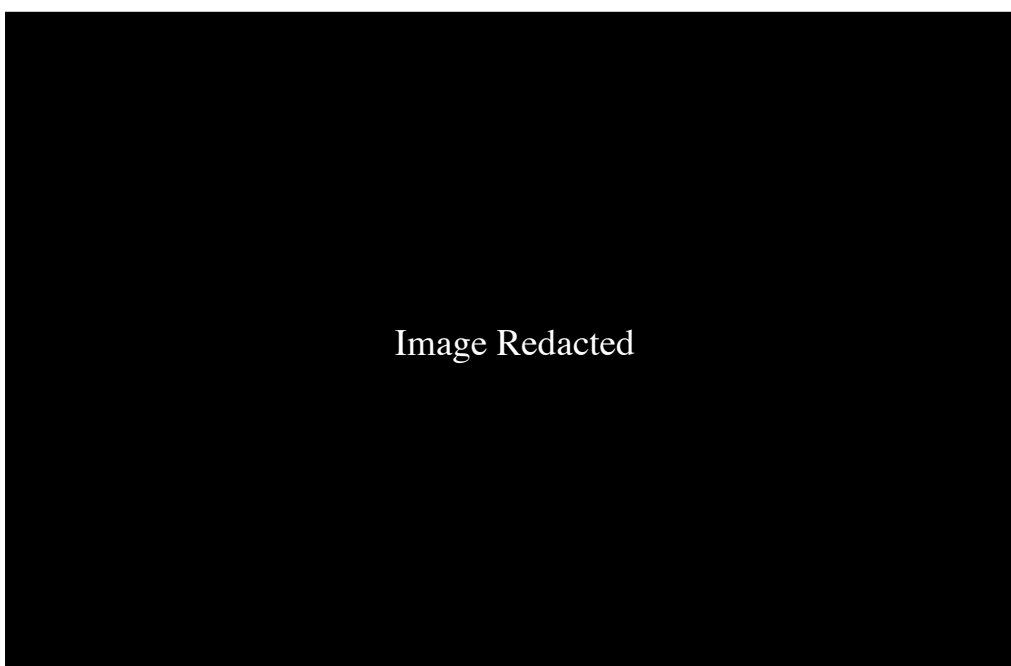


Fig. 1.8: Xiao Lu, *Dialogue 1989*
Installation – Performance, National Art Museum, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

²⁶⁵ Gao, *Total Modernity*, p. 158; Gao Minglu 'Foreword', p. viii, in Xiao Lu, *Dialogue*, trans. Archibald McKenzie (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010).

²⁶⁶ Xiao Lu, *Dialogue* 2010. And interview with Leung Kwankiu, March 2016.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

²⁶⁸ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 159–61.

Xiao Lu's relationship with her partner Tang Song had dissolved after they returned to China. Tang attempted to claim *Dialogue* 1989 as his work, and Xiao Lu had reasons to fight for solo authorship to *Dialogue* 1989, but it proved to be extremely sensitive for all involved; it was a public affair to see who would win the case of authorship, and Xiao Lu managed to claim her work as her own, but doubts remained, hence Gao Minglu encouraged her to write her autobiography *Dialogue* 2010. This gave her another medium to voice her subjectivity, this is more than a mode of gesturing.²⁶⁹ Xiao Lu reclaimed her work by actuating her subjectivity, the self-voicing in aesthetic practice in China in the twenty-first century. This is another example of a female artist's self meeting aesthetics under the influence of feminism, and the complexity of making sense of things in the ontological identification relationship. She said in our conversation:

Objectively speaking, this was my graduate piece. Because the biggest controversy of it right now is Tang Song, isn't it? If Tang Song could have produced this piece, so could my teacher Song Jianming. Because this piece, from the conceptualisation of its' installation, to the gunshots, to its execution, had nothing to do with him. If you read my novel you would know. So that time, when they interviewed Song Jianming, this was what he said: if Tang Song could be counted as the creator of the piece, then so can I.²⁷⁰

What is still problematic for female artists today is doubt about discerning good or bad art. At an exhibition on *Gender Violence* 2015 curated by Cui Guangxia, with artists such as Xiao Lu, Cheng Guang, and Zhang Haiying were preparing their work on the day of the exhibition and the catalogue had been produced with the audience waiting outside before the opening, but it was interrupted without notice by officials, deemed forbidden and closed the exhibition. This is not dissimilar to the 60s nude exhibitions in Britain.²⁷¹ However, a few months later, the Kylin Contemporary Center of Art, in Chaoyang District, Beijing, held another performance art exhibition, 'Ran

²⁶⁹ Ibid.

²⁷⁰ Xiao Lu, Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

²⁷¹ Exhibition Catalogue - *Cultural Codes of Gender Violence: 2015 Heforshe Chinese Contemporary Art Exhibition* (Beijing: Jian, 2015). Curator Cui Guangxia, interview with Kwankui Leung March 2016.

Dian: *Beyond Action*', and this was uninterrupted by officials in January 2016; artists including He Chengyao, Xiao Lu, and Dong Jinling exhibited their work freely.²⁷² The difference between the two exhibitions was an aesthetic discernment that concluded 'Gender Violence' 2015 had a political message, and the 'Ran Dian: Beyond Action' had subtle messages that performed subjectivity; the focus was more on the heritage of China, rather than raising political issues, regardless of bodily exposure.²⁷³

China's situation for the emergence of feminism in the aesthetic realm is quite different to Western feminism, also claimed by Hu Yifei and her partner Chen Jing as a couple nodding in agreement with each other's comment in our conversation, 'performance art gives us freedom to be who we want to be'.²⁷⁴ Hu and Chen, both are performance artists, attempting to draw people's attention to self awareness in China in a society that lack consciousness of self caused by an oppressive collective system, thus lack self exploration and subjectivity. By exploring their body through engaging in aesthetics, naked or not, working together or alone, they focus on the possibility of body performance art that is self directed with dances or movements. Rooted in solidarity with feminists globally, Chen being a male artist, is not an unusual specimen of a male feminist in China and instigates performance art to voice political concerns. The body itself speaks says Hu and Chen, liberates, and have no need for an external prop, the body can be exercised anywhere at any time; performance art is a collaborator of freedom, especially when subjectivity of the individual is restricted and oppressed by the government.²⁷⁵ This is how Chinese artists continue to actualise the self to meet aesthetics in the last few decades. The above suggests the ontological became political.

By juxtaposing Emin and Chengyao under this history of aesthetics provides not only a Western or Chinese view of contemporary art in postmodernity, but a hybrid understanding of where, how, and why Chinese artists are positioning their art practice that attempts to, on the one hand embrace a Western aesthetic that has influenced the world and on the other, they have a desire to remain loyal to their heritage of China for Chengyao and Europe for Emin in this era.

²⁷² *Randian: Beyond Action*, Curators Cecilia Freschini, Jonas Stampe, and Chen Yunbing, Art Exhibition, January 2016.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Hu Yifei and Chen Jing Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

The ontological identification relationship of Emin and Chengyao is ‘making sense of things’ in art practice, it is necessary to explicate how and why there are three aspect of subjectivity and why their subjectivity is crucial in their artwork. Female subjectivity began to change from a ‘gestural signifier’ to actualisation of relationship between subjectivity and artwork in this history.

Walter Benjamin discussing Kafka’s work as *gestus* on stage, ‘Each gesture is an event – one might even say, a drama – in itself.’²⁷⁶ Gesture is usually a non-verbal communication, but Benjamin claims it is an event, which means it is more than gesture itself, it could even be a drama. This means gesture of the body is active, I would argue that this extends the body as verbal voice. What is at stake is not a demonstration born out of polemics or even theory but being ‘equal to men’ while becoming a female artist with voice and ideas. As Butler and Irigaray suggest, women do not only wish for equality with men, but something beyond equality, something women are capable of being beyond the understanding of their existence, and most crucially something in their own creative mode of being. As shown in Emin and Chengyao’s own ontological identification relationship with three aspects of their subjectivity, they attempt to resolve a problematic system that privileged male artists within a patriarchal society. Their bodily voice is making sense of their ontological microcosm. Perhaps this was another reason why Chengyao not only sought solace by retreating to a Buddhist monastery, but has since become a Buddhist nun in July 2017.²⁷⁷ The ontological identification relationship unfolds. They reconstruct what they see to what is required to change, the body as a verbal communication has evolved from gesture to actualisation of subjectivity in Emin and Chengyao’s work, which begins to happen in movements of the female body – performativity, text, interviews, visibility, exhibitions, ubiquitously, and inclusively univocal. Having established the ontological identification relationship, I will now turn to chapter two for the first aspect of subjectivity, performativity of subjectivity.

²⁷⁶ Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schochen Books 2007), p.121.

²⁷⁷ He Chengyao, interviews with Leung Kwankiu, 2013-2017.

Chapter 2 – Performativity of Subjectivity

I want this body to be released from old traditions, to break people's existing conceptions as to what a female body should look like, therefore I needed to portray myself in a different way.²⁷⁸

Interpreting and comparing Emin and Chengyao's work in this way is to have a global understanding of their art practice in art history. They illustrate why subjectivity in female art practice is crucial, and this comprises an ontological identification relationship, which reflects and exhibits three aspects of their subjectivity. The fundamental characteristic of performativity of subjectivity, is borrowed from Butler's idea of subjectivity, is the consequence of desire. Thus far we see how Emin and Chengyao's work embraces subjectivity, how the self emerges with artwork, and how they practice art in an ontological identification relationship as their methodology. It is a relationship that consists of the stream of subjectivity interacting with the stream of materiality: X-subjectivity + Y-artist's material = XY-artwork, that interacts and exhibits three aspects of subjectivity: performativity, visibility, and univocity. This second chapter will unfold and interpret how and why performativity is the first aspects of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity from different cultural formations in this comparison.

As Chengyao said in the above quote, she needs to portray herself 'in a different way...', 'to break people's existing conceptions of the female body'. She has adopted performance art in her art practice as a medium to communicate her memories that involves performing the subject as voice, beyond non-verbal communication, which means beyond gesture. According to Butler, performativity is presenting who we are and speaks one's self and who we want to be, and is not an act of someone else.²⁷⁹ This performativity is seen in Emin and Chengyao's work when they perform themselves with their own body, although this is not to imply dualism, because the process of becoming is non-dualistic. This process manifests something as an event and as such

²⁷⁸ He Chengyao, Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

²⁷⁹ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 41.

the body in a sense moves outside of itself in order to become itself in a new way. The idea of performativity as described in the work of Butler challenges the dominant discourse of essentialist gender identification. Through her theory of performativity, the idea of gender is constructed and reconstructed; this questions the entire constitution of biology,²⁸⁰ and maintains the claim that gender is constructed through a process of reiteration in body performatives that speak one's gender identification.²⁸¹ But before this, their subjectivity necessitates the actualisation of subjectivity, which is *presentation* of one's self, rather than *representation* of self or by another or for another. Presentation is a journey of becoming, close to theatre, whereas representation is based upon a stable relationship of identity.²⁸² Emin or Chengyao reiterate their performatives each time they exhibit their work, they present the self in performativity as who they are, which is often misread as representation. Butler writes: 'the falsity of signification points out the entire structure of representation as inadequate.'²⁸³ Butler's work comprises a continental and an analytical discourse in postmodernity that she traces back to include John Austin's idea of performative acts to adopt a gender performativity. In 1962 Austin wrote *How to Do Things with Words*, for the exposition of speech act theory in philosophy.²⁸⁴ Austin claims, performatives are acts of performing a kind of truth, 'for instance, without saying anything to that effect, where 'I assert' and 'I deny' are pure explicit performatives in some sense...'.²⁸⁵ In both Emin and Chengyao, the naked-self-portrait/new nude is a performative of subjectivity, as becoming as opposed to a fixed encounter of nature.

Part I will discuss the lack of female subjectivity, Part II will then discuss the performativity of subjectivity, that leads to Part III on the refraction of subjectivity.

²⁸⁰ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and The Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 41.

²⁸¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limit of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 2011 [1993]), p. 79.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁴ John L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962).

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 87. Also see Peggy Phelan and Jill Lane, *The End of Performance* (New York: New York University Press, 1998) p. 5-7. For performance studies using Austin's work.

Part I – The lack of Subjectivity

Female artists have become more visible in recent decades, thus it is difficult to ignore the global phenomenon that surrounds Tracey Emin and He Chengyao's art practice in this early twenty-first century. In 2004 Patrick Hayes suggested, 'Tracey Emin bears all of the hallmarks of the postmodern genius' in his article on Emin, titled 'Don't Shoot the Messenger! Tracey Emin and the philosophy of confessional culture'. Hayes also highlighted all the postmodern criticisms that surrounds the interpretation of Emin's work as, 'regurgitation...vomiting...', 'The task of the viewer – should he choose to accept it – is to examine the undigested chunks to see what rancid morsel made her sick in the first place. Even a rat after it's been poisoned a few times knows not to eat the same food again, but Emin keeps eating from the same pool of experiences, vomiting over and over again. It's such a ridiculously stupid habit, it can only be intentional.'²⁸⁶ Hayes not only gives a cynical, sarcastic account of Emin's work as a questionable genius who needs a break, but his polemic attack also suggests she is less intelligible than a rat. Hayes fails to see the trajectory of many artists who repeat the same subject again and again to gain a different perspective each time. For example, the sunsets of Turner, the landscapes of Monet, or the figures of Picasso to name a few were repeating the subject of desire in their art practice; repetition is an artist's aspiration of 'intention'. Deleuze's interpretation of Bacon's painting is a good example of repetition in his art practice, 'by tracing lines that cross the entire painting and that start and continue off the frame, and by opposing to the organic notions of symmetry and center the power of a mechanical repetition elevated to intuition.'²⁸⁷ Or indeed, Hayes own writing, is itself repetitive, when he updates he writing every single day.

After Hayes or Sewell's polemic words, Emin has gone from strength to strength, but under the misleading conception of confessional art label. It is misleading because it is not confessional art, but an edited truth. As Emin said herself: 'Truth is such a transient thing... it's like with my work, people say, "Oh, the honesty and the truth behind it" – but it's all edited, it's all calculated, it's all decided. I decide to show this or that part of the truth, which isn't necessarily the whole story, it's just what I

²⁸⁶ Patrick Hayes, 'Don't Shoot the Messenger! Tracey Emin and the philosophy of confessional culture'. *Culture Wars*, culturewars.org.uk 2004.

²⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* (London: Continuum, 2003), p. 108.

decide to give you.’²⁸⁸ This conveys as not confessional art, especially not in the artwork itself. Perhaps, being visible to the public comes with the territory of criticisms, right or wrong, the ability to filter the negatives is far from easy, that is the price of performing the subject visibly as one may conclude.

Thus, in the edited truth there is no mimetic process that leads to knowing but rather the impossibility of such a mimesis, because of the lack of foundation, because construction and deconstruction begin to dominate in the twentieth century. Emin’s work is in a sense caught between a rhetoric of identity, the assertion of who she claims that she is, and a void at the heart of subjectivity because her work constructs the self within the public arena. In her work she projects a sense of becoming other through the edited truth while simultaneously asserting personality through the work and yet this personality is undermined as soon as it is presented, by the eradication of the face. Hence, Emin searches within the lack of foundation of the self and in so doing provides a model of ‘the performative of subjectivity,’ an exploration and assertion of subjectivity as a sense of constant becoming; artwork that is open and never closed in a final, aesthetic resolution.

Mixed views of Emin’s work have been reported across the tabloids since Emin’s tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995 (Fig: 2.19), and more so of the work *My Bed* 1998 (Fig: 2.12). As it was for Chengyao in China, who had similar attention and criticisms since she walked up the Great Wall in 2001 with *Opening The Great Wall* 2001 (Fig: 2.11) and *Ninety Nine Needles* 2002, (Fig: 3.3-3.5). Emin or Chengyao remind us of how female subjectivity in different countries has been neglected in history, anticipating a turn to history for a deeper understanding of female subjectivity, and why Emin and Chengyao deem it crucial to question this in contemporary art practice through visible performativity.²⁸⁹

The complexity of the trajectory since Dadaism has influenced performance art today, was in fact constituted at the same time as feminism since the 1910s. Dadaists’ manifestation was the beginning of questioning traditional art practice, authorship,

²⁸⁸ Lynn Barber, ‘Show and Tell’ Interview with Tracey Emin. *The Guardian* 22- April 2001.

²⁸⁹ WACK ‘Art and Feminism Revolution’, Exhibition, MoMA, and Global Feminism in Brooklyn Museum, New York 2007. Also see Rebel Women, BBC Four, June 18- 2018. Also see Rebel Women, National Gallery throughout 2018. Liao Wen, *No More Nice Girls*.

authority, and subjectivity in modernity.²⁹⁰ While the Dadaists shout their anti-traditional art campaign, anti-war, and anti-bourgeoisism, advocating a change of perception and introducing new tools of readymades in art practice, the suffragettes obtained the vote for women in 1918. Akin to the Dadaists, they too questioned authority, tradition, subjectivity of women, the lack of which is opposite to male subjectivity. The suffragettes continued to fight for the rights of women, better working conditions, better pay, child rights, and protection against violence.²⁹¹ The parallel of Dada and the struggle for the vote with the suffragette movement, demonstrated the way in which the aesthetic and the political cohere within this historical passage. The dark side of this is, while women had just begun to: 1. Vote, and 2. Having obtained a glimpse of consciousness of female subjectivity through the first wave of feminism in the 1920s to 1960s, men dismissed any discourse of female subjectivity, authorship, or artworks, hence female artworks were not publically exhibited or discussed seriously, as a result their bodies became a radical weapon that constituted their art practice during the 60s and 70s.²⁹²

This means feminists' attempt to actualise a female voice in the public realm against its general abrasion of lack, faced further complexity of feminism not only locally but globally.²⁹³ From objection of inequality to the applications of equality, for better or worse was never modulated. As Nina Power queried in *One Dimensional Women* 2009 (this title echoes the *One-Dimensional Man* by Herbert Marcuse who wrote about contemporary culture of his time): 'If the contemporary portrayal of womankind were to be achievement would culminate in the ownership of expensive handbags, a vibrator, a job, a flat and a man – probably in that order'²⁹⁴ then where is feminism going? The Performativity of Emin and Chengyao constitute this question in their first aspect of subjectivity, performativity. According to Rebecca Fortnum, when she interviewed contemporary female British Artists that included Tracey Emin, it does

²⁹⁰ Olive Banks, *Becoming a Feminist: The Social Origins of First Wave Feminism* (London: Prentice Hall, 1990). Also, the not-yet-published, Griselda Pollock, *Feminism, a Bad Memory?* (London: Verso, 2019)

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² WACK 'Art and Feminism Revolution', Exhibition, MoMA, and Global Feminism in Brooklyn Museum, New York 2007. Also see Rebel Women, BBC Four, June 18th 2018. Also see Rebel Women, National Gallery throughout 2018. Liao Wen, *No More Nice Girls*.

²⁹³ Ibid.

²⁹⁴ Nina Power, *One Dimensional Woman* (O Books UK, 2009), p. 1-30.

not mean feminism is a failure if none of the female artists she interviewed do not define themselves as ‘feminist artists’.²⁹⁵

The 1960s and 1970s witnessed the second wave of feminism, but this wave included female artists at the front line with their bodies, protested visibly through performance art. They continued to be outspoken about their rights, their desires, and being conscious of actualising female subjectivity. They realised the lack of emancipation, creativity, exhibition, protection, and women’s rights. As performance artists, the body became a voice. Here we see the body transformed into an intensive surface in ways that allow for new modes of poly-vocal articulation. This in turn opens out a new way of articulating how flesh and text might interrelate beyond a dualism of text and body. While female artists were becoming ‘Artists’ and protesting against the erosion and the lack of female subjectivity, Barthes, Foucault, Derrida and their confederates, had had sufficient amount of attention and subjectivity, thus attempted to concern themselves with grand subjects from Plato to their present day metaphysics. This led them to not only claim the death of the author to favour the reader but to continue the patriarchal stance of a male dominated society. They further emphasised the deconstruction of language, subject, and the global society, which women lacked.²⁹⁶ But the very notion of subjectivity for women was still ignored in the sixties and seventies; they felt undermined and devalued by the opposite sex, who did not appreciate that female subjectivity was compromised while they crusaded to champion Text; even ‘text’ had a better position than female subjectivity. Not only female artists realised their subjectivity was ignored, but their potential for the deployment of subjectivity in cultural and political sphere was impossible unless they spoke through what the male understood of, the female body. They put forward a discussion visibly with their performance art tool. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler asks:

If everything is discourse, what happens to the body? If everything is a text, what about violence and bodily injury?... I think, that in order for feminism to proceed as a critical practice, it must ground itself in the sexed specificity of the female body.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists*, p. vii.

²⁹⁶ Burke, *The Death and the Return of the Author*, pp. 19–59.

²⁹⁷ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 4.

This is a Feminist question, and the female artists of the 60s and 70s provoked another temporal wave, to highlight the invisibility of female artists, but this was not against male writers per se, they protested against the lack of acceptance of female artists exhibitions, women's rights, and the general emancipation of women, for their generation and the past generations.²⁹⁸ But the truth of the matter is female subjectivity was at its infancy, it was at a crawling stage, perhaps in the twenty-first century it is at its walking stage with artists such as Emin in Britain, Chengyao in China, and their confederates around the world. Female artists' subjectivity was in question and this was another collation between men and women artists in the 60s, 70s, 80s, and even 90s. This exhibited how advanced male subjectivity became and how far behind female subjectivity is when it is ignored or highlighted.

Despite progress, female subjectivity is still in question as it is in feminism, perhaps these two unavoidably go hand in hand. This is related to the mode of thinking in *The Death of the Author*, which trajectory has been questioned and rejected by Sean Burke, authorship itself is still very much alive in the event of the author working on their Text, although the work of Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida does attempt to assert an ethical culture of the 60s and 70s that favours the reader over the author, authority, and power, with a global adherent of relativism; even feminism became a kind of relativism.²⁹⁹ This corresponds with the mood towards 'anti-ontology' in the 60s and 70s; even male artists at the time saluted this idea.³⁰⁰ Levi-Strauss emphasised that 'the goal of the human sciences is not to constitute man, but to dissolve him'.³⁰¹ With these developments, the idea of self is being questioned and is no longer a centre of agency but a discourse for the freedom of the viewer and the reader, and created through internal and external historical forces, the unconscious forces working themselves out echoes Duchamp's idea of the artist is irrelevant in art practice. Female subjectivity had to be voiced through the performativity of female artists so that the male will listen,

²⁹⁸ Merle Radtke, 'Presence and Absence: On the Legacy of 1970s Performance Art,' in Gabriele Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde: Art of the 1970s, the Sammlung Verbund Collection Vienna* (Munich, London, New York: Prestel, 2010), pp. 79–83. See also Claudia Benthien, *Skin: On the Cultural Border between the Self and the World*, trans. by Thomas Dunlap (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

²⁹⁹ Burke, *The Death and the Return of the Author*, pp. 19–59.

³⁰⁰ Qu'est-ce que la photographie? Exhibition Catalogue, Centre Pompidou, 1st March to 1st June 2015 - France, written by Anne-Claire Meffre.

³⁰¹ Burke, *The Death and Return of the Author*, p. 13. See also William Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Intentional Fallacy", *Swanee Review*, vol. 54. They claim that the text 'is detached from the author at birth and goes about the world beyond his power to intend about it or control it'.

they understood the naked body through the nude, hence through the new nude of female artists to wake up the slumbers of men and women. This notion of the lack of subjectivity is not imaginary, but a discourse in feminist art history throughout the twentieth century of modernism and postmodernism, and alongside this the shift of aesthetic sensibility and its tools in art practice, the body becoming the primary subject of enquiry for feminist performance artists. A change of aesthetic movement means that aesthetic culture turns away from traditional ideals of beauty, harmony, and adoration of aesthetics, to a focus on ideas, the mind, thus the concept of art since Dadaism. Concepts became far more focused despite protests against it in its earlier days. Dadaism was rejecting traditional visual culture for thinking culture, and they became bored with restrictions in their metaphoric art praxis. This radical change in aesthetic subjectivity is the trajectory of Emin and Chengyao's work, but they turn towards an ontological identification relationship in performativity that gives voice to the lack and erosion of female subjectivity. Calvin Tomkins who interviewed Duchamp wrote from their conversations, 'Duchamp once said':³⁰² 'The artist himself doesn't count, because there is no actual existence for the work of art. The work of art is always based on the two poles of the onlooker and the maker, and the spark that comes from that bipolar action gives birth to something – like electricity. But the onlooker has the last word, and it is always posterity that makes the masterpiece. The artist should not concern himself with this, because it has nothing to do with him.'³⁰³ This means Duchamp privileged the viewer over the creator, which is very similar to the development of *death of the author* in the 60s and 70s, they too privileged the reader over the author, which is not dissimilar to Marxism, which privileges proletariats over bourgeois. The two images *Fountain* 1917 (Fig: 2.1) and *Playing Chess with Eve* 1963 (Fig: 2.2) that changed the art world is not what it seems. On the surface Duchamp is the master of Dadaism, but Tomkins and others have disclosed and revealed the complex web of Duchamp's life and his associations. This delineated an attempt to annihilate subjectivity of artists, leading to death of the artist/author from a Dadaism and Duchampian history, which is crucial to explicate why and how female artists since the 60s to Emin and Chengyao's art practice that exhibited female subjectivity without compromise.

³⁰² Calvin Tomkins, *The World Of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Time Life Books, 1972), p. 171.

³⁰³ Ibid.

Fountain 1917

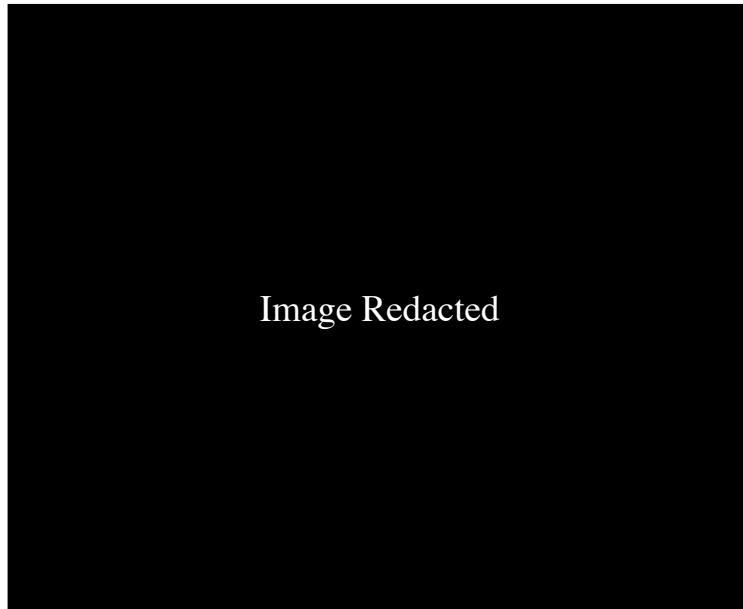


Fig. 2.1: Marcel Duchamp, *Fountain*, Replica 1964
Tate Collection, London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Playing Chess With Eve 1963

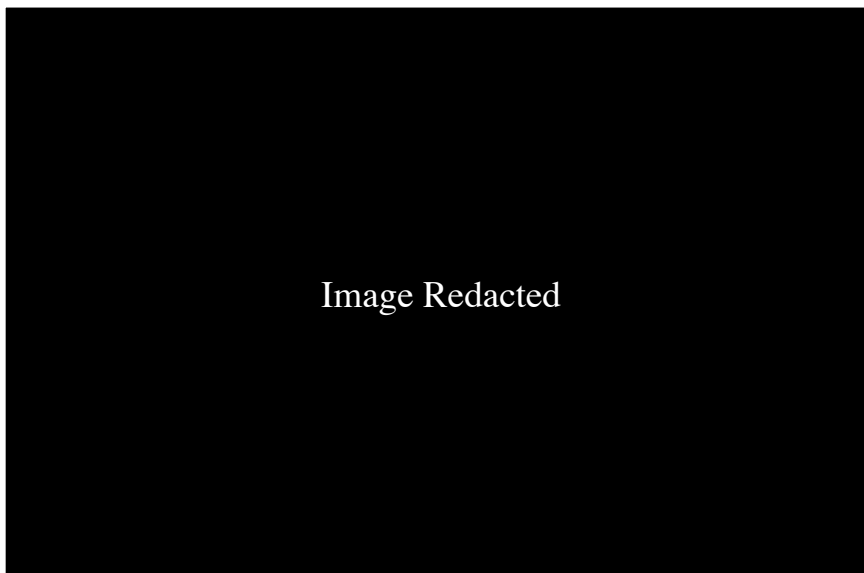


Fig. 2.2: Duchamp, *Playing Chess with Eve* 1963
Photograph, Pasadena Art Museum, US.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

While Duchamp's art praxis has influenced female artists today he has also influenced them in his time, but a dispute has surfaced since 1983 when a letter was discovered from Duchamp to his sister. The Dadaists movement inaugurated not only by male Dadaists but also by female Dadaists who influenced Duchamp's art process such as Irene Gammel's research claims,³⁰⁴ furthermore Tomkin's biography on *Duchamp* 2014 did not dispute this claim, which means it is highly plausible. On 11th April 1917, Duchamp wrote to his cherished sister Suzanne, 'One of my female friends under a masculine pseudonym, Richard Mutt, sent in a porcelain urinal as a sculpture'.³⁰⁵ Gammel claims the female friend is Baroness Elsa.³⁰⁶

This contradicts Duchamp's claim that he had purchased the urinal himself with his friends at the Mott Iron Works on Fifth Avenue New York, but who presented it for the Society of Independent Artists that refuted the urinal as art for their exhibition? What seems to be problematic is, Duchamp was a member of the jury when the urinal arrived for submission with the signature R. Mutt 1917, which was submitted with the name and address of a female friend of Duchamp. Duchamp did not submit the urinal, nor did it include his address, nor did he claim or disclaim it to anyone on the day of the submission. However, after it was rejected, Duchamp resigned from the Society of Independent Artists and further explored his art praxis.³⁰⁷ His love of playing chess took precedence, and he explored his art praxis with games of chess, his puns, and humour became his way of making sense of things in his world. During negative reviews of his ideas of the readymade, anti-traditional art remained his conception of art.³⁰⁸ Duchamp was bored with these retractions, and his desire for freedom was the driving force behind his brainwave, and returned to Paris for further answers.³⁰⁹ It remains a mystery why Duchamp never claimed *Fountain* was his or not his, or that it belonged to someone else, nor did Duchamp or his confederates offer an explanation, not even on his death bed.³¹⁰ It is evident and reputable to state that there were collaborations

³⁰⁴ Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa: Gender, Dada, and Everyday Modernity* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2002) pp. 12, 14, 63, 223-228. Also see SRB, 'How Duchamp stole the Urinal.' Scottish Review of Books. November 4th 2014.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

³⁰⁷ Calvin Tomkins, *The World Of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Time Life Books, 1972).

³⁰⁸ Calvin Tomkins, *Marcel Duchamp: The Afternoon Interviews* (New York: Badland Unlimited, 2013), pp. 23-93.

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

³¹⁰ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: MoMA, 1996. pp. 178-182.

between Duchamp and Baroness Elsa and other female artists in the work of *Fountain* 1917 at this stage, if they have collaborated on other projects previously.³¹¹

However, it must be acknowledged that in the 1900s it was still a patriarchal society. Since female artists were not recognised as great artists, or in Linda Nochlin's famous words, 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?' in her 1988 article, it is not surprising that Duchamp took the brunt of the rejection if his female friend did not wish to claim it, and since it was rejected, what was the point to claim it as hers or Duchamp's? While he could have argued that it was from his female friend to save himself from embarrassment when rejected, or it could be read as an ethical act to save his female friend from legal proceedings at the time in the face of the Espionage Act passed by US congress in 1917 regarding 'any statement criticizing the war was a crime, and periodicals that carried what the postmaster general considered anti war material could be banned.'³¹² Duchamp and his confederates remained silent. Was this to protect his female friend or himself or in line with his philosophical claim that the artist is irrelevant in the production of artworks, this would also fortify his art praxis. The government's attempt to control artists at that time mirrors the events in the UK in the 60s-70s, or China today.

The Dadaist group consisted of Man Ray, Hugo Ball, Hans Arp, Max Ernst to name a few, but we do not often acknowledge, among them there were female artists, Emmy Hennings, married to Hugo Ball who created the Dada manifesto in Zurich 1916,³¹³ Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Sophie Taeuber-Arp, married to Hans Arp, and Hannah Höch, who contributed to this history.³¹⁴ They often travelled between Europe and America, and attempted to change the perception of art thinking, but the idea of anti traditional art constitutes Duchamp's sentiment even before world war one.³¹⁵ But the female artists were ignored, and deemed insignificant in Dadaism until recent research. The Dadaist attitudes and art praxis of readymades continues to influence artists today, such as Emin and Chengyao in this comparison. But what is also crucial here is how Chengyao pays homage to Duchamp's work, and moreover, he is her opponent.

³¹¹ Ibid, pp. 227-229. Also see Irene Gammel, *Baroness Elsa*.

³¹² Tomkins, *Duchamp*, pp. 190-191.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Tomkins, *Duchamp*, pp. 163-165.

³¹⁵ Ibid.

In 2000s China, despite an economical growth, the political regime remained unchanged since 1989, claims Chengyao in our conversation.³¹⁶ Performance art of naked self-portraits such as *Opening The Great Wall* 2001, *Marcel Duchamp As My Opponent* 2001 (2.2 and 2.3), where she is semi naked with her head looking down at the chessboard, her arms on the table, suggests confidence, body freedom, and being ready for the challenge of a chess game usually played by men, echoing one of the first performance art of all time, *Playing Chess With Eve* 1963. This is an attempt to make sense of her art practice and life. Furthermore, Chengyao and her husband divorced years prior to these works (which she refused to discuss in her interviews with me or others, understandably, a Chinese characteristic not dissimilar to the British ‘stiff upper lip’, which Emin is opposed to, but also individual. This exhibits how she is conscious of being alone without a man sitting opposite her or to play chess with, and how she can play on her own, without the need for a man, showing signs of female intelligence, as well as standing in her own body, and even artists such as Duchamp being a spectre opposite her, but aiding her journey in art practice. Chengyao echoes Eve naked before Duchamp in *Playing Chess With Eve* 1963 (Fig: 2.2), although this was not Duchamp’s work, but rather Jullian Wasser’s instigation and photograph the what is now called performance art,³¹⁷ he instructed Eve Babitz to sit naked opposite Duchamp to play a game of chess. Eve was a lover of the married gallery owner Walter Hopps at the time,³¹⁸ and came from a family of artists, her parents were invited to the opening of the retrospective of Duchamp’s work on the 7th October 1963, but Eve was not invited because Hopps attempted to keep peace. Being rebellious in character she ignored the status quo and attended the celebration, and some considered her as a Brigitte Bardot of America.³¹⁹ Among the guests were Man Ray, Richard Hamilton, Andy Warhol, and Duchamp as usual was smoking a cigar and playing chess with anyone who wished to be his opponent on the day of his retrospective celebration. The photographer, Jullian Wasser saw a photo opportunity and chose Eve who was age twenty, and asked her if she would play chess with Duchamp ‘nude’. Eve feeling jilted by Hopps agreed to the opportunity to provoke. Wasser placed Eve naked opposite Duchamp age seventy-six fully clothed was ready for the challenge. Eve did not usually play chess thus Duchamp

³¹⁶ He Chengyao, Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing 2013-16.

³¹⁷ Tomkins, Duchamp: Afternoon Interviews, pp. 23-93.

³¹⁸ Andrew Male, ‘Eve Babitz: return of the LA Woman’ *The Guardian*, Nov 2016.

³¹⁹ André Schulz, ‘The story of a picture’ *Chess News*, November 17th 2015.

won all the games, he was an active member of the professional chess club and perhaps aspired to become professional but after the twists and turns of his art praxis after the war, his readymades were revived in the late 50s by galleries and students. The 60s Los Angeles and New York were actual sex and the city, a time where women explored sexuality and body emancipation with the experimentation of contraceptive pills and feminism.²³⁰ While Chengyao in 2001 saw Marcel Duchamp as her opponent in her work, there is a sense of evoking work from old masters akin to Chinese heritage in art praxis, which artists often facsimile old masters' paintings. Duchamp adopts readymades that have no masters, which means he adopts orphans of art and give them an art life, to which he is the master.

²³⁰ Lili Anolik, 'Eve Babitz's Famous Nude Chess Match Against Marcel Duchamp, The full Story'. *Vanity Fair*, October 2015.

Marcel Duchamp as My Opponent 2001

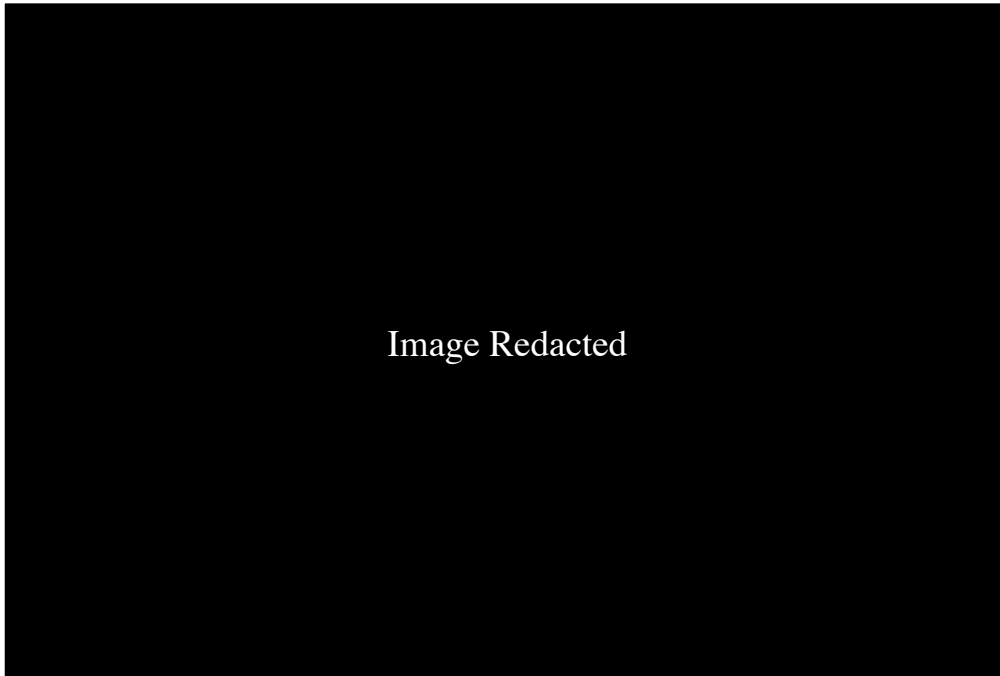


Fig. 2.3: He Chengyao, *Marcel Duchamp as My Opponent 2001*
Western Chess, Photograph, Studio, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

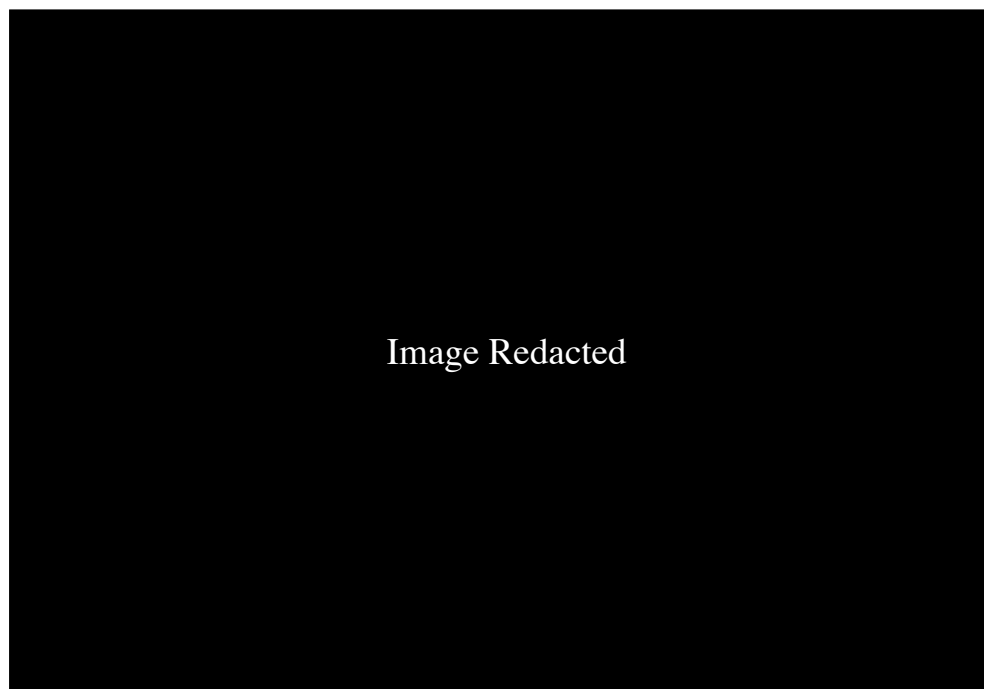


Fig. 2.4: He Chengyao, *Marcel Duchamp as My Opponent 2001*
Chinese Chess, Photograph, Studio, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Chengyao is also suggesting a statement about the absence of a male opponent, implying that she can play a man's game of chess, both European and Chinese Chess. This acknowledges how she was influenced by Western artists, but not only influenced or inspired, but immersed in their work.³²¹ In this first aspect of subjectivity Chengyao's ontological identification relationship is in performativity. As evident in both photographs, she is alone with the game of both Western Chess and Chinese Chess. Her aesthetic subjectivity is personal but refracted as a critique of patriarchal structure in this first aspect of subjectivity as performativity. Although critical of patriarchy she is nevertheless inclusive of male artists. By imitating Duchamp's images, she is suggesting a lineage between China and the West as inclusive rather than imitating Western culture, as it is with Emin in Britain.

In 1919 Duchamp returned to France after four years in American from 1915 to 1919 but continued collaborating with artists abroad since the 1920s, this suggests he is not only a local artist, but a participant of a global art movement. But it was not until after World War II, that the art world missed Duchamp and his collaborators with readymades, he once again returned to American, but this time he became a US citizen in 1955. In 1963, the Pasadena Museum of California gave Duchamp his first Marcel Duchamp retrospective, where *Playing Chess With Eve* 1963 was born.³²² This history also demonstrates some male artists were rejected and devalued in art practice, with evidence of Duchamp's work being rejected and criticised before the 1950s, some male artists experienced erosion of their subjectivity from time to time, but as for female artists, their work was a none entity or exhibited, apart from being models for photographers or paintings. As for Duchamp, despite some acclaims for the *Nude Descending a Staircase, No 2*, 1912, it was nevertheless refuted as Nudes do not move, Nudes do not travel to sitting rooms, (similar to Manet's *Olympia* 1863 in Paris Salon, where the eyes of the nude model looked into the viewers, brought down the exhibition). *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even (The Large Glass)* 1915-1923, was not recognised until the 1950s, but these works and his last work before he died in 1968 *Etant Donnés* 1946-1966 are all collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art today.

³²¹ Francis M. Naumann (ed.), *The Recurrent, Haunting Ghost: Essays on the Art, Life, and Legacy of Marcel Duchamp* (New York: Readymade, 2012).

³²² André Schulz, 'The story of a picture' *Chess News*, November 17th 2015.

The point confronted here is that, there is a resonance between the anti traditional art of the Dadaists movement since the 1900s and the death of the author since the 1960s, that questioned the relevance or irrelevance of subjectivity throughout most of the twentieth century in modernity and postmodernity. This further evinced how the arts, literary, and philosophy spheres, were anticipated by the death of the artist and authorship in Dadaism, where artists are not relevant but the interpretation of the audience is.³²³ Amelia Jones claims in *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* 1994, how Duchamp influenced postmodern criticism in art discourse, praxis, and artist's materials.³²⁴ Similarly, Stephen Hicks sees Duchamp and the Dadaists influenced post-modernism more generally and that 'deconstruction is a literary version of Duchamp.'³²⁵ But Duchamp can also be seen squarely within Modernism. In Peter Gay's analysis, modernism is characterised by two qualities, 'the lure of heresy' and 'principled self scrutiny' that involves 'the exploration of self.'³²⁶ The Dadaists certainly illustrates these qualities while female artists attempt to understand and make sense of their position but ignored.

Traditional fine art has been questioned by the Dadaist movement, but this reaction was within a male – dominated art world and the death of the artist was decidedly the death of the *male* artist's authorship, because most female artists never had authorship or the notion of public exhibitions of their artworks before or in the 1910s. Apart from some female artists mentioned above³²⁷ or female artists across other disciplines, most women lacked the confidence to practice art visibly or were discerningly excluded, and the idea of a fine artist's *métier* always belonged to male artists up until the 60s – 70s.³²⁸ That is, when feminist artists rose up to the challenge, they created an art movement with performance art practice, to question the absence of

³²³ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: Afternoon Interviews*. p. 171. Also see Herschel B. Chipp, *Theories of Modern Art: A Source Book by Artists and Critics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). pp. 366-396.

³²⁴ Jones Amelia, *Postmodernism and the En-gendering of Marcel Duchamp* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge UK and New York USA, 1994).

³²⁵ Stephen R.C. Hicks, *Explaining Postmodernism: Skepticism and Socialism from Rousseau to Foucault* (Ockham's Razor Publishing, 2011 [2004]), p. 199. Although according to Peter Gay, Duchamp is still within the Modernist era.

³²⁶ Peter Gay, *Modernism: The Lure of Heresy from Baudelaire to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: Norton, 2008), pp. 4-5.

³²⁷ Brian Dillon, 'Hannah Höch: art's original punk', *The Guardian*, January 9th 2014.

³²⁸ Writing about Clement Greenberg's characterisation of Jackson Pollock as 'fierce, violent, impetuous, undisciplined ... explosive,' Gabrielle Schor observes that these are epithets with 'which no woman could hope to compete.' Gabrielle Schor, 'The Feminist Avant-Garde, a Radical Reevaluation of Values,' p. 24, in Schor (ed.), *Feminist Avant-Garde*, pp. 17-71.

female artists and their subjectivity with their naked bodies. But they were often faced with objections, once female subjectivity entered in the realm of discourse and practice, male artists and authors were not interested in subjectivity generally. As Lois McNay says, women had only recently gained subjectivity and agency and needed to resist its being removed by thinkers such as Foucault.³²⁹ McNay's defence of women's subjectivity was to reify its erosion by males, it also highlights there is a new phenomenon that has been hard-won through the history of women's struggle that is not so easily removed by the death of the author or the death of the artist.³³⁰ Furthermore, the attempt to claim logocentricism as a male preoccupation by philosophers above and psychoanalysts such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Jacques Lacan, and thereafter Julia Kristeva, further confuses the emancipation of female subjectivity in the twentieth century. Women's desire to explore their subjectivity was led by confusion concerning who language belongs to.

In the twenty-first century Chengyao in China and Emin in the UK are examples that foreshadow this aesthetic tradition in their attempt to explore subjectivity. Traditionally, most male artists had no interest in female artist's subjectivity and were not interested in their creative practices or their artworks prior, during, or after 60s and 70s. Even the 80s and 90s female artists were still desperate for recognition to exhibit, and once again had to prove to men or the world they are great artists.

Chengyao's homage to Duchamp's cubist painting *Nude Descending a Staircase* No 2. 1912 (Fig: 2.5) below, suggests the Chinese female body is active and moving down the stairs highlighting and resisting the lack of subjectivity. The image on the right suggests an invisible image of a female nude figures, the image on the left is visibly going downstairs, which means the female nude is not inside the bedroom. Chengyao herself is in motion of walking down a flight of stairs that she has orchestrated in Beijing, which creates a movement of her attempt to salute and be in agreement with Duchamp's idea of a *Nude Descending A Staircase* No. 2. Chengyao's body as herself remains frozen in time, but visible and actualising her subjectivity with her body, she is both the model and the artist here; the female body affirming female subjectivity against its erosion, it is a performativity from being mute to actualisation

³²⁹ Lois McNay, *Gender and Agency: Reconfiguring the Subject in Feminist and Social Theory*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), p. 9.

³³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 9-15.

of subject, free to walk, talk and making sense of her subjectivity. But in this first aspect of subjectivity she is questioning the wider society in China that restricts the female body, this is not only for herself but also to question the emancipation of women. The body that has been restrained by political power, enforces Chinese artists to long for change, from the Stars of the 70s, '85 movement of the 80s, and performance art of the 90s, until the present to resist political interference.³³¹

Nude Descending a Staircase No 2. 1912

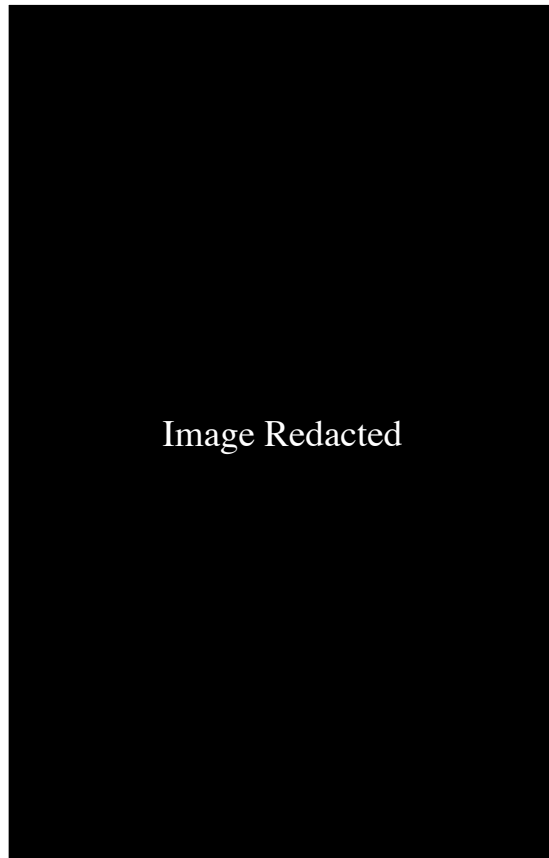


Fig. 2.5: Duchamp. *Nude Descending a Staircase No 2*. 1912
Oil on Canvas 1.47 m x 90 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

³³¹ On the influence of Duchamp and Beuys on contemporary Chinese art see Paul Gladston, *Contemporary Chinese Art, a Critical History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), pp. 48, 78, 82. Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art 1970s–2000s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014).

Homage to Duchamp 2001

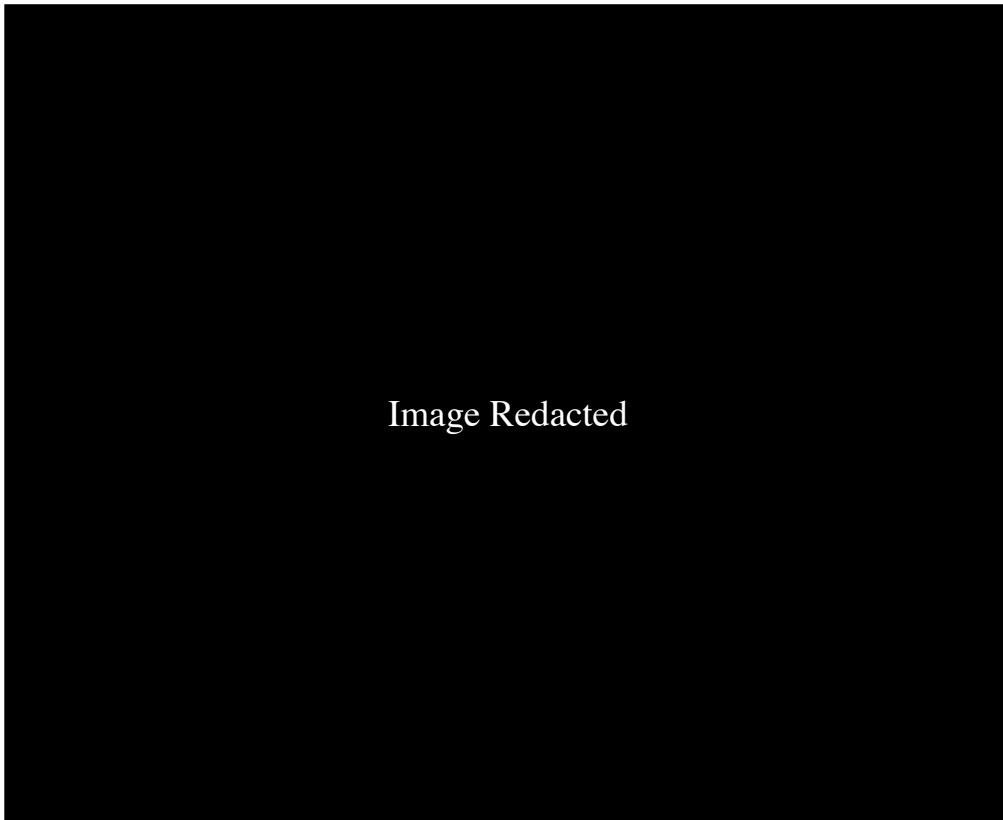


Fig. 2.6: He Chengyao, *Homage to Duchamp 2001*
Performance, Photograph, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made 1996

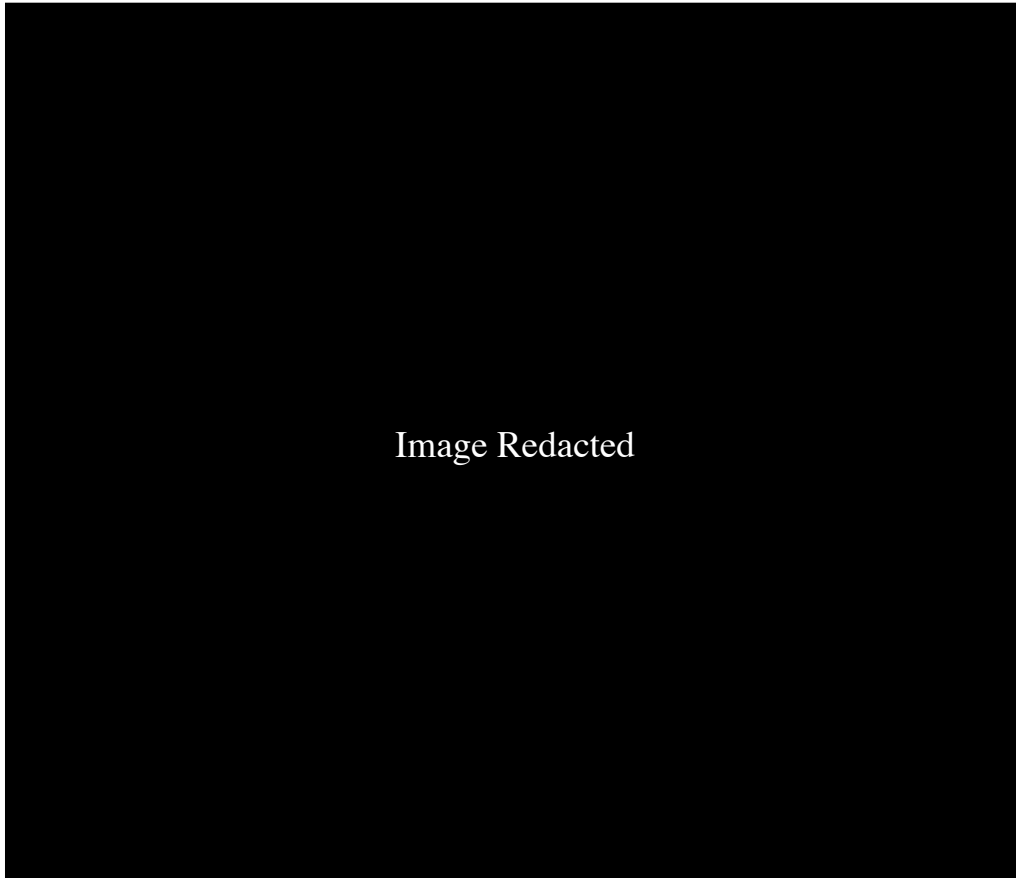


Fig. 2.7: Tracey Emin, *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made 1996*
Performance, Photograph, Stockholm's Galleri Andreas Brändströma.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

As for Tracey Emin in 1996, she resides in an artist's residency for three weeks in Galleri Andreas Brändström, Sweden. Herself as the artist and the naked model for the work *Exorcism Of The Last Painting I Ever Made* 1996 (Fig: 2.7). The gallery fitted sixteen fisheye lenses into the gallery walls for audience to view how Emin creates her work. In some sense it has the connotation that one has to peep through a hole to see her naked body while she works, but here, she is performing her work, attempting to work through her fears of painting during the 1990s when she gave up painting after the Royal College. She locked herself in the gallery studio to avoid being disturbed while she performed her naked self-portraits. This consisted of Emin making sense of things in her ontological identification relationship in this first aspect of subjectivity, performativity. She laid out her buckets of paint in a variety of colours, various brushes, various white paper, drawings taped onto the wall from floor to ceiling, ready for working on from different angles among other art materials. There is a ladder to help her with the drawings and paintings on canvas, ink on paper, printing and sketching on the wall above her height. There is a cushion and a mat on the floor for a siesta. There is also a single bed in the studio with a radio, CDs of Van Morrison, Beach Boys, along with magazines and newspapers, cigarettes and so forth. It was self contained, solely a space for working, to map out her daily routine, to being in the mode of performativity that constitutes her ontological identification relationship, immersed herself in art practice.³³²

The three weeks' performance was a performativity of Emin's new nude, not only Emin herself but the whole art process is the new nude, this exhibits the process of her performativity. She articulated her experiences, relationships with others such Sarah Lucas and saying, 'I love you Sarah', and sexual images of herself with others, in a practice identifying herself with her artwork. After the end of her residency Emin sold the work to Charles Saatchi among other collections for exhibitions in London. The finished residency resulted in twelve large acrylic on canvas paintings, seventy-nine paint and ink on paper, seven figure paintings, and seven letters, along with materials used in the exhibition which were themselves rearranged as works of art for Christies as part of the Post-War Contemporary Art Evening Sale in February 2015.

³³² Tracey Emin, *Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made* 1996 Stockholm's Galleri Andreas Brändströma Catalogue 1996.

Exorcism of the Last Painting I Ever Made raised £722,500.³³³ Emin's earnings from selling paintings are signs of female artists who refuse to live in poverty, but having far from equal pay in contrast to male artists. It is a female voice in a moment when their works are sold at Christies for nearly a million pounds.³³⁴ Another work that follows this line of thinking is *Tracey Emin C.V. Cunt Vernacular* 1997.

The work *Tracey Emin C.V. Cunt Vernacular* 1997 (Fig: 2.8), was realised when Emin attempted to find a job, it was an experience of retrieving records to form a CV that turned into an artwork. The video was originally titled *Tracey Emin Curriculum Vitae*, but Emin later replaced the words 'curriculum vita' with 'cunt vernacular' as a pun referring to a sexual CV (narrative from the original written CV). It was filmed and photographed by Sebastian Sharples with Emin's instructions. This was exhibited with her nine-page text work projected with photographs.

***Tracey Emin C.V. Cunt Vernacular* 1997**

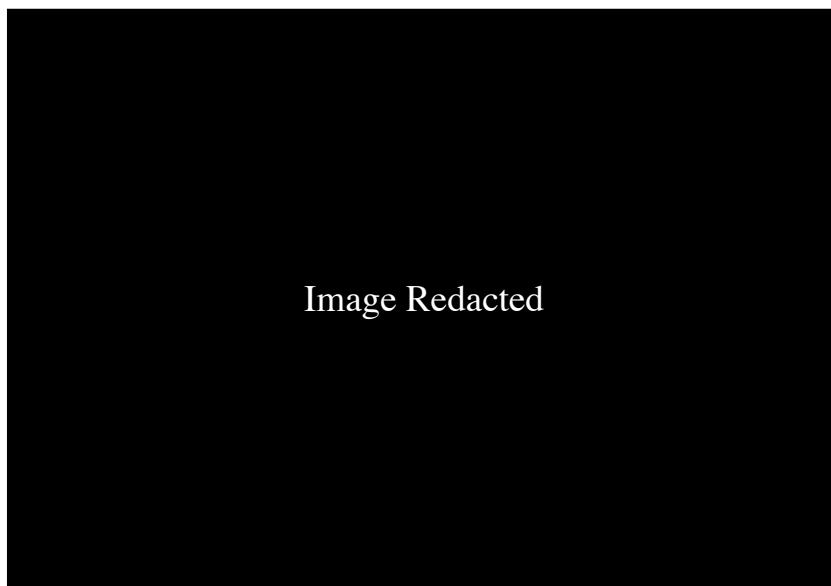


Fig. 2.8: Tracey Emin C.V. Cunt Vernacular 1997
Film and Photograph, Tate Collection.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

³³³ Christies, 'Post-War and Contemporary Art Evening Auction,' 11 February 2015, London. Also see art corresponding Mark Brown, 'Pivotal Tracey Emin art installation Exorcism goes on sale for £600,000.' *The Guardian*, January 2015.

³³⁴ Tim Walker, 'Tracey Emin: Why are women artists paid less than men?: Tracey Emin says the sexism suffered by women artists is 'unbelievable'', *The Telegraph*, January 2014.

The video film exhibited the state of her room similar to *My Bed* 1998, she is still distressed, with difficulty in writing up a CV, similar to her CV on a Blanket called *Hotel International* 1993, she did the same here and turned the moment into a work of art, herself in her artwork, her body crouched down in a prayer like position with assortments of papers, bills, newspaper, magazines, Turkish flags, photographs, a cup of something. She no longer lives here or like this, Emin has said, she is fussy and prefers her studio to be tidy; this contrasts to the lack of motivation in the earlier days of her art career if she likes to be tidy.³³⁵ This performativity actualises her subjectivity in film, a desire to record her way of life and the distress that surrounds her. Here Emin involves her mother again in the video, who seemed oblivious of what Emin is creating, Emin by her feet; this is similar to Chengyao's *Mama and Me* series 2002. In another work in 2000 two photographs survived out of a set of six, the rest were burned in a fire in Saatchi's warehouse, along with *The Beach Hut* and the tent *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995. They were owned by Charles Saatchi and were kept in his storage when not in exhibitions, along with other artists' work such as Damien Hirst, Dinos and Jake Chapman Brothers. Emin said after the fire, 'This news comes between Iraqi weddings being bombed and people dying in the Dominican Republic in flash floods – so we have to get it into perspective. But I am really gutted. I just thank God no one was hurt. I can't replace my works.'³³⁶ These two photographs proved to be crucial, *The Last Thing I Said To You Was Don't Leave Me* 2000 (Fig: 1.9, 10), was the title that accompanied *The Beach Hut* and the photographs Emin's boyfriend Mat Collishaw took before their break up. Emin is crouching down in a corner inside the beach hut looking down at something hidden in her hands. Her back towards the camera created an image of her naked back, on her left shoulder there is a small image of a scorpion tattoo. On the second image Emin is kneeling down, with a sideways image of her face, eyes closed, Emin said, 'The hut is a bare and naked thing. I thought it made perfect sense if I was. It's also got some kind of weird, religious look in it, like I'm praying or something', she said, when she was 'completely broke'

³³⁵ Neal Brown, Sarah, Kent, Mathew Collings, *Tracey Emin: I Need Art Like I Need God*, White Cube, Catalogue, London, 1998. Elizabeth Manchester, *Tracey Emin C.V. Cunt Vernacular* 1997, Tate Collection 2002. Also see Mandy Merk and Chris Townsend, eds, *The Art of Tracey Emin*, London, 2002.

³³⁶ Charlotte Higgins and Vikram Dodd, '50 years of British art lies in sahes' *The Guardian*, May 2004. Also James Meek, Art into ashes (Part 2). *The Guardian*, September 2004.

The last Thing I Said To You Is, Don't Leave Me Here 2000



Fig. 2.9: Tracey Emin *The last Thing I Said To You Is, Don't Leave Me Here*. In her Beach Hut in Whitstable, Photograph Digital Print 1, Emin Studio, Tate, and Saatchi Gallery Collection.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

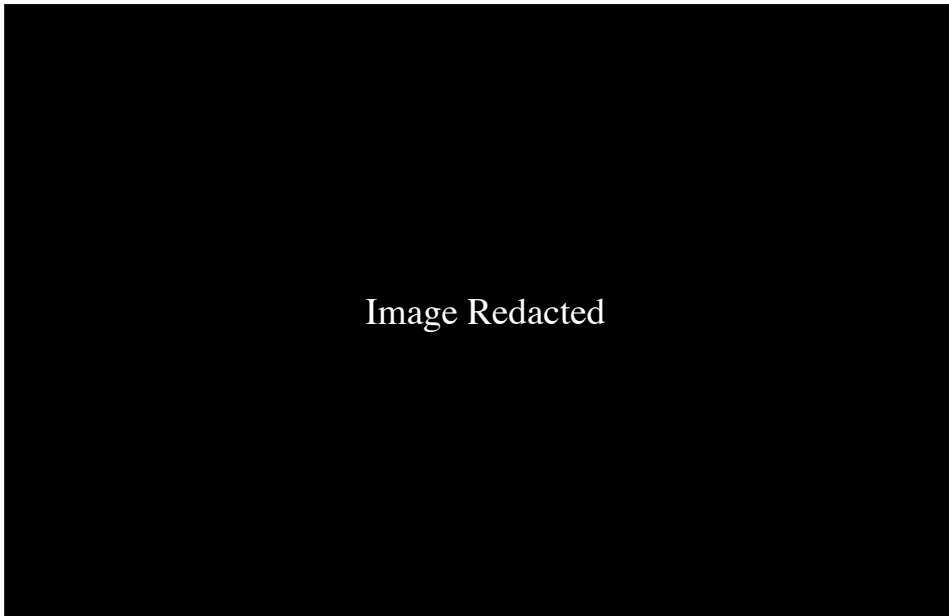


Fig. 2.10: Tracey Emin *The last Thing I Said To You Is, Don't Leave Me Here*, in her Beach Hut in Whitstable, Photograph Digital Print 2, Emin Studio, Tate, and Saatchi Gallery Collection.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

and it was really brilliant, having your own property by the sea'.³³⁷ These works are poignant records of Emin's life, a female artist who is broke, but has longing for aesthetic expression, and freedom akin to an aesthetic genius, not only to actualise her subjectivity here, but being visible with subjectivity. The romantic idea of an artist in poverty, is how Emin's performativity intertwines with her memories of her traumatic life. Similar to Chengyao, Emin's performativity conveys her subjectivity in artwork, and demonstrates the ontological identification relationship in this first aspect of subjectivity.

At a time when deconstruction of postmodernity was at its height and in transition at the end of the late 1990s to early 2000s, along with the concomitant death of the author that questions that objectives of subjectivity, Chengyao and Emin's ontological identification relationship questions the lack of female subjectivity, which means an erosion of subjectivity in art history. This leads to a discussion of performativity of subjectivity.

Part II – Performativity of Subjectivity

For Butler, subjectivity is a consequence of I desire x, which links to performativity. She explains the Hegelian notion of the subject; the subject cannot know itself in any immediate sense but instead requires mediation in order to understand its own structure. The subject expands in the course of its adventure through alterity; it internalises the world that it desires and widens to encompass what it initially confronts as other to itself. The final satisfaction of desire is the discovery of substance as subject, the experience of the world as everywhere confirming that subject's sense of immanent metaphysical place. Insofar as the subject is engaged in the act of reproducing the totality of relations that constitute its identity, it is involved in the 'labour of the negative',³³⁸ and, as negative, this subject cannot wholly identify with an encompassing plenitude. For example, the dialectic opposite is continuously performing a struggle to resolve for a finite or infinite resolution. In effect, the subject is its own dispersal into the world and at the heart of this process of dispersal is the

³³⁷ Mark Lobel, 'Inside Tracey's Bed', *Varsity Online*, 6 October 2000. Also Tate collection. Rachel Taylor November 2003.

³³⁸ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 41.

functioning of desire, becoming world. Butler also discusses ‘self-actualization’ as another level prior to action, actualisation before performativity, and this desire actualises self as the foundation of subjectivity as discussed in Chapter one.³³⁹ The self is produced through regulatory norms as a process that forms bodies³⁴⁰ and so the subject on this view is a consequence of social and political forces and in this way is performative. Performativity for Butler is central in the subject as critique of the discreet, unchanging notion of the subject.³⁴¹ She discusses Hegel’s dialectic as a positive thesis followed by its negation, its antithesis, resulting in a synthesis of becoming from a fusion of the positive-being and the negative-nothing. When Butler says Hegel’s desire is the central process of the dialectic, she is discovering the dialectic force of desire that impels subjectivity to come to know itself through its opposite, through the other and through matter.³⁴² She says for Hegel, the subject becomes objectified and realises objectivity within itself.³⁴³ This means Hegel’s subject cannot know itself immediately but needs mediation to understand its own structure, and the subject is a reflexive structure that has to move outside of itself to know itself as a reflexive structure.³⁴⁴

Hegel claims that “self-consciousness in general is Desire” (§167), by which he means that desire signifies the reflexivity of consciousness, the necessity that it become other to itself in order to know itself. As desire, consciousness is outside of itself, consciousness is *self-consciousness*.³⁴⁵

Performativity necessitates desire as self-consciousness, which is relevant for Chengyao and Emin because they desire to actualise subjectivity to identify with their material of desire for their ontological identification relationship in their art practice: the desire to create artwork, is both voice and active. Without this self-consciousness,

³³⁹ Ibid, pp. 5–6; see also Judith Butler, *Senses of the Subject* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), pp. 63–89.

³⁴⁰ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, p. 2.

³⁴¹ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 11.

³⁴² Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 6: ‘The consideration of desire becomes essential in assessing the historical viability of Hegel’s metaphysics, for desire, according to Hegel, is the incessant human effort to overcome external differences, a project to become a self-sufficient subject for whom all things apparently different finally emerge as immanent features of the subject itself.’

³⁴³ Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 8.

³⁴⁵ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 7.

they would not actualise their subjectivities, the desire to exhibit their work, to be acknowledged and visible as artists, and not to hide under a man in form or name, nor to hide behind a mask, indoors, or in public. Their visible presentations of subjectivity come to know themselves through desire to communicate the invisible self, where the body becomes a voice in performativity. Peggy Phelan claims the ontology of performance, an idea close to the ontology of subjectivity presented here. Performance ‘becomes itself through disappearance,’³⁴⁶ because like subjectivity in artwork, performance is temporal and only reaches its acme through its ceasing to be. A live performance plunges into visibility and then disappears into memory, back into invisibility but their photographs and films live on, posits a problem. The artworks themselves in performance art, remain in the public collection, hence they are still visible and accessible, which suggests they are only invisible when artwork vanishes from public completely but in this technological society, it is impossible to eliminate an artwork that has been exhibited. The artwork continues to exist even after the artist dies, they are still visible, for example, Emin’s and Chengyao’s heroes, Schiele, Munch, Khalo, or Duchamp. Likewise, Emin and Chengyao’s subjectivity comes into visibility through artwork and they will never disappear altogether, which means their exhibited works live on in their absence, in someone’s home, or gallery or site specific in the artist’s absence, this also links with chapter three on visibility.

But performativity here indicates the emergence of subjectivity, which is not simply performance but is the actualisation of subjectivity prior, during, and after its manifestation in the ontological identification relationship in Emin and Chengyao’s process of art practice. When female subjectivity is actualised as performativity it opens into visibility – exceeds gesture – and opens in ways that do not occasion completion but a process of touching what is inclusive. It is a threshold that resists traditional perception, thus, in the case of Emin and Chengyao, the exhibition of a figure that is similar to the traditional nude can no longer be named as such, hence I suggest it is a new nude. Performativity implies a relationship to presentation as a journey of becoming, which depends upon a flux of being to voice a concern. When performativity is integral to subjectivity and articulated through the body then it is a becoming of who one is. This means Emin and Chengyao can therefore be set in the context of

³⁴⁶ Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), p. 146. .

performance art as performativity. But they are also working within this mode of practice by responding to the lack of female subjectivity, conversely, performing uncompromisingly, to question male aesthetic subjectivity, where the body is exposed and becomes voice.³⁴⁷

In *Bodies that Matter*, Butler emphasises how the subject of experience is a body. She develops her argument in stages. (1) She recasts ‘the matter of bodies as the effect of dynamic power,’ which means that the body’s gender is performative and governed by regulatory norms in a given culture. (2) Performativity is the power to produce that which it regulates. Thus, gender as performativity means that performance itself generates the effect that is the practice of gender. (3) A person’s sex is therefore not natural, on which the construction of gender is imposed, but is itself ‘a cultural norm which governs the materialisation of bodies.’³⁴⁸ (4) This means that we need to rethink the way in which the subject, the ‘I’, is formed as a gendered person, which in turn (5) entails that identities are linked to gender and sex as discourse that reinforces heterosexual norms.³⁴⁹

With this view, gender is performativity constructed through power networks in society that have been dominated, historically, by patriarchy and state. Their overt exposure of a female subjectivity conveys the personal as an implicit political critique. Butler’s performativity as subjectivity that is constructed is evident in Emin and Chengyao’s performativity of their ontological identification that articulates the personal and yet it is political – the personal becomes political in this first aspect of subjectivity.³⁵⁰

Gender is thus linked to the materiality of the body because without it there would be no gender; the material body is the necessary condition for the construction of gender as the site of discursive practices that are governed by power of the state, which in Western societies has meant patriarchal power thus far.³⁵¹ Similar to Foucault’s idea of gender and sex are regulatory practices by power, Butler claims gender is constructed by social norms, not biological that produces the bodies it governs. In a

³⁴⁷ Liao Wen, *No More Nice Girls*. Also see, Shijiazhuang Shi: Hebei jiao yu chu ban she, 2002.

³⁴⁸ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter* (London: Routledge, 1993), pp. xii–iii.

³⁴⁹ Ibid. Butler has also developed the idea of the performative in relation to language. See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997).

³⁵⁰ Carol Hanisch, ‘The Personal Is Political’, Barbara A. Crow (ed.), *Radical feminism: A documentary reader* (New York: NYU Press, 2000), pp. 113–115.

³⁵¹ Cesare Cuttica and Gaby Mahlberg (eds.), *Patriarchal Moments (Reading Patriarchal Texts)* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

critique of Western philosophy going back to Plato, Butler emphasises how women were linked to materiality and the Aristotelian idea that women provide the matter (body) and men the form (soul).³⁵² Agency has been conditioned by regimes of discourse and power that can be challenged. Thus, Butler wishes to affirm the construction of gender and also sex within regimes of normativity governed beyond patriarchal power while asserting the subject as the subject of desire who, in Hegelian terms, becomes materialised and does not exist other than as the materiality of gender and sex.³⁵³ The subject is the agent constructed and re-constructed through discourse, which can challenge normativity and re-create herself or himself through a new performative discourse. Butler's claim is against the nature of biology that is fixed, inflexible, and problematic. In the 1940s Simone De Beauvoir suggested in *The Second Sex* 1949, 'one is not born a woman, but, rather, becomes one',³⁵⁴ supports Butler's view.

To explicate this mechanism of how they do this, I turn to an analysis and interpretation of firstly, Chengyao's *Opening the Great Wall* (Fig: 2.11) and secondly Emin's *My Bed* (Fig: 2.12). Their performativity, which in fact questions the lack of female subjectivity, is their first aspect of subjectivity they articulate; it is a property of their ontological identification relationship. The body is conceptualising, constructing, and operates as its own performative when harnessed within the field of artwork, and as Elizabeth Grosz emphasises in *Volatile Bodies* 1994, the body is 'never quite reducible to being merely a thing.'³⁵⁵ Because the body embodies desire, and desire changes over time, while the 'I' remains the same.

If my mother did not run about, day and night, stark naked with disheveled hair, shouting through the streets and alleys of my hometown. If she did not use this method to expose the confining morals of patriarchy, to protest its discipline and violence, and to look with contempt on its authority using her extreme insanity to realize her freedom, then I wouldn't have used the identity of artists for my behaviour on the Great Wall. I understand that I similarly violated the

³⁵² Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, p. 8.

³⁵³ Mutual recognition is only possible, says Butler, in the context of a shared orientation towards the material world. Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 57.

³⁵⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 11, citing Simone de Beauvoir.

³⁵⁵ E. A. Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Minneapolis: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. xi.

prohibition of male-dominated society against women freely controlling their own bodies, especially in the name of art. I believe that I cannot allow myself to sink into the dust my predecessors left behind and become one more sacrificial offering to patriarchal society. I acted instinctively to make a new start. My body is a weapon to challenge restrictions that are hundreds of years old.³⁵⁶

Similar to Emin, Chengyao works with her memories, she draws deep from experience. She observed her mother's mental disability as a child and saw her mother removing her clothes to become naked in public, to protest against government officials, with partial memory Chengyao's practice embodies and condenses her memory for an external temporal image, as an edited truth. Chengyao's practice is a performativity of self in which subjectivity comes to articulation in artwork. Her body embodies the story of her own life, in a patriarchal society that has oppressed women from her own experience.³⁵⁷ Although childhood memories are clear when she saw the Great Wall filled with the artwork of H.A Schult in front of her, her thoughts travelled to the suffering of her mother. The Great Wall is an iconic symbol of China but for Chengyao and her contemporaries, it was their heritage, their history, it belongs to them, it is close to the hearts of Chinese people, artists' sensitivity feels the pain of their past.³⁵⁸ With this complex memory of the Great Wall, and her mother who stripped often in public, Chengyao was confronted with what is in front of her, the boundary of herself and China's greatest icon in her own country begins to sink in. She took off her red top and walks along the Great Wall with the artists Schult and the public behind her, in-between Schult's one thousand *Rubbish People* 2001 (Fig: 2.11), each figure made out of collected rubbish such as tin cans, attached to the Great Wall like a long line of soldiers. What this performance also narrates is her female Chinese body and her family, which is far more crucial than *rubbish people* on the greatest wall in history.

Gao Minglu writes: 'He undertook her ceremonial act of imitating the insanity of her mother in order to comment on the modern myth that has ruined Chinese

³⁵⁶ Cited in Gao 'The Great Wall in Contemporary Chinese Art,' p. 784..

³⁵⁷ Eva Kit Wah Man, 'Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: the Case of He Chengyao,' pp. 176–80, in Mary Bittner Wiseman and Liu Yiedi (eds.), *Subversive Strategies in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 171–89.

³⁵⁸ He Chengyao Interview with Kwankui Leung, March 2016.

women's identities and lives.'³⁵⁹ There is a complexity to this in art history. Chengyao's performance reflects Duchamp's work, who created works on top of readymades, an example would be his drawing a mustache on the *Mona Lisa* 1503, and calling it *L.H.O.O.Q* 1919 ('Elle A Chaud Au Cul' – 'She has a hot ass').³⁶⁰ The Dadaist attempts not only to disrupt authorship, subjectivity, but also language. Similarly, contemporary artists such as Cai Yuan and Jian Xi who seize an opportunity to participate in someone else's work to create their own, also jumped on Emin's *My Bed* in 1999 in Tate Britain for the Turner Prize show. Joining someone's else finished artwork is problematic, as with Emin's *My Bed* in 1999, Emin emphasised how hurt and angry she was afterwards, she felt her body has been trampled on and eroded.³⁶¹ And yet, Chengyao's *Opening The Great Wall* became her seminal work, as did Duchamp's readymades. What is compelling here is the connection between Chinese artists and western artists, who are all influenced by Dadaism and the Duchampian trajectory, including *Rubbish People* by Schult.

However, similarly, *Opening The Great Wall* 2001, may have outshone the original artist's work *rubbish people* 2001, Chengyao had a good point to make; this wall is her heritage, and where better than the Great Wall to remember and commemorate her mother who suffered as those who have suffered before her on the Greatest Wall in the world.³⁶² As she said above, if it had not been her mother, this work would not have happened, this also means she identifies herself with artwork, this signifies her ontological identification relationship. In reconstructing and re-enacting her memory she is confronting patriarchy. This suggests her ontological identification is making sense of things, in her microcosm, and being a female artist in global art practice to question the world.³⁶³ Gao writes: 'The artist instigated the event when her memory of her own life collided with the historical significance of the wall.'³⁶⁴ The personal has turned critical and political in this first aspect of subjectivity, performativity. The Great Wall is a trope of memory and a sense of grief for Chinese people as it is for Chengyao, the general orientation of the nation and the direction

³⁵⁹ Gao Minglu, *Total Modernity and the Avant-Garde in Twentieth Century Chinese Art* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2011), p. 14. See also Gao Minglu, 'The Great Wall in Contemporary Chinese Art,' *Positions*, vol. 12, no. 3, 2004, pp. 773–86.

³⁶⁰ Calvin Tomkins, *Duchamp: A Biography* (New York: MoMA, 2014), p. 218.

³⁶¹ Tracey Emin, interview with Melvin Bragg, London 2001.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 776.

³⁶³ *Ibid.* p. 14.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

towards which China is journeying, a capitalist mode of production and materialistic cultural values, at the expense of democracy and human rights.³⁶⁵ Chengyao's naked self-portrait not only created an uproar among the public, but created a new perspective on the Chinese female body.

³⁶⁵ Xin Liu, *The Mirage Of China: Anti-Humanism, Narcissism, and Corporeality of the Contemporary World* (Oxford and New York; Berghahn Books, 2009).

Opening the Great Wall 2001

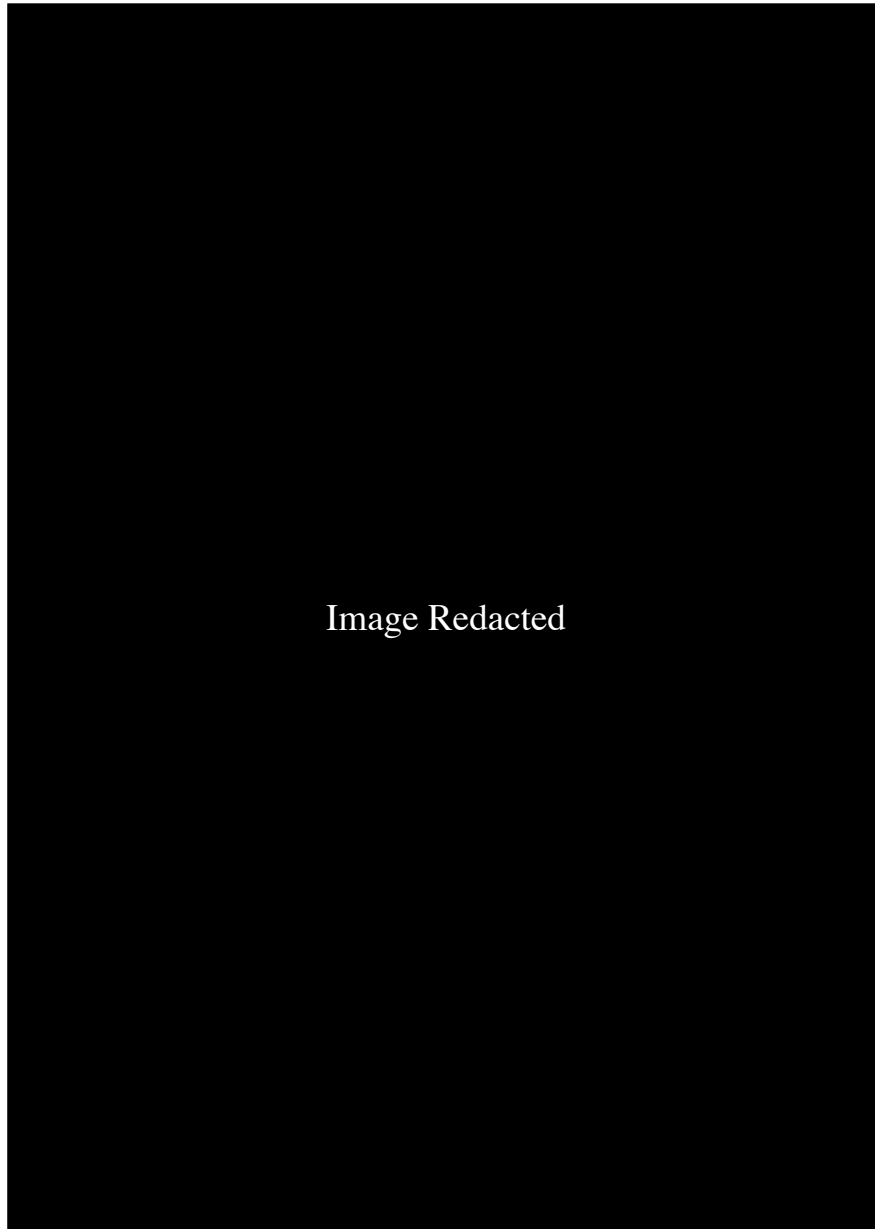


Fig. 2.11: He Chengyao, *Opening the Great Wall 2001*
Performance, Photograph, Great Wall, China.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Jullien argues that there is no nude in the history of Chinese art because it is concerned not with an ideal of beauty in the nude body but primarily with life force, energy-breath (*qi*), and spirit (*shen*).³⁶⁶ The body embodying the Chinese spirit (*shen*) in Jullien's terms is at the heart of Chinese art.³⁶⁷ In Shi Pu Wang's article he criticizes Jullien's claim that Chinese art expresses subtle energy (*qi*).³⁶⁸ Wang argues that Julien is 'guided by a belief in the radical incompatibility between East and West' in highlighting the dichotomy between the European and Chinese understanding and perception of the human body. The result is 'a circuitous study that shifts between the Western philosophical lineage from Plotinus to Hegel, and Chinese notions of the body and their manifestation in Chinese society.'³⁶⁹ Perhaps Jullien's research of the nude that is absent in China and Wang's observation about energy (*qi*) and spirit (*shen*) is the point that Chengyao is making in the context of the new nude in China, and challenging the traditional values of the nude both in China and the West. She fuses the artistic values of East and West in the new nude with a personal message. Traditional Chinese artists were interested in the animation of the spirit (*shen*) with nature in traditional art and keeping the naked body image always hidden from public view to keep up with traditional values of their time, mostly descended from Lao Tzu, Confucian, and later Buddhism values. Jullien identifies the naked with life and the nude with art, he claims 'as is confirmed in every instance simply switching from one term to the other is therefore enough to make the transition from life to art,' 'nakedness is me, and the nude is someone else.'³⁷⁰

The traditional nude that Jullien discusses without the idea of memory and personal experience is absent in China. Chengyao fuses Jullien's distinction between the naked and nude, me and other, life and art in her work. She combines the heritage of the Chinese body-memory as well as spirit (*shen*) and energy (*qi*) with the Western nude lineage within a global art movement. There had been body studies and erotic nudes in early twentieth century China, but these were not mainstream and were not

³⁶⁶ François Jullien, *The Impossible Nude: Chinese Art and Western Aesthetics* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), pp. 34-36.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 30-39.

³⁶⁸ Shi Pu Wang, Review of 'The Impossible Nude: Chinese Art and Western Aesthetics,' *China Review International*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2008, pp. 234-43. On the way *qi* as 'rich and strange' is expressed in Chinese art see Craig Clunas, *Superfluous Things: Material Culture and Social Status in Early Modern China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1991), p. 85.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³⁷⁰ Jullien, *The Impossible Nude*, p.4.

part of a nude genre in art history.³⁷¹ Chengyao's *Opening the Great Wall* 2001 transgresses public morality and popular mores in which public nudity is not widely accepted, as well as confronting traditional Chinese art. The work exhibits beyond representational norms and tradition, with performativity marking out a realm of becoming in which Chengyao's subjectivity is manifested and actualised.

If performativity includes a stance, such as 'I assert' or 'I deny' in Austin's terms, then these words of Chengyao while she is practicing her ontological identification relationship constitutes her stance of thoughts and language. Chengyao's work exists within the symbolic realm and semiotic pulse in Kristeva's terms,³⁷² because she actualises her female subjectivity as voice, it is always both and never only one or the other; coherent speech lays in both symbolic and semiotic realms, and thus it is multiplicity in singularity in a Deleuzian sense of being and becoming, which means inclusivity but particularity.³⁷³ To compare Chengyao's work in China with Tracey Emin's work in Britain provides a global understand of female artists aesthetic subjectivity in performativity, which now I will turn to the work of Tracey Emin, *My Bed* 1998.

In Japan they were shocked by my dirty slippers but they stole some bloody knickers and some condoms,". "In America it was like: 'Yeah, we've seen feminist art before, we've done it already'. No fuss - they just treated it like a regular artwork. "In the UK, it exploded with the Turner Prize. It just went crazy."³⁷⁴

³⁷¹ R.H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961; reprinted 1974).

³⁷² Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Trans Leon S. Roudiez. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), p. 63. Also Butler argues against Kristeva in *Gender Trouble*, p. 123-126.

³⁷³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 112. Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*, trans. D. Smith (London: Continuum, 2000), p. 101.

³⁷⁴ Tim Masters, 'Tracy Emin 'hopes' bed artwork will go to museum' Art and Entertainment correspondent, BBC News. June 2014.

My Bed 1998

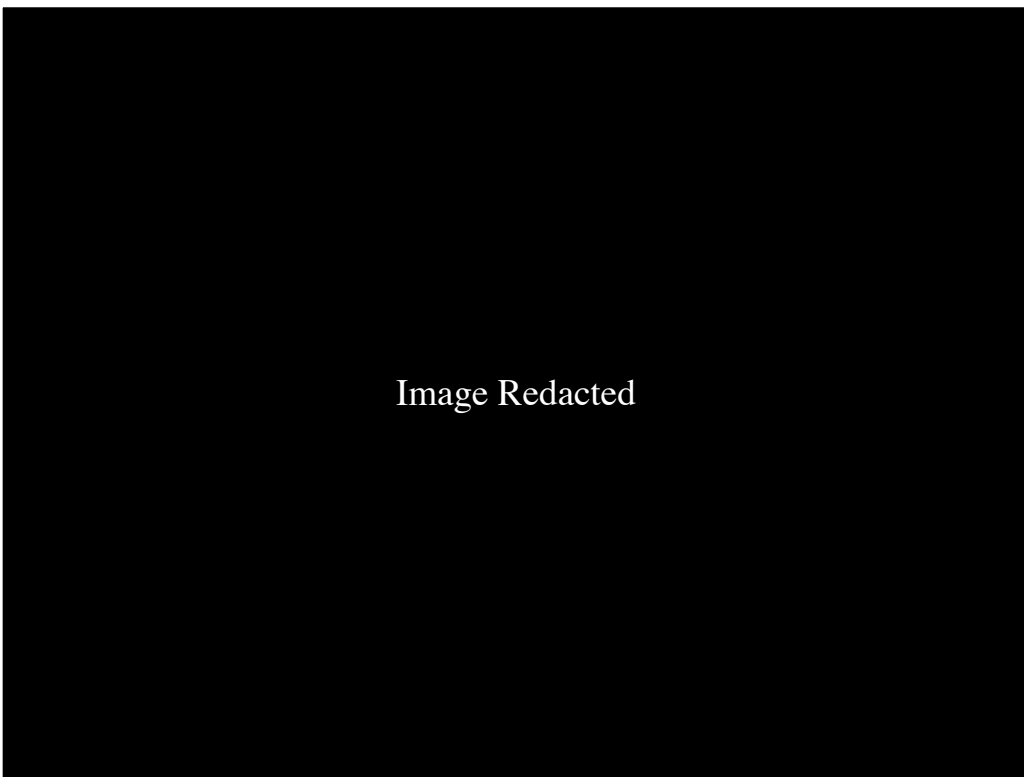


Fig. 2.12: Tracey Emin, *My Bed* 1989–2015 Installation, re-exhibited Tate Britain 2015.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

In 1998 I had a kind of mini nervous breakdown in my very small flat and didn't get out of bed for four days. And when I did finally get out of bed, I was so thirsty I made my way to the kitchen crawling along the floor. My flat was in a real mess everything everywhere, dirty washing, filthy cabinets, the bathroom really dirty, everything in a really bad state. I crawled across the floor, pulled myself up on the sink to get some water, and made my way back to my bedroom, and as I did I looked at my bedroom and thought, 'Oh, my God. What if I'd died and they found me here?' And then I thought, 'What if here wasn't here? What if I took out this bed-with all its detritus, with all the bottles, the shitty sheets, the vomit stains, the used condoms, the dirty underwear, the old newspapers – what if I took all of that out of this bedroom and placed it into a white space? How would it look then?' And at that moment I saw it, and it looked fucking brilliant. And I thought, this wouldn't be the worst place for me to die; this is a beautiful place that's kept me alive. And then I took everything out of my bedroom and made it into an installation. And when I put it into the white space, for some people it became quite shocking. But I just thought it looked like a damsel in distress, like a woman fainting or something, needing to be helped.³⁷⁵

It is controversial to see the surface of *My Bed* and comparing it with *Opening the Great Wall*. But these are Tracey Emin and He Chengyao as female artist's seminal works in a global art history. *My Bed* of Emin 1998 is a crucial moment in her life. She created *My Bed* out of moments of desperation, from depression in her bed for four days to actualising the conception of *My Bed* for exhibition in a gallery space in Sagacho Exhibition space in Tokyo 1998, then to Lehmann Maupin gallery New York, and was nominated for the Turner Prize 1999 in London Tate Britain but it did not win. Steve McQueen won that year with an emotional intense video installations *Drumroll* 1998 and *Deadpan* 1997. *My Bed* brought confusion and controversy not only to the public but to most art establishments, hence it did not win. It was also trampled upon, disrupted, and damaged the layout by two Chinese performance male artists' Cai Yuan

³⁷⁵ Tracey Emin interview with Julian Schnabel, *My Bed* 1998. Tate Collection TateShots, London, April 2015.

and Xi Jian Jun who reside in Britain. They sought to create another work from Emin's bed by jumping on it to disrupt, but failed to impress, and were questioned by police. While some audience found it appropriate or even humorous, Emin felt her body had been trampled upon, emotionally hurt by it, as she described when interviewed by Melvin Bragg 2001. Neither she nor the Tate wanted to press charges thus the case was dropped.³⁷⁶ Police interference of exhibitions in the UK are rare since the 60s and 70s, but in China it is still anticipated if exhibitions are politically inclined. But this case was seen as vandalism. The externalisation in the concept of *My Bed* is a mode of self-actualisation of the subject in performativity mode with her words and presentation of *My Bed* in a public space. The subject has awareness of the self through an ontological identification relationship with her history and art practice, Emin's subjectivity intertwined with her artist's material. The formation of this becoming, the dialectic between subjectivity and artist's material, is resolved in the work itself.

My Bed performs a detrimental period of Emin's life with depression over a broken relationship with her boyfriend. The bed is usually a place of rest, solace, safety, and a space to make love, give birth, be born in, and possibly die in one day. The significance of *My Bed* is considerable, although the bed is not Emin's flesh, it is still her naked self-portrait metaphorically, with her DNA imprinted onto the bed, the relationship she has had with her bed. She identified herself with her bed as artwork, she moves towards the items among the bed that constitutes her art material; she slept in the unmade divine bed with rugged stained white cotton sheets and two pillows, bloodstained underwear, worn stockings, used towels, on the floor an empty vodka bottle, tooth paste, cigarette packets, newspaper, shaving tool, used condoms and its packet, dirty sheepskin like sleepers among the dust on an ultramarine blue rug, a small one foot tall bedside round dusty table filled with assortments of polaroid image of herself, ashtray filled with cigarettes ends, and so forth, furthermore, there are chained up suitcases as if immobile for elsewhere (Fig: 2.12).

Deborah Cherry observes how Emin's bed is 'a thoughtful arrangement of items placed around a bed base' and these items are not only dark and dirty but also bright and white: beside the soiled items are pristine objects such as the glistening clear glass of the vodka bottles. This is not a random array of cast-off underwear and condoms,

³⁷⁶ Fiachra Gibbons, 'Satirists jump into Tracey's bed' Semi naked pair 'reacting to self-promotion' of art prize entry. *Arts Correspondent, The Guardian*, Oct 1999.

but a carefully orchestrated arrangement.’³⁷⁷ Cherry’s assessment of a ‘carefully orchestrated arrangement,’³⁷⁸ endorses Emin’s emotional attachment to her bed, but the artwork is always edited – Cherry’s suggestion of carefully orchestration arrangement – means it is an edited truth. Emin refers to the bed as her own or my bed as the title says; it has become an artwork, which she has orchestrated and edited for exhibition. Cherry’s well observed comments are right to refer to *My Bed* as art. The temporal difference indicates a significant change, from truth to edited truth. Hence the idea of performativity is crucial, while the work is edited truth, it is Emin’s performatives that feed the artwork itself that becomes performativity in the ontological identification relationship. We cannot see *My Bed* without the artist’s authorship or subjectivity, it is not confessional art but rather, it is performative. Similar to *Opening the Great Wall*, *My Bed* displays an intimacy as actualisation of subjectivity while anticipating critique from the aesthetic realm. The thesis Subject-X Emin, and antithesis Material-Y bed, to synthesis as artwork *My Bed* is Emin’s performativity as the first aspect of her subjectivity, which constitutes the ontological identification relationship of Tracey Emin in the UK. I now turn to Chengyao in China with *Mama And Me* 2002 (Fig: 2.13).

³⁷⁷ Deborah Cherry, ‘On the Move: My Bed 1998 to 1999,’ pp. 144–5, in Mandy Merck and Chris Townsend (eds.) *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), pp. 134–54.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

Opening the Great Wall was the beginning of *Mama and Me* 2001 (Fig: 2.13). The work reveals a connection between a daughter and a mother, suggesting women's lineage and family values, a performativity to make sense of their relationship. Chengyao created *Mama and Me* when she returned home one afternoon to find her mother half naked and playing with a rotten apple in their courtyard, she decided to connect with her mother through her art practice. This work was captured with photography, instead of ignoring her mother illness as usual, she decided to embrace her by standing behind her mother and in solidarity she removes her own shirt to capture a moment of unity with her mother. She said that she attempted to understand her mother through her art practice.³⁷⁹

This intimate, intense moment for Chengyao with her mother is another similarity to that of Tracey Emin's work *Conversation With My Mum* 2011 (Fig: 2.15) in the Hayward Gallery, with different perspectives and connotations of intimacy relating to their experience with their mothers.³⁸⁰ Emin filmed her conversation with her mother, where she asked questions about her childhood, abortion, children, and how her mother did not want Emin to have children so she can be free to further her career, children would tie her down. Similar to Chengyao and her mother in China, they discovered intimacy in performativity, visibility, and univocity in solidarity. The uncanny became a little clearer for Emin and Chengyao. Another piece is Emin's *Mum Smoking* 1994 (Fig: 2.16), in the National Gallery Scotland 2008, this image is also exposing her mother as the model similar to Chengyao exposing her mother intimately. There is a resonance here where they both include their mother in their work, they both confront traumatic experiences face to face, the unspeakable bodily experience resurfaced in performativity. What is crucial here is how their childhood experiences have haunted them until adulthood, which is why they revisit them through their ontological identification relationship.

Chengyao's *Mama and Me* (Fig: 2.13) relives the traumatic memory by exposing it. This questions female subjectivity in a patriarchal society, and people like her mother who were marginalised when mentally ill. As Wah Man observes, Chengyao makes 'a strong contribution to the discourse of madness and marginalisation in her country.'³⁸¹ She attempts to intertwine her subjectivity with her art practice; this gives her the power to voice her subjectivity and concerns,

³⁷⁹ Wah Man, 'Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: the Case of He Chengyao.'

³⁸⁰ Tracey Emin, *Love is What You Want* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2011), p. 96-97. Also in White Cube Gallery, 2001.

³⁸¹ *Ibid*, p. 183.

but it refracts as protest in this first aspect of subjectivity – performativity – that seeks to highlight and to give voice to not only her mother but her own subjectivity. Her performance creates a new relationship that remedies the old one; this is resonant with *Opening the Great Wall* 2001, which constitutes a triptych of *The Great Wall – Magnolia – Mama and Me* 2002 (Fig: 2.14).³⁸²

***Mama and Me* 2001**



Fig. 2.13: He Chengyao, *Mama and Me* 2001.
Performance, Photograph, Beijing.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

***The Great Wall – Magnolia – Mama and Me* 2002**

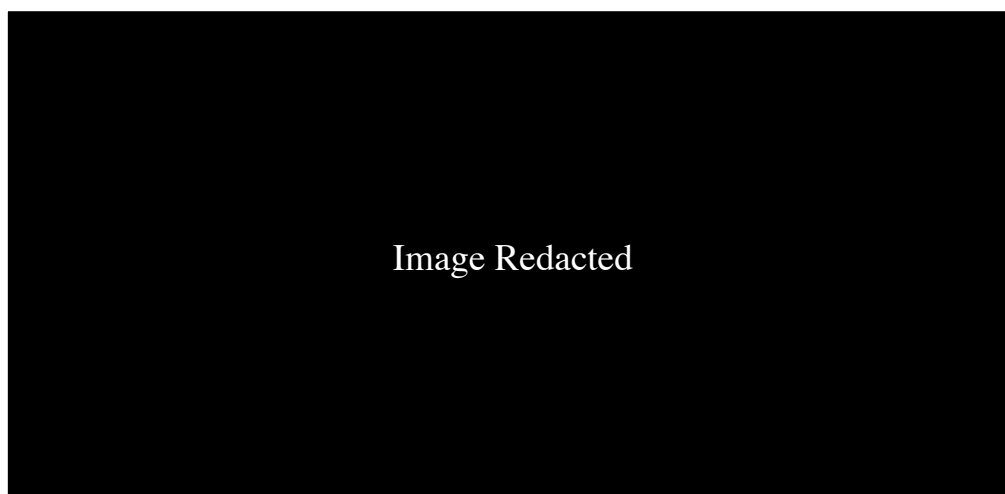


Fig. 2.14: He Chengyao, *The Great Wall – Magnolia – Mama and Me* 2002
Photograph, Brooklyn Museum Gallery, New York.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

³⁸² Ibid.

Conversation With My Mum 2011

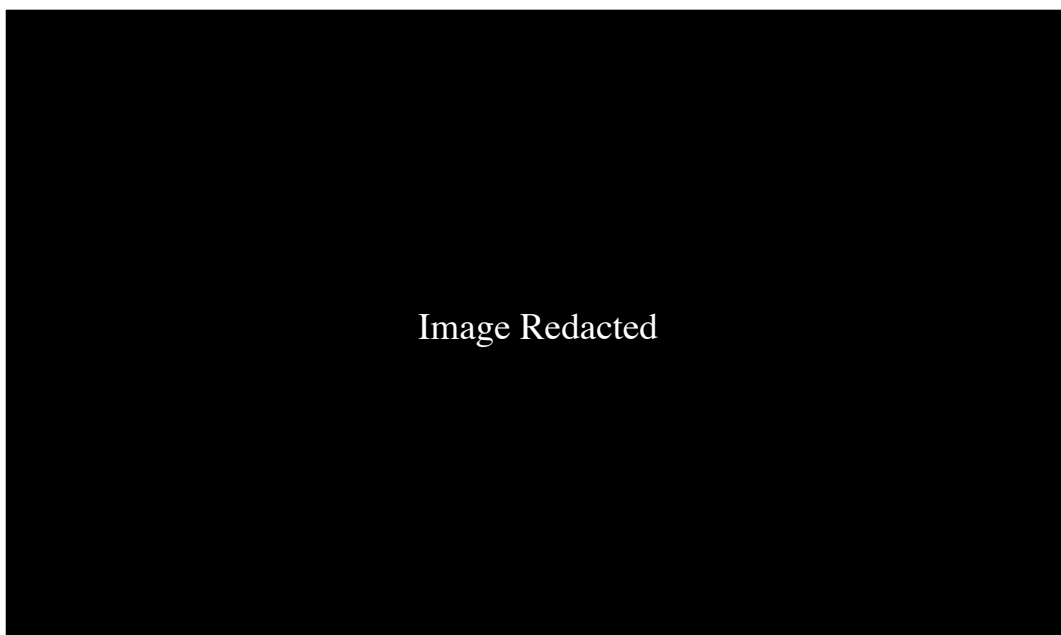


Fig. 2.15: Tracey Emin, *Conversation With My Mum 2011*
Video on a small television, Still, Hayward Gallery, London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Mum Smoking, Family Suite, 1994.

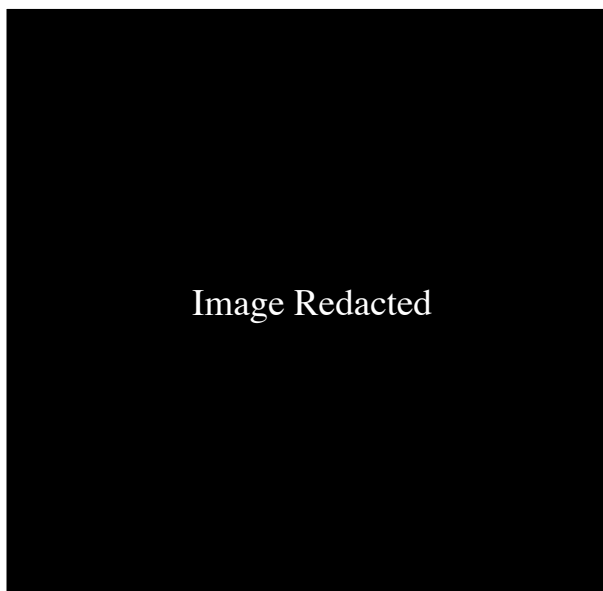


Fig. 2.16: Tracey Emin, *Mum Smoking, Family Suite, 1994.*
Mono print, black ink on paper. National Gallery Scotland.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Similarly, Emin's mother's narrative of not wanting her daughter to have children responds to and reflects a patriarchal society, Emin would not be able to experience her subjectivity if she had to take care of children and work twenty-four hours a day claims her mother.³⁸³ Chengyao's *The Great Wall – Magnolia – Mama and Me* 2002 (Fig: 2.14) exhibits a mother and daughter relationship that has been reconciled and the magnolia flower (*mu lan far*) is their relationship, as an ancient Chinese symbol for womanly beauty,³⁸⁴ emphasises how her mother and herself are between the Magnolia flowers with a bright sky as a symbol of a new beginning, with *Opening The Great Wall* on one side, and *Mama and Me* on the other, is an attempt to change the perspective of their relationship to make anew the old residues of tragedies. Many have discerned her mother's mental illness as imperfect, in here she is suggesting a new way of seeing her mother's illness, and the Magnolia flowers is how she sees her mother, she is embracing her mother and her mother's illness, she is making sense of things in her ontological identification relationship as it is in Emin's work with her mother. This also highlights the double refraction, the new nude as the result of women's articulation of subjectivity through naked performativity that is simultaneously a cultural critique of the ancient repression of female subjectivity in both societies.

Testimony 2001

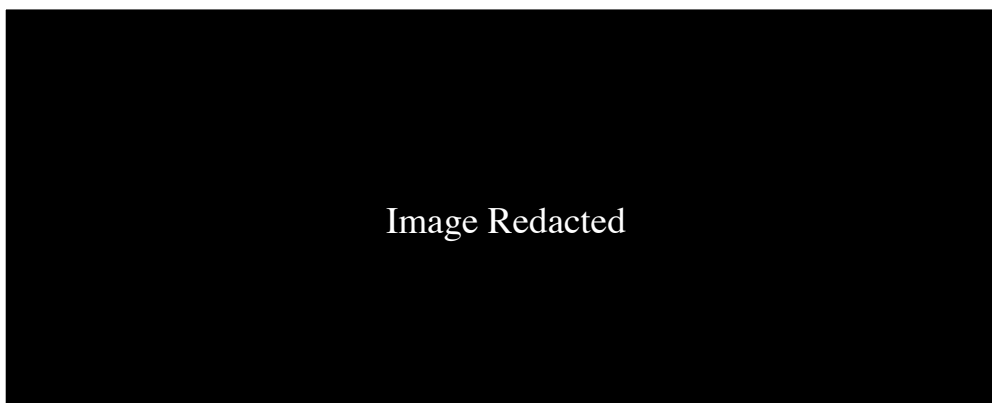


Fig. 2.17: He Chengyao, *Testimony* 2001
 Photograph, Brooklyn Museum Gallery, New York.
 [Image redacted due to copyright]

³⁸³ Tracey Emin, Interview and Conversation with My Mum, Carl Freedman, and Rudi Fuchs. *Tracey Emin: Works 1963-2006*. New York: Rizzoli, 2006.

³⁸⁴ W. Perceval Yetts, 'Notes on Flower Symbolism in China,' *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, no. 1, Jan. 1941, pp. 1-21.

The body relationship here shows their intimacy is far more important than sexual relationships, it is not about sex, but the people that Chengyao is close to. It is about the intimacy of relationship that develops the inter-generational theme. A related piece that demonstrates a connection between Chengyao's mother, Chengyao and her son, is *Testimony* 2001 (Fig: 2.17), Chengyao standing behind her mother without her face, her mother looking up to her daughter, similar to the image in *Mama and Me*. In the middle is Chengyao with her son behind her without his face, then her son alone on the right-hand side image, the portraits look melancholic, in a state of being photographed in a studio, frozen in time. The body here is a memory of past, present and future; by being visible, the semi-naked portrait in these photographs emphasises an attempt to bring attention to the erosion of familial subjectivity, meaning the lack of familial subjectivity. This further suggests the son on his own must take care of himself; the one standing behind the other is the one that needs to do the caring, and the son sitting on his own must stand on his own two feet without his parents or grandparents, ending the bond between them.

The famous tent is one of Emin's seminal work since 1995, *Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963–1995* 1995 was destroyed by a fire in Saatchi's rented storage in London in 2004.³⁸⁵ This work comprises 102 names of everyone Emin had been intimate with. While this thesis compares Emin's work with Chengyao's, it is not the fame or the lack of fame that is crucial here, but their attempt to bring our attention to their female aesthetic subjectivity. Emin highlights intimacy with everyone she has slept with, either a sexual or non-sexual relationship, such as ex-boyfriends, her mother, father, grandmother, twin brother, and friends. Emin said:

It was like carving out gravestones for me...It was a painful piece of work, which I find nauseatingly... but I think graphically, is pretty superb piece of work. People said, who's interested in how many people she's shagged? Good point, nobody should be. But the tent wasn't about that, it was about how many people I slept with or been intimate with, whether it was sexually or just sleep wise. People went inside the tent, by the time they came out, they were thinking about all the people they had sleep with, and all the people they had been close to and that is how the tent worked, and people had to take it back what they said about it. I used me to make

³⁸⁵ Charlotte Higgins and Vikram Dodd, '50 Years of British Art Lies in Ashes' *The Guardian*, May 27th 2004.

the work. If I want to make a painting of a woman, who do I make a painting of? Me, I use myself, I don't go and get another women and use her. I'm quite vulnerable but obviously not as vulnerable as I used to be.³⁸⁶

The audience who viewed the work had to crawl inside the tent to see the words 'With myself, always myself, never forgetting' on the floor of the entrance of the tent.³⁸⁷ Deborah Cherry calls this a 'womb like space' in which the audience participated in the life story of Emin and also reflected on their own lives. Emin's body is ironically present through its absence and, in a sense, naked in that the tent evinced intimacy with others. The womb like space of the tent is akin to Plato's *chora*-like receptacle filled with meaning, but here Emin fills it with intimate relationship – the meaning of the relationships it records – and containing Emin's performativity when exhibited in the gallery space. The actualisation of her subjectivity created this work, which evolves in the ontological identification relationship process. Moore quoting Deleuze says, 'The rules of actualization are not those of resemblance and limitation, but those of difference or divergence and of creation...[In] order to be actualized...must *create* its own lines of actualization in positive acts...[It] is forced...to create its lines of differentiation in order to be actualized.'³⁸⁸ This suggests not only Emin's thoughts, narratives, and artworks are crucial, but an actualisation of subjectivity for her creative process.

³⁸⁶ Tracey Emin talking about *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*, 1995, Saatchi Gallery, London. Published by *the EYE* 2003.

³⁸⁷ Cherry, 'On the Move,' p. 130.

³⁸⁸ Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, p. 415.

Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995, 1995

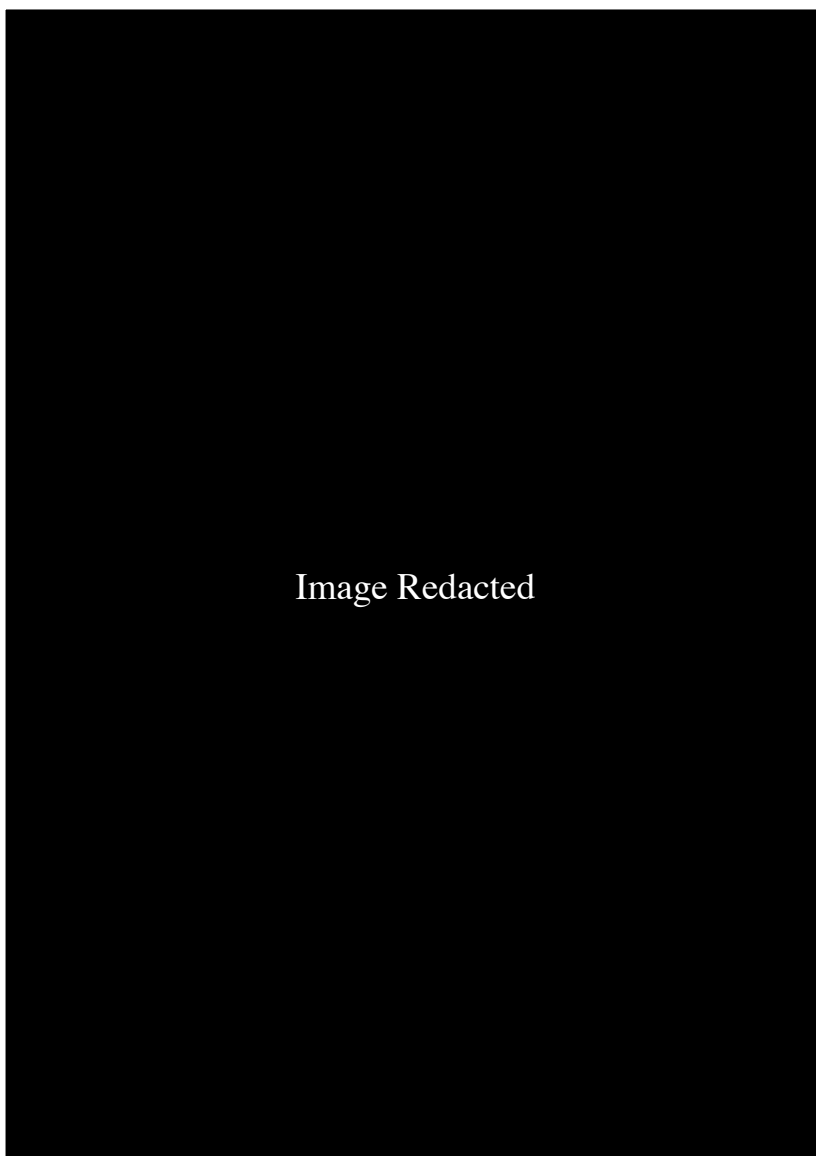


Fig. 2.18: Tracey Emin, *Everyone I have Ever Slept With 1963–1995*, 1995
Installation, Saachi Gallery (Burned in a fire at warehouse).

[Image redacted due to copyright]

Apart from the surface sexual connotation, the work refers to Emin's intimate performatives in Butler's sense: it is personal but also a critique of gendered assumptions, which brings our attention to the other side of British society or the reality of United Kingdom, sex, promiscuity, alcohol, smoking, drugs, and rock and roll trickled down from a bohemian hippies' society of 60s and 70s. This is achieved through simply citing the names in the tent, but exhibits Emin's intentionality, skills, concepts, and communication, then sexuality abates once the audience realises this tent is not primarily about sexual relationships but about all personal relationships; it is equally about family and friends. Akin to *My Bed* 1998, it is a naked self-portrait, one that has her DNA sewn on the canvas of the tent. The needles pierced and sewn with each stitch by a sewing machine like a chisel on a sculpture, similar to Chengyao's *Ninety-Nine Needles* 2002 (Fig: 3.3, 3.5), to voice a concern for female subjectivity. Emin used it as virtual, and Chengyao used it as actual, invisible and visible is at play to not only narrate their history, but also a critique of history with the lack of female subjectivity despite history suggests the emancipation of women.

This work not only shows all the characteristics of an extension of Emin's subjectivity in the aesthetic realm, a collapse of identity between subjectivity and art material of work, seen in the way in which interior memory of relationships becomes an exterior statement bearing witness, but it also actualises the self: in performativity that articulates memories. Emin sourced a tent, put it in her room, and sewed each letter on the inside of the tent; the tent becomes a canvas, and the materials such as needles for embroidery used by Emin, articulates a mode of working and being through the simple fact of using such materials from her personal belongings, such as fabrics from childhood, which have been characterised as 'women's work' in the past, but here not only narrates Emin's microcosm, but ironically refracts as a feminist critique. This is similar to that of Chinese acupuncture needles that Chengyao used in *Ninety Nine Needles* 2002 (Fig: 3.5). While Emin's sewing needles are on fabric rather than on her actual body, the tent with words is nevertheless her self-portrait, and similarly Chengyao's acupuncture needles are actually on her body; they both exhibit and highlight a harsh, violent, patriarchal society through using needles as an artist's material in artwork, as Emin said, 'it was like carving gravestones', and Chengyao fainted while ninety nine needles penetrated her body. In both artworks, needle and thread perforate the fabric

or the body. Acupuncture is restorative or healing and patchwork could be seen as reparative, concerned with mending through suturing.³⁸⁹

Catherine Dormor observes the following about the action of sewing: ‘The simple utilitarian straight stitch can be used to patch, repair, connect and hold fabric pieces together, the needle passing back and forth between them. This term ‘back and forth’ indicates a mutual exchange brought about by the action of needle and thread, suggesting openness and engagement between pieces. Back and forth implies repetition and rhythm, notions that are most commonly associated with a sense of well-being, perhaps even a meditative state. But this back and forth also conjures a sense of the incessant and urgent, perhaps the need to complete, to reach the end, establishing a different rhythm, one more closely associated with speed, mechanisation and industrialisation.’³⁹⁰ Dormor posit a philosophical reading of sewing with needles, as in Emin’s ontological thought process.

The material of *Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963-1995, 1995*, is akin to Emin’s skin metaphorically, being penetrated with needles, as in Chengyao’s *Ninety-Nine Needles* 2002 (3.3, 3.5), and the works are analogues of each other. It is as if the repetition of the performance has produced Emin’s work attempting to articulate something of central importance for Emin about her subjectivity and so the subjectivity of another. In a similar enactment, the penetration of the body by the acupuncture needles in Chengyao’s work, articulates a complex layering of experiences in her life. At one level the piece is about pain, the pain of her Mother’s illness and treatment. But it is also about healing as that is the function of acupuncture needles, for medicinal purposes. It also exhibits pain and the release of pain in a catharsis that unloads a pure sense of self for Chengyao while also speaking to the centrality of the relationship with her mother.

In *I’ve Got It All* 2000, Emin performs a self-portrait that plays with gender expectations – that women make money from their bodies – whilst also forming a critical comment on this gender expectation. Here she is being ironically critical but affirming at the same time of a critique of patriarchy. Wearing an expensive Vivienne Westwood dress, Emin sweeps money into her body as both statement of freedom and ironic commentary: ‘*I’ve Got It All*, or I’ve made it in the world, and yes, it is from a female body,’ but this work is a critique of commercialising women, when

³⁸⁹ Dormor, ‘Writing Textile, Making Text: Cloth and Stitch as Agency for Disorderly Text;’ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

³⁹⁰ Ibid. Catherine Dormer, *A Philosophy of Textile, Between Practice and Theory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 31–39.

earning money should be a norm, as male artists have done for hundreds of years; but it suggests 'I am the model and the artist in this work, I have earned this success with my body and hard work, and it is from my subjectivity.'³⁹¹

I've Got It All 2000

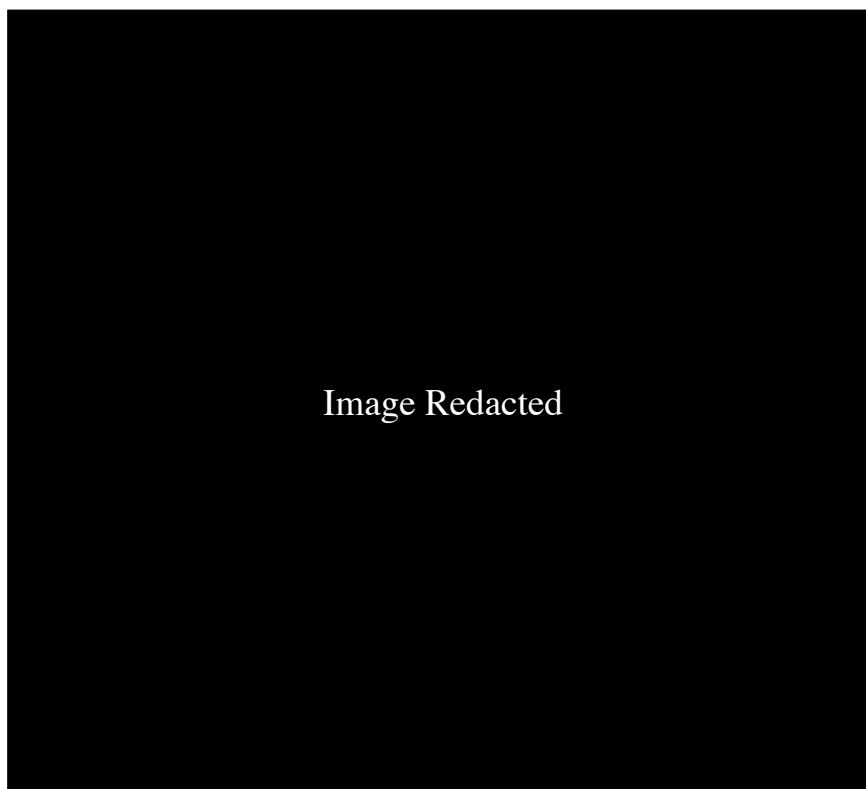


Fig. 2.19: Tracey Emin, *I've Got It All 2000*
Polaroid Photograph, London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

The work shows an anticipation of viewing women as prostituting when they earn money to survive, even through art, which is itself another layer of an erosion of female subjectivity.³⁹² The image suggests, Emin does not care what you think about her, but invites you to see another

³⁹¹ Peter Osbourne, 'Greedy Kunst,' pp. 44–50, in Merck and Townsend, *The Art of Tracey Emin*, pp. 40–59.

³⁹² Catherine Harper makes the analogy between Emin's blanket work and prostitution, which are both seen as 'women's work' (p. 237). Catherine Harper, 'I Need Tracey Emin Like I Need God,' in Hilary Robinson (ed.), *Feminism Art Theory* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 237-39.

perspective of what earning money means for female artists. She is making a substantial income with her naked self-portraits, and ‘so what if you think negative about this?’³⁹³ is what she is saying here. If earning a living through sex is negative, then this image is in protest against anybody’s views of sex and society for women and their occupations. According to Butler, in *Bodies That Matter*, what is deemed unnatural is social violence towards another body but is itself ‘a cultural norm which governs the materialisation of bodies’.³⁹⁴

Part III – Refraction of Subjectivity

It is not where we thought it was.
 Somewhere distant in our minds.
 A place you can return to – a memory.
 Past that never seems to go
 Away – a dream
 That’s [sic] strangely joined to the future
 Something passing me by – I try to hold
 The hand of a ghost – something – or Someone who yet has not died
 A mental web – of past – present And future.³⁹⁵

The poetry is among Emin’s many text works, her words suggests the mind also matters to her, and because she holds words dear, it is about her intellect; creating text is creating and developing something within her subjectivity and agency, suggesting the mind is as important as the body, and that they live as one to convey her subjectivity. It further suggests, if you want to communicate with me speak to my mind and not solely my body, and that she cannot separate them. In an interview with Griselda Brown in 2016, Emin said: ‘lots of women want to redefine how they look, and I want to redefine my brain.’³⁹⁶ Emin’s early work develops a process of actualising her subjectivity in her ontological identification relationship practice, drawing on her

³⁹³ Ibid.

³⁹⁴ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, pp. xii-xiii

³⁹⁵ Tracey Emin, *This is Another Place* (Oxford: Modern Art Oxford, 2002), no page number.

³⁹⁶ Tracey Emin, interview with Griselda Murray Brown, Hong Kong, *Financial Times*, 2016.

memory, exposing the uncanny that has haunted her since childhood; she is protesting against the lack of women's subjectivity by performativity.

Terribly Wrong 1997

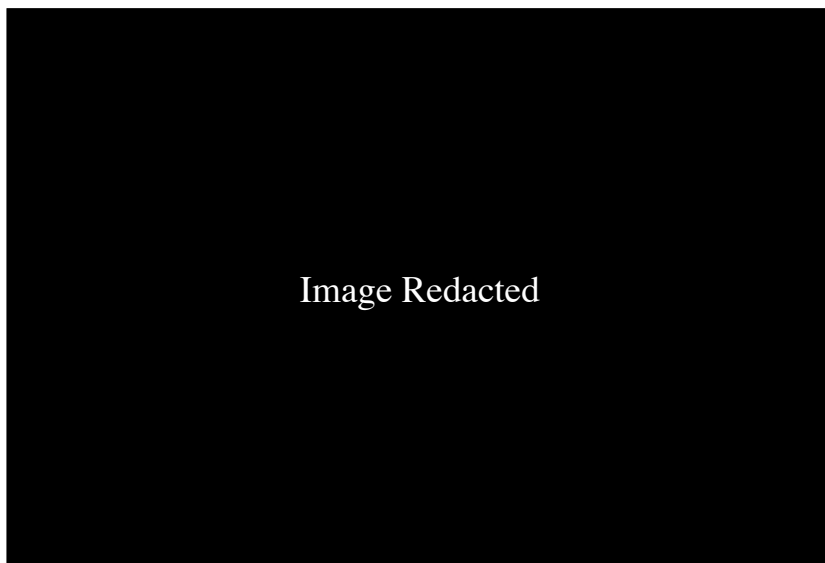


Fig. 2.20: Tracey Emin *Terribly Wrong* 1997, Tate Collection
Monoprint on paper, London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Emin's monoprint, a line drawing accompanied by text written backwards '*gnorw ylbirreT* with *SOMETHINGS WRONG*'. The distorted female figure laying down spaceless, faceless, with a glimpse of a head, legs spread apart and one knee up as if in pain, with some kind of fluid dripping down from her vagina suggesting bleeding. From a surface reading it could be a miscarriage, abortion, period, or corporeal malfunction as the title suggests *Terribly Wrong* 1997; Emin here not only narrates bodily experience, but a week of hell in 1992.³⁹⁷ During a course of a week Emin broke up with her boyfriend, had an abortion, and underwent serious dental surgery (lack of dental

³⁹⁷ Tracey Emin, *Strangeland* (Lodnon: Hodder and Stoughton, 2005), p. 56.

care caused the loss some of her teeth since a teenager). Furthermore, a painful memory of her two abortions, but she said she had no choice; no one wants to have an abortion.³⁹⁸

In *Strangeland* 2005, Emin devotes a whole section on how to avoid an unwanted pregnancy, 'The Proper Steps for Dealing with an Unwanted Pregnancy', Emin exhibits what she wished she knew since a teenager, thus perhaps another teenager may benefit from the exposure of her experience,³⁹⁹ but controversy was huge from many parents across the UK. She confronts the reality of her life in this situation and confronts the audience in turn with that reality; not turning away, not judging, but looking. Yet while *Somethings Wrong* is a stark image of her abortion and as such is a revelatory piece about her life, Laura Smith makes a crucial point that this and other stories 'have been confessed already and many times over.'⁴⁰⁰ Again, if confession is an act of truthful admission, then according to Smith this is not a confession because it is 'an ongoing act with slightly different iterations.'⁴⁰¹ Confessional art is a misleading label for Emin's work.

These works reveal Emin's subjectivity/desire for her performativity to be visible, to question by exposing all, to draw our attention to tragedy, corporeal malfunctions, and deep emotional ambivalence of life, which necessitates performing visibly. Emin remarks:

I'm still asking the same questions that I was asking in 1994, but I may be getting different answers. Things recur. I might have thought something at 20 but I'll think about it differently...⁴⁰²

³⁹⁸ Ibid.

³⁹⁹ Ibid. p. 147-165.

⁴⁰⁰ Laura Lake Smith, 'Telling stories: performing authenticity in the confessional art of Tracey Emin,' *Rethinking History*, vol. 21 (2), 2017, pp. 296-309.

⁴⁰¹ Ibid.

⁴⁰² Tracey Emin interview with Arifa Akbar 2010. *A Retrospective of Tracey Emin's Monoprints of 1990s* (The Royal Academy London, 2010).

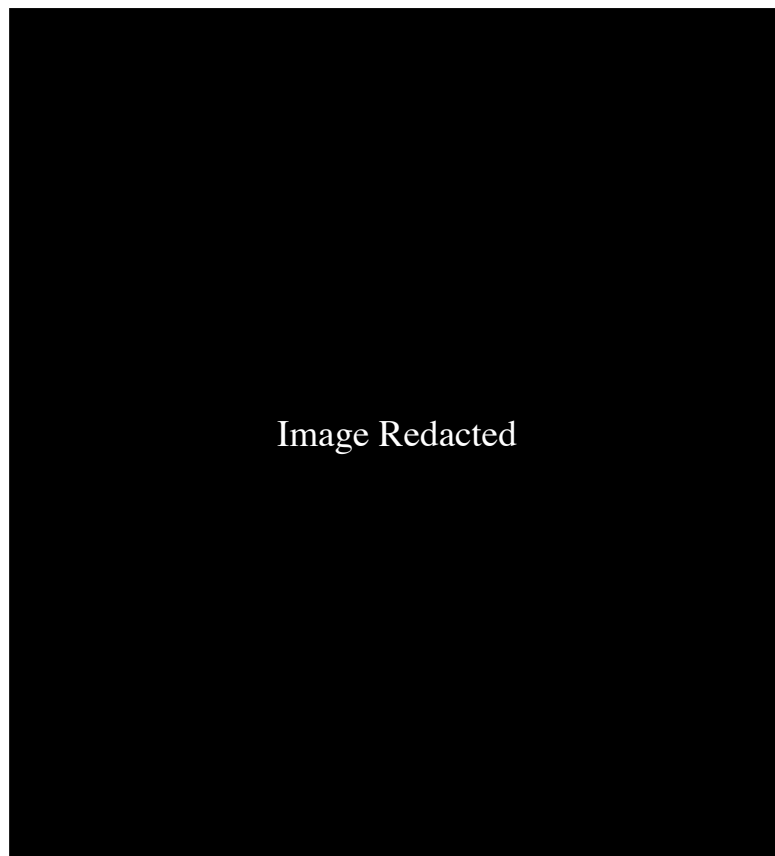
Something Really Terrible 2001

Fig. 2.21: Tracey Emin, *Something Really Terrible* 2001
White Cube, London.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

A blanket as artwork follows the tradition of tapestries and images on silk, cotton, and other cloths. But when Emin intertwined her blankets with human experience and memory, she brings our attention to something naked, close and personal, as Emin says, a ‘blueprint’ of what it is to be human.⁴⁰³ Lamoni comments, Emin says that blankets are for the protection of someone’s body, and as such function ‘as simulacrum of the naïve and cheerful world of childhood, confirming their infantile connotations as well. But this imaginary world is immediately disrupted by the text

⁴⁰³ In the context of an exhibition of *Cloth and Memory*, Dormor observes: ‘As the cloths that surround, support, and secrete us throughout our lives carry the stains, marks and messiness of lives lived, loves loved, and fears feared, so they become a mapping of human history, a blueprint of what it is to be human’ (p. 93). Catherine Dormor, ‘Cloth and Memory,’ *Textile* vol. 11, part 1, 2013, pp. 88–93.

grafted onto the blankets... the reassuring and 'virginal' technique of weaving or quilting covers up, and then uncovers, the narrative of aberrant violence.'⁴⁰⁴ Emin's appliquéd blankets feature her practice in multimedia. They articulate a subjectivity that contains longing and a critique of patriarchy in her experience. The practice of embroidery or tapestry is historically dominated by women and has been seen as the site for the contestation of patriarchy.⁴⁰⁵ In the same trajectory as *Terribly Wrong* 1997 (Fig: 2.20), is *Something Really Terrible* 2001 (Fig: 2.21), another embroidery created from Emin's experience of loss, abortion, and heartbreak. The words *You Forgot To Kiss My Soul* at the bottom of the blanket can speak the past and future, she is also talking about lost relationships.⁴⁰⁶ The themes that Emin repeats in exhibitions such as *Those Who Suffered Love* 2009, *Walking with Tears* 2010, *Love is What You Want* 2011, and *The Last Adventure Is You* 2014, are crucial as many artist attempts to capture a feeling from within, an expression that has not been heard, hence she endeavors to repeat them beautifully on a blanket, paper, canvas, or neon, words that mean something inside of her, while it is hauntingly traumatic, she is nevertheless actualising her female subjectivity with performativity.

Emin performs her work through drawing them out of her reflections, this work *No More Time* 2009, shows a figure in suffering mode, looking disheveled, with a sketch in thin lines to suggest a figure that appears to have disintegrated legs and no face, bending over as if in pain, connected to the work *No, No, No* 2009 below, a quick sketch of another moment gone wrong. Emin emphasises:

Love rarely comes easily and if it does, it usually goes quite quickly. And there is death, and loss, which at some point in our lives we all have to deal with. I'm constantly fighting with the notion of love and passion. Love, sex, lust – in my heart and mind there is always some battle, some kind of conflict.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ Giulia Lamoni, 'Philomela as Metaphor: Sexuality, Pornography, and Seduction in the Textile Worlds of Tracey Emin and Ghada Amer,' p. 185, in Isabelle Loring Wallace and Jennie Hirsch (eds.) *Contemporary Art and Classical Myth* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 175–98.

⁴⁰⁵ Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011).

⁴⁰⁶ Michael Corris, Jennifer Doyle, Ali Smith, *Tracey Emin, Love is What You Want* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2011).

⁴⁰⁷ Tracey Emin Interview with White Cube Gallery (Exhibition Catalogue 2009).

No More Time 2009

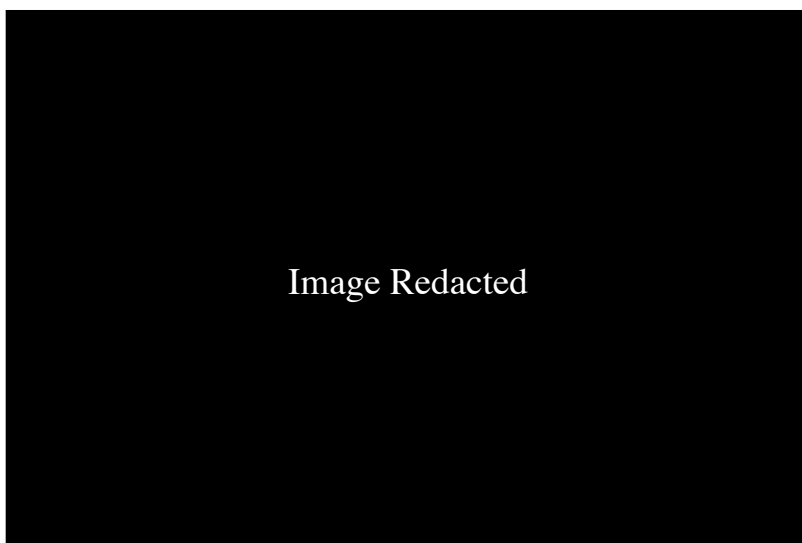


Fig. 2.22, Tracey Emin, *No More Time* 2009, Embroidered Cotton
22.5 x 26.4 C print Photograph: Stephen White, White Cube, London.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

NO NO NO 2009

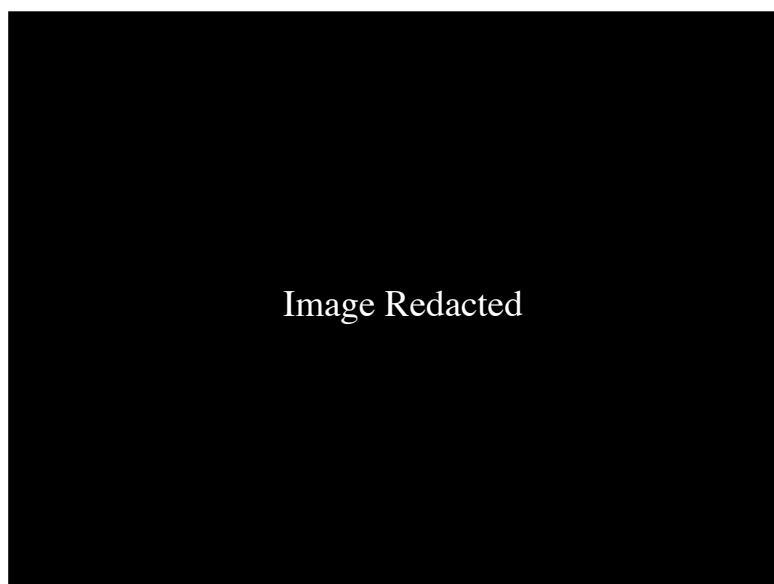


Fig. 2.23: Tracey Emin, *NO NO NO* 2009
Monoprint on Fabric 19.5 x 23 cm
Photograph: Stephen White, White Cube collection.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

He walked along with me. We passed the clock tower and turned left into the high street. He slipped his arm round my shoulders and said, 'How about a New Year kiss?' We got to the corner of Burton's shoe shop and started snogging. He put his hand down my top, at the same time pushing me against the wall. He pulled my skirt up. I began to worry. Everyone knew he had broken in girls before and I didn't want it to happen to me. I said, 'No. Get off, please.' He pulled me down the alley and pushed me to the ground. As I lay on my back worrying about my new blue coat, he pushed his fingers up between my legs – and rammed himself into me. I was Crying. His lips were pressed against mine, but I was motionless, like a small corpse. He grunted and I knew it was over. He got up, I just lay there on the ground, my tights round my ankles. The clock was striking twelve. As he walked away he turned and said, 'I've always wanted to do it to you. I like your mouth.' When I got in, my mum said, 'Tracey, what's wrong with you?' I showed her my coat, the dirt and the stains, 'I'm not a virgin anymore.' She didn't call the police or make a fuss. She just washed my coat and everything carried on as normal, as though nothing had happened. But for me, my childhood was over, I had become conscious of my physicality, aware of my presence and open to the ugly truths of the world. At the age of thirteen, I realised that there was a danger in innocence and beauty, and I could not live both.⁴⁸

Emin describes this in *Strangeland* 2005, to give a wider spectrum to her experience of this rape. Images such as *No No No* 2009, (Fig: 2.23), has a chilling effect when we connect this image with not only painful experiences when she created this image, but the moments of the above event. The story of rape at thirteen years old when she said *no, no, no*, but the intruder and rapist ignored her *no, no, no*. Here Emin enacts a performative gesture with her body in a protective position, with suggestions of arms folded across her chest, legs held together, grieving in a sitting upright position, to make sense of what had happened to her, to understand a painful moment. Be it her abortions, sexual abuse, or the rape, melancholia still underlines this naked self-portrait with text, as if the image of the figure is not enough, it necessitates text to help her speak, the *no, no,*

⁴⁸ Emin, *Strangeland*, pp. 24, 141.

no, for a considerable length of time. This small monoprint questions the lack of female subjectivity, links with an abuse of female subjectivity. It yells her desire to protest against erosion of her female subjectivity; the experience of rape, abjection, abortion, poverty, debt, and the lack, but as if no one can hear, so she must repeat her voice, her message, her subjectivity with bodies exhibited ubiquitously.⁴⁰⁹ Being rape at age thirteen in an alleyway of Margate by someone she knew, precipitate our attention not only an assault on Emin as a teenager, but to a wider concern with the lack of female subjectivity from an early age.⁴¹⁰ Emin attempts to reconcile this with performativity within her ontological identification relationship, where she confronts, feels safe, and being creative, and the personal refracts as political message, there is no political words, she only draws from her personal reflections.⁴¹¹ Apart from this, Emin is also in a moment of grief for her past, which is not dissimilar to Chengyao's grief for her mother and her past.

Again, the discussion about authenticity and repetition of themes is not logocentric but aesthetic subjectivity. Maya Murray takes this scene and explores how women articulate rape in the face of state non-engagement and how work such as Emin's can articulate rape in the face of state non-engagement and how this work can offer ways for lawyers and law makers to understand this trauma and its revelation. In a study, Murray argues that Emin suffers from Rape Trauma Syndrome and that this is a major event in her life that has driven much of her art practice.⁴¹² At first Murray thought Emin's accounts and artwork to be chaotic but eventually found themes emerging, such as an imaginary court in which her rapist and others who had sexually assaulted her are prosecuted, and she frequently returns to the theme of sexual assault both in her work and poetry, her humour being, thinks Murray, a protective gesture: 'Once we understand Emin's occasional lack of skeptical self-protection, we can understand the behavior of the women in the RTS cases.'⁴¹³ Kokoli likewise has discussed Emin's account of sexual abuse in her review of *Strangelands*, making a distinction between 'Emin' as the narrator of the text and the historical person who had been subject to this abuse. Autobiography and fiction come to be modes of world

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 141.

⁴¹⁰ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born: Genesis of a New Human Being* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p 11: 'Unfortunately, all that does not yet help much the subjectivity of our newborn to develop by taking into account what it initially experienced.' This refers to repression of female subjectivity.

⁴¹¹ Doyle, J. The Effect of Intimacy. In *The Art of Tracey Emin*; Thames & Hudson: London, UK, 2002; pp. 102–118.

⁴¹² Yxta Maya Murray. 'Rape Trauma, the State, and the Art of Tracey Emin,' *California Law Review*, Vol. 100 (6), 2012, pp. 1631-1707, 1709-1710. RTS means Rape Trauma State.

⁴¹³ Ibid, p. 1684. Also see, Sally Munt 'Queer Attachments: The Cultural Politics of Shame' (Queer Interventions 18 Dec 2007).

making but which nevertheless convey a reality.⁴⁴ Fantome similarly discusses Emin's rape and makes the point that through art Emin achieves a kind of catharsis over this issue: 'Thus, for Emin, the process of disclosure, either through the creation of her work or the associated broader exploration arising through subsequent interviews, has cathartic benefits.'⁴⁵

Works such as *No No No* and *No More Time* 2009 evoke Emin's bodily experience and communicate an actualisation of her subjectivity to voice her memories of the pain of her earlier life. This personal story we can take as an index of wider British society, a society that is divided: on the one hand promoting a persona of a Nanny state, while on the other poverty that is right in front of our eyes. As for Chengyao in our conversation in Beijing:

HCY: Some... Those that contain my own words, those are believable. The thing is, I don't want to talk about my past works these days. I feel... I want to treat them... How should I say this... I'll have to think up a lot just to recall them... It's like chewing gum. The flavor is all gone, but now you're asking me to continue to chew on it still, you know? I've already spat out that chewing gum!

HCY: Really, some times, it's quite tough to talk about these older works.

KK: Is that why it is important to get the truth?

HCY: This truth is relative. And the world is ever-changing. Nothing is ever purely black or white.

KK: Why is it relative?

HCY: Time, too, is relative. I remember Einstein once said, if you sit beside a beautiful woman for an hour, you'll feel that time passes very quickly. But if you put your hand into the fire, you won't be able to stand it even for a few seconds.

KK: Are you in the process of discovering the truth?

HCY: Yes, I suppose... There's not much of truth or anything, anyway. I think it's just us humans attempting to understand this world in their own way. Therefore, I think rather than attempting to reach this answer/conclusion, it's more important to just open up one's mind.⁴⁶

Chengyao opens herself in her work, in *On The Way* 2002 (Fig: 2.24), she stands naked in a grotto painted with red from a religious offering practice, as if to give herself to a place beyond this world. She delineates her way of making sense of life, by exploring her ontological

⁴⁴ Alexandra Kokoli, Review of Strangelands, *The F-Word: Contemporary UK Feminism*, 4 June 2006.

⁴⁵ Christine Fantome, 'Articulating Authenticity through Artifice: The Contemporary Relevance of Tracey Emin's Confessional Art.' *Social Semiotics* vol. 18 (2), 2008, pp. 223–36.

⁴⁶ He Chengyao interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016. Part of the transcript from the interview, see appendix.

identification relationship in performativity mode of being. In *On The Way* 2002 (Fig: 2.24) her naked body is partly painted red with her face in darkness, the hidden face, which intentionally suggests it is her Chinese body as a self-portrait but it could also be anyone, voicing women necessitates a safe space, they are often invisible and hidden alive in graves, lacking individuality of female subjectivity. She also unveiled an ancient traditional symbol that links the cave to femininity, the earth belongs to women, parallel to Duchamp's *Etant Donnés* 1966, Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine Du Monde* 1866, Francis Bacon's faceless bodies, or Emin's faceless bodies.

***On the Way* 2002**

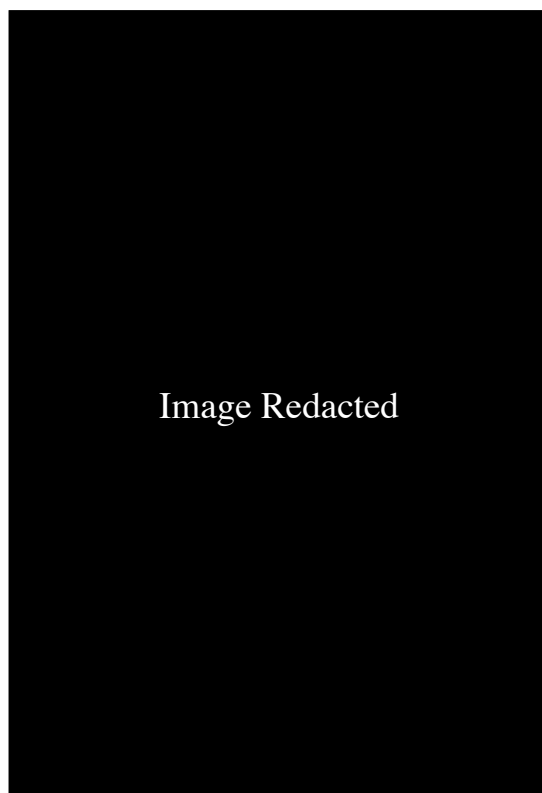


Fig. 2.24: He Chengyao, *On the Way* 2002
Performance, Mountain Cave, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

This also means the cave is a sacred cave, a receptacle within which Chengyao stands naked, establishing a link between her and the earth of China, which the red symbolically posits.

This cave reminds me of Plato's cave in western thinking, which is the place of delusion and darkness, in China caves usually symbolise a bridge that we cross from this world to the next, and even our heritage travels: the place one goes to for solace and peace or even death. Chengyao's face is unseen, out of sight, suggests a lack of subjectivity, again similar to Emin's faceless bodies.⁴¹⁷ The lack of subjectivity is an erosion of female subjectivity. Similar to *Of Other Spaces* 2004 (Fig: 2.25-2.26), Chengyao walks around in circles, with a message of bondage and oppression of corporeal movements in a patriarchal society. The uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity of Emin and Chengyao is performativity, with personal thoughts and narrative of corporeal pain, suffering, and abuse, which refracts their subjectivity as political in this first aspect of their subjectivity. They identify their subjectivity with their work; the flow of subjectivity (X) and the flow of artist's materials (Y) intersects as artwork (XY) narrates a critique of a global society, of the female lack: in love, in subjectivity, in freedom. Emin and Chengyao's different childhoods and adult experiences and cultural formations convey complex societies with similarities of uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity. Juxtaposing their work has evinced a global female aesthetic subjectivity filled with protest against the lack of female subjectivity with performativity as their first aspect of subjectivity in their ontological identification relationship. This leads me to their second aspect of subjectivity, visibility of subjectivity in chapter three.

⁴¹⁷ Tracey Emin, *The Last Great Adventure is You* (London: White Cube, 2014).

Of Other Spaces, 2004

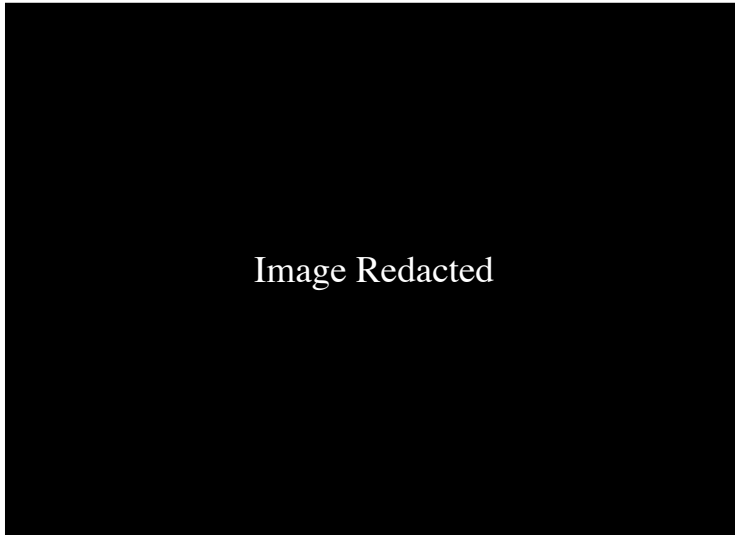


Fig. 2.25: He Chengyao, *Of Other Spaces*, 2004,
5-Open Air Performance, Art Festival Performance Photograph, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

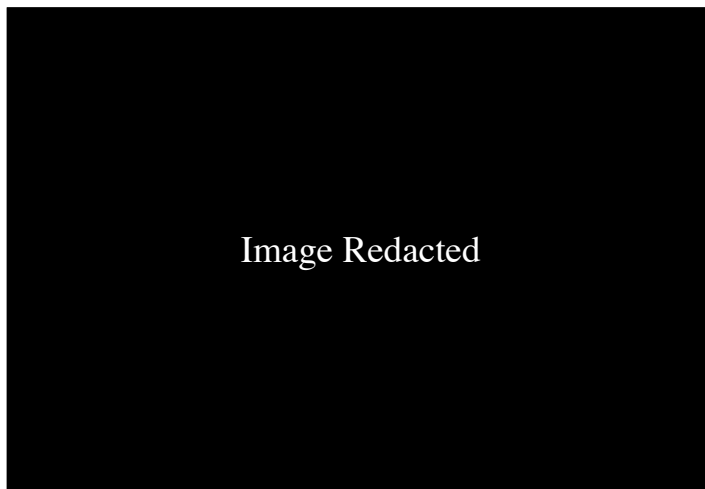


Fig. 2.26: He Chengyao, *Of Other Spaces*, 2004,
5-Open Air Performance, Art Festival Performance Photograph, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Chapter 3 – Visibility of Subjectivity

I feel that for humans, from the moment we are born till the moment we die, our bodies are being restrained on many fronts – from our culture, our society, even our morals... These things place a lot of restrictions on our bodies. I myself would like my body to become, how should I say it... One that has no such restrictions. I want my body to have freedom. That is not to say that a nude body is a free body. It's more than that. This kind of freedom, it's from the exterior to the interior, from surface appearance to one's internal, state of mind.⁴⁸

He Chengyao's quote above is precisely the sentiment her work attempts to draw our attention to. Chapter two illustrated Emin and Chengyao's performativity as the first aspect of their subjectivity in their ontological identification relationship. Performativity entails visibility, which will be the focus of this chapter. Emin and Chengyao's visibility within a global framework illustrate how and why their subjectivity attracts all the complexities of their flow of subjectivity (X) interacts with the flow of artists' material (Y) and synthesises to produce artwork (XY). The three aspects of their subjectivity are reflected in each of the artworks; my task is to explicate each aspect, which is interconnected with each of the other aspects within their actualisation process of subjectivity, and each aspect necessitates a chapter to convey a deeper understanding of their aesthetic female subjectivity. It is problematic to read Emin or Chengyao from only one aspect or perspective, because as soon as one aspect is viewed, another aspect is still evolving itself resulting in contradiction. While this thesis does not attempt to answer or resolve contradictions in their art practice, it interprets what underlines their work. The last chapter revealed an ontological identification relationship interaction, reflecting three aspects of subjectivity. Investigating through a historical, philosophical, and feminist lens, with their work and interviews as empirical data, has also led to Visibility as the second aspect of their subjectivity.

Emin or Chengyao's ontology of being entails exposing corporeal significance uncompromisingly, and this attracts not only the surface remarks of artwork from taste to

⁴⁸ He Chengyao interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

misunderstanding, but deep doubts of their art practice when becoming visible. In their visibility, Emin and Chengyao encounter global art practice and a range of response to their work from laudation to criticism and from acceptance to rejection. Both artists witnessed world events developing since 1989: the changes around the world, such as the celebration of the demolition of the Berlin Wall and the atrocity in Tiananmen Square, June 4th. In China artists were prosecuted as a consequence of art practice or raising awareness of freedom of speech; some are still suffering imprisonment in the 2010s. They have no access to protection nor the human rights to explain themselves, or to be defended by a lawyer if lawyers do not concur with communist policies. In the midst of this history some artists continued their art practice such as Chengyao and her confederates. By the 2000s, the work of Chengyao in China and Emin in the UK participated in global female artists' discourse with their female subjectivity, and were invited to exhibit from all over the world, such as Asia, Europe, and America. The history of the female self in artwork reads as self articulation and moving from the invisible to the visible through a process of revelation and actualisation to exhibitions, which is female artist's actualising their subjectivity. To borrow from Butler, this is the exploration of artwork through desire/subjectivity,⁴¹⁹ and in Irigaray's terms, to give birth to oneself, and the affirmation of women's subjectivity that is part of the very structure of life.⁴²⁰ This subjectivity, in Butler's terms, is identified as 'I desire x'. To understand the process whereby women's subjectivity comes into view from invisibility to visibility, therefore demonstrates the complex annihilation of subjectivity to actualisation of subjectivity.

Part I of this chapter will discuss *Becoming Visible*, addressing Emin and Chengyao's visibility and invisibility, part II will discuss their *Ontology of Being*, and finally, part III will address the *Doubts of Art Practice* that relates to Emin and Chengyao: the process whereby female subjectivity comes to visibility and meets aesthetics.

⁴¹⁹ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

⁴²⁰ Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu Nous* (London: Routledge, 2007).

Part I – Becoming Visible

One of the key factors in understanding Emin and Chengyao has been the wider cultural and political context, especially the events of China in 1989 that affected the rest of the world, and where artists seek refuge to survive prosecution. In 2008 we saw China in full glory during the Olympic games, where Ai Weiwei and his confederates contributed to the creation of the Nest Stadium, Beijing, with lauded reviews of China's fine artistry and culture that not only showed their cultural athletes but Chinese dancing and calligraphy. But since 2014, Chinese artists contributed to the solidarity events such as the Umbrella movement in Hong Kong or to creating artworks that critiqued the lack of freedom, as we saw with male artists Ai Weiwei, Gui Guangxia, Cheng Guang, and Wang Zang, for example, who were prosecuted in China not only for creating works that were political, but for supporting the Umbrella movement where thousands took to the streets of Hong Kong to protest against non-democracy.⁴²¹ Another event was July 13th 2017, when the contemporary writer Liu Xiabo passed away in hospital at the age of sixty-one without humanitarian support or liberty. His voice and thoughts were oppressed since June 4th 1989 in the communist regime, with strict surveillance by the prison guards and the state police; they charged him with crimes that Western law would see as a violation of his human rights. When, throughout his imprisonment, Western neighbours requested Liu's release, even presenting him with a Nobel Prize 2010, each request was denied. By not releasing the literature scholar Liu Xiabo, the Chinese government demonstrated how they object to interference from foreign neighbours, as they are against interference with the governance of global neighbours but see themselves as contributors of worldly concerns (but was Tibet an exception to the rule?).⁴²² This could be interpreted in the grand scheme of things as rejecting a colonial culture since the Opium War that still looms large in Chinese history. When Liu Xiaobo was permitted to write again from prison, he wrote to his wife Liu Xia:

Sweetheart ... I am sentenced to a visible prison while you are waiting in an invisible one. Your love is sunlight that transcends prison walls and bars, stroking every inch of my skin, warming my cell, letting me maintain my inner calm,

⁴²¹ Gui Guangxia, Cheng Guang, and Wang Zang, interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

⁴²² Yu Jie, *Steel Gate To Freedom: The Life Of Liu Xiaobo*, trans. HC Hsu (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

magnanimous and bright, so that every minute in prison is full of meaning. Given your love, sweetheart, I look forward to my country being a land of free expression, where ... all views will be spread in the sunlight for people to choose without fear. I hope to be the last victim. I am a hard stone in the wilderness, putting up with the pummelling of raging storms, and too cold for anyone to dare touch. But my love is hard, sharp, and can penetrate any obstacles. Even if I am crushed into powder, I will embrace you with the ashes.⁴²³

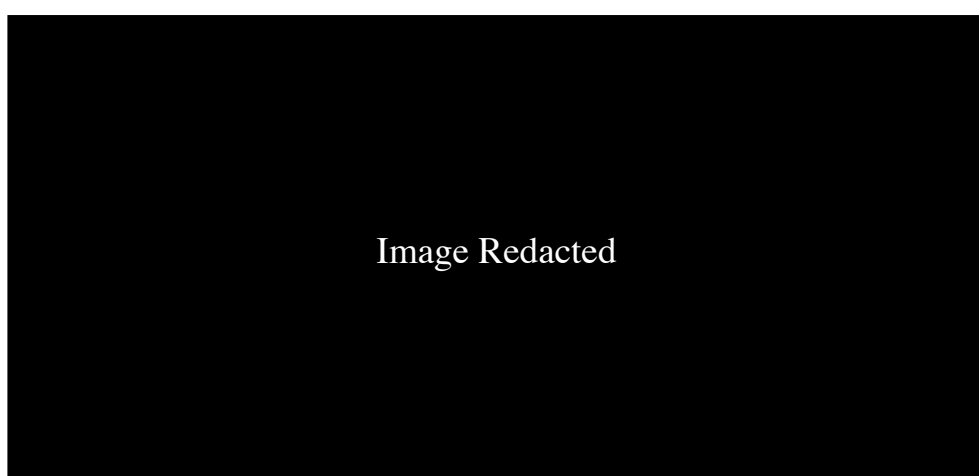


Fig. 3.1: Pen International, *Liu Xiaobo and Liu Xia*, Poster to Freedom 2008-2017.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

This poignant letter conveys the grief and bitterness of China's citizens. Liu's experience divulged the cost of visibility for ethical solidarity with fellow artists of China. These events cascaded fear throughout China and affect artists today. Chengyao is not protected from the effect of oppression in China. Her attempt to produce work that questions the lack of female subjectivity has come to a halt when she retreated to a monastery in India to become a nun in 2017.

Lamentably, we see the Marxist dialectical master and slave enactment in China, the proletariats were from rural provinces of China, such as Mao, Deng and their confederates who became the new Masters, which in turn oppressed the very citizens who aided them to achieve their ideology. Marx assumed and transformed Hegel's Master-Slave dialectic into a theory of

⁴²³ Scott Simon, 'Sunlight That Transcends Prison Walls,' Liu Xiaobo, Letter to his wife Liu Xia, her translation (National Public Radio Oct 9th 2010). See also a different translation in Yu Jie, *Steel Gate To Freedom*, p. 164 -165.

class struggle; he predicted the class of the bourgeoisie would be overthrown by the proletarians,⁴²⁴ and to some extent this is evident in China with Mao and communism, but the proletarians turned into masters of slaves.⁴²⁵

Artists in China still have to function within a strict regime intolerant of criticism. Visibility has both negative and positive properties for artists and intellectuals in China, as in the case of Liu Xiaobo. As Chengyao said: ‘as long as we do not throw eggs at them (the government) it will be ok’. While Chengyao is subversive, she realises the limits of reality, there is a wider impact, from the behavior of people in a communist society, as Singer says, Marx omitted ‘human nature’. Similar to most dictatorships, art is used as a propaganda. The Chinese Communist Party has had an ambivalent attitude towards contemporary Chinese art, on the one hand being cautious of it in case it is politically critical, and cracking down on it after the Tiananmen square protests of June 4th 1989, while on the other welcoming the contribution of Chinese artists who can profit from the global commercial art scene, and so undertaking a political recuperation of contemporary art.⁴²⁶ This means Chengyao’s work is at stake of losing momentum as a performance artist in this climate. Her aesthetics subjectivity has been uncompromising when performance art was possible, her work was not only a desire for harmony but also to fulfill a responsibility to her heritage. This became a kind of calling or vocation – to actualise, to reveal, to understand, and to rescue – not only for her mother or grandmother as she claims, but also for herself who is directly affected by the politics of today, even global art establishments lack the power or law to protect her expressions.

Chinese history promulgates a rejection of foreign influence and yet China welcomes trade, in a pragmatic and self-directing manner. Mao adopted a Western ideology of Marxism and Leninism to change China⁴²⁷ and yet the dictatorship of China over its citizens has not changed since Mao’s death, artists had to build a new alliance in the global network with the West. Engaging with the West was encouraged by Deng Xiaoping when he became leader of China in 1978, and this network became the backbone of contemporary art in China, but in 1989 Deng, at

⁴²⁴ Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto* (London: Penguin, 2015).

⁴²⁵ Michael Dillon, *China: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2012), pp. 200-203. Also see Dikötter, *Mao’s Great Famine*.

⁴²⁶ Paul Gladston, ‘Somewhere (and Nowhere) between modernity and tradition: towards a critique of international and indigenous perspectives on the significance of contemporary Chinese art,’ pp. 11-12, *Tate Papers*, vol. 21, 2014, pp. 1-10.

⁴²⁷ Dillon, *China, a Modern History*, p. 171.

eighty-four years old, was fearful and his priorities were to protect communist ideology, commanding, in agreement with the government, the oppression of student's protest on June 4^a 1989.⁴²⁸ In 20th April 1989, Deng was asked to revise a funeral speech for his colleague Hu Yaobang's death, but apparently in an ornery mood of old age while 'Reviewing Zhao Ziyang's draft of funeral speech on April 20, while student demonstrators filled the capital's square, Deng deleted the phrase "great Marxist". Making a sour face, he said, "there's already too much about his merits...When I die, don't call me that either.'" ⁴²⁹ Deng attempted to renounce Marxism for Chinese communism. But despite Deng's openness, the June 4^a tragedy still occurred with his approval. Interestingly Deng was born in Sichuan Province and studied in Chongqing, which parallels Chengyao's background.⁴³⁰ China evolved with the growth of trade in capitalism, and Chinese artists attempt to reconcile political disease with their art practice during the 1990s. Deng passed away in February 1997.

Events such as Liu Xiaobo or June 4^a become international, and the nuanced relationship between China and the West impacted upon artists around the world. While it was not only artists who suffered the tragedy, they are conscious of the political stipulation, and attempt to highlight oblivion. Art practice became further uncompromising visibly, with alliances locally and globally, contemporary art practice such as the Stars and the '85 movement grew as mentioned in the introduction and the first chapter, with a hybrid voice in both the West and China; when an international audience grew, female artists were invited to exhibit abroad.⁴³¹ Thus, female artistic practices developed globally in the 1990s and 2000s, and both Emin and Chengyao exhibit their performance artworks in the US, Europe, and Asia.⁴³² Their visibility further contributes to feminist thought globally.⁴³³ The cultural formation of Chengyao in China and Emin in Britain are distinct, but both cross a cultural boundary through art practice in an existential female aesthetic subjectivity; their work not only constituted their local audience but a global visibility. A global

⁴²⁸ Alexander V. Pantsov, Steven I. Levine, *Deng Xiaoping: A Revolutionary Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 406-409.

⁴²⁹ Ibid, p. 408.

⁴³⁰ David Goodman, *Deng Xiaoping and the Chinese Revolution A Political Biography* (London: Routledge, 1994)

⁴³¹ On the Chinese domestic avant-garde, in contrast to those abroad, see Wu Hung, 'A Case of Being "Contemporary": Conditions, Spheres, and Narratives of Contemporary Chinese Art,' pp. 399-402; Melissa Chiu and Benjamin Genocchio (eds.), *Contemporary Art in Asia* (Boston: MIT, 2011), pp. 391-410.

⁴³² David Clarke, 'Contemporary Asian Art and the West,' p. 350, Jonathan Harris (ed.), *Globalization and Contemporary Art* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 245-52.

⁴³³ Ibid.

art practice that only privileged male artists until recent history is also a challenge for both Emin and Chengyao as their art practices became highly visible in the 2000s. They face not only politics or anti politics but also the lack of visibility for female artists globally: their personal artworks drew attention to the invisibility of female aesthetic subjectivity in the history of art.

Their personal naked self-portraits are in contrast to the artwork of the Guerrilla Girls with gorilla masks of the 80s, who visibly protested directly against discrimination in the forms of sexism, racism, and oppression, their tireless work has impacted the world of Feminism in the arts.⁴⁴ But wearing masks avoids being visible of who one is, their faces are invisible, so they continued the notion of being invisible – not being seen was to object to invisibility. In the 2000s Emin and Chengyao uncompromisingly became naked with a visible face, to perform who they are, and their intentions were refracted from exposing personal experiences, as extrapolated from their interviews. They are nevertheless interpreted as protestors in opposite sides of the world; with their personal history against discrimination similar to the Guerrilla Girls, sexism, racism, oppression, the lack of female subjectivity against the backdrop of patriarchy. The issue is that the Guerrilla Girls' intention carried through to expression in their masks, is not performativity of who they are, they are hidden behind gorilla masks.

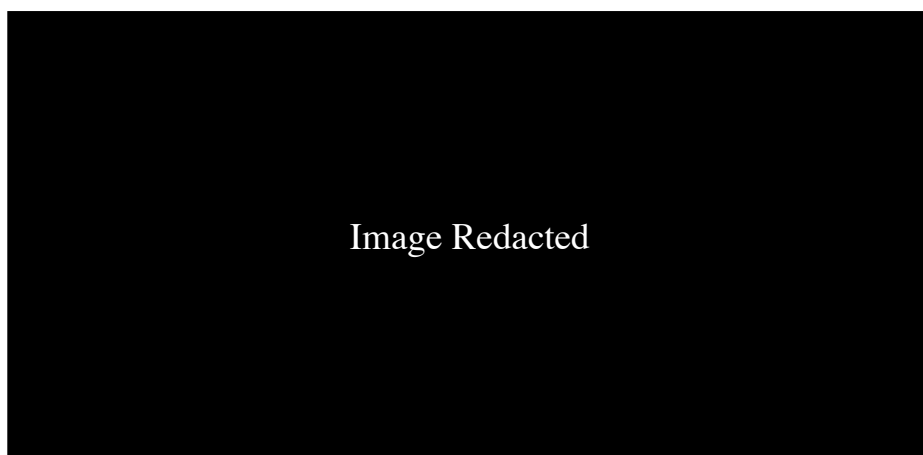


Fig. 3.2: Guerrilla Girls, 'Do Women Have to Be Naked To Get Into Met Museum?' Poster, 1989. Tate Collection, London.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

⁴⁴ Katy Deepwell (ed.), *Feminist Art Manifestos: An Anthology* (London: KP Press, 2014), The Guerrilla Girls: 'The Guerrilla Girls' Guide to Behaving Badly (which you have to do most of the time in the world as we know it), School of The Institute of Chicago: Commencement Address May 22nd 2010. Also see Take Modern Collection, London.

The composition and exposure of Emin and Chengyao's personal history being visible within a cultural history of Eastern and Western aesthetic subjectivity not only exemplifies a process of becoming a female artist in a male-dominated art world, but also creates a didactic atmosphere to suggest that their subjectivity can come to an ownership of its own when it is visible. They attempt to avoid being abraded by a patriarchal system, and yet still maintain a wish to collaborate with male artists, even though their view of our world as female artists is different to that of their male contemporaries; they see their female body as a woman, and not as men see it or conceive of it as Emin and Chengyao attempt to draw our attention to, and also many feminist scholars' attempt to do the same.

In *Gender Trouble*, Butler suggests: For feminist theory, the development of a language that fully or adequately represents women has seemed necessary to foster the political visibility of women.⁴³⁵ Through the political, Butler claims that it is necessary for women to be visible, although for Butler there is a gender analysis that shows the very category of 'woman' as gendered has been historically constructed over time.⁴³⁶ Jones' disidentification as a process based on visibility and knowable is linked to a politics of identification and counter identification, often through queer theory. She writes: 'It also points to the shift I am tracing, and thus to some degree creating/reiterating, in this book from an identity politics based on visibility and knowable, singular categories of identity to a politics of identification, often charged through queer theory, that allows for ambiguity and confusion but insists upon the role of identification as a process'.⁴³⁷ This again parallels Butler's visibility that is linked to politics and this link between identity politics and visibility is articulated in the work of Chengyao and Emin, albeit, politics refracted from performativity as the first aspect of their subjectivity, and here visibility is the second aspect of their subjectivity. In spite of a rhetoric of equality in the East or West, feminism continues to be secondary on the governmental agenda, for example against a quota system, feminism, or post-feminism.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁵ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, p. 2.

⁴³⁶ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 200–201: 'I have tried to suggest that the identity categories often presumed to be foundational to feminist politics, that is, deemed necessary in order to mobilize feminism as an identity politics, simultaneously work to limit and constrain in advance the very tacit constraints that produce culturally intelligible "sex".'

⁴³⁷ Amelia Jones, *Seeing Differently: A History and Theory Identification and the Visual Arts*. 1st ed. London: Routledge, 2012. p. 12.

⁴³⁸ Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art 1970s–2000s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), p. 352.

Both Emin and Chengyao received polemic critical commentaries on their work locally and internationally, and each country would have international news feeds for a global audience, either on their national newspapers or websites, which constitutes the visibility of being in art practice. Furthermore, the male gaze links to a traditional view of visibility of the female body for voyeuristic practices, such as a model for drawing. The digital space is another global visibility, and they experience an existential passage of a virtual and actual state of being as twenty-first century artists. Global visibility as an artist comes with the territory, exhibitions, travels, and engaging with the public.

In China, Chengyao became visible through performance art in the 2000s; it was a more bearable consequence than the virtues of teaching art and mathematics in schools in the 1990s. With the responsibilities of her son and a mother who was unwell, Chengyao did not take a simple step of being in the art world when she decided to join the stage of performance art. After she graduated from a research degree in Fine Art at CAFA. Creating *Opening the Great Wall* in 2001 (Fig: 2.11), her naked self-portraits became highly visible, attempting to challenge the controversial view of the naked body in China; by using a Western performance art trajectory, she was diving into a deep ocean of polemic criticisms. Her performativity refracted as a critique of the Chinese government and its tradition of female subjectivity. Through performance art she had the opportunity to articulate her thoughts and to voice her concerns. This was an attempt to invite a collective identity of feminist Chinese women through history, although most audiences did not understand why she is actualising her subjectivity, or why she is becoming visible in a global hybrid of a feminist movement, but she was not only performing solely for her mother or grandmother, but also for herself with memories of her familial environment.⁴³⁹ Akin to that of Emin's determination, Chengyao would not have walked semi-naked anywhere if she did not deem the naked female body crucial in art practice; despite criticisms from the public and the government, she or Emin continued a global practice in the 2000s, but Emin was more advanced than Chengyao, six years early to *Opening The Great Wall* 2001, Emin exhibited her tent, *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995, and *My Bed* 1998. While Western culture has created room for feminism to grow, there is dire restriction in China for performance artists.⁴⁴⁰ Perhaps

⁴³⁹ Ibid. Also Wah Man, 'Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: The Case of He Chengyao' pp. 171-190.

⁴⁴⁰ He Chengyao, Yi Fei, interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, 2016.

China has a different agenda for feminism for future generations, as Fortnum points out, to write them 'in' to the story 'for future generations'.⁴⁴¹ Feminism also travels in a futuristic movement of being with society and culture.

Art in China became a hybrid phenomenon, the first Shanghai Biennale was formed in 1996 by the Chinese Ministry of Culture, the Municipal Administration of Shanghai, and the Shanghai Art Museum.⁴⁴² Chinese officials even promoted art as having significant commercial value in the global art market for China, until they realised it was political: the crackdown on Ai Weiwei and Liu Xiaobo is what Chengyao attempts to challenge. Before 2000, Beijing had very few commercial art galleries; by 2000 five galleries had appeared, by 2008 there were three hundred galleries and by 2012 almost eight hundred districts had over two hundred galleries in them.⁴⁴³ Similarly, in Britain, Emin said that there were not enough galleries in the 80s and 90s, not even for male artists who existed for hundreds of years, never mind female artists who were doubted.⁴⁴⁴

When Chengyao performed naked in *Ninety-Nine Needles* (Fig: 3.3) and *Opening the Great Wall* (Fig: 2.11), it attracted shock waves throughout the world, as did Emin's work. For most audiences, ancient acupuncture needles and the Great Wall are two cultural icons that Chengyao's body demonstrated in a Chinese culture of being, she became visible to the world with her naked self-portraits, the self as artwork is visible before the public. The meaning of physical bodies is different in China to the West. Another point is when Susan Mann writes how the Chinese were never particularly interested in the naked body; it was not the naked body that interested them but inner thought and the clothed body, because only the clothed body displays signs of who the person is: gender, status, ethnicity, and work are defined by clothing and badges attached to clothes.⁴⁴⁵ The naked body levels and strips people down to a fundamental structure that is not who they really

⁴⁴¹ Rebecca Fortnum, *Contemporary British Women Artists: In Their Own Words* (London: I.B Tauris 2007), p. viii.

⁴⁴² In 1996 Organiser founded the Shanghai first Biennial. Under the authority of the Chinese Ministry of Culture and the Municipal Administration of Shanghai, the Shanghai Art Museum organized the first Shanghai Biennial in 1996. <http://www.biennialfoundation.org/biennials/shanghai-biennale/>. See Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art 1970s–2000*, p. 11: 'The proliferation of modern and contemporary art has continued to this day, especially after the 2000 Shanghai Biennale which signaled the official acceptance of contemporary art forms.'

⁴⁴³ Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art*, p. 432.

⁴⁴⁴ Tracey Emin Interview with Hardtalk's Stephen Sackur, Margate, May 2012. Also see WACK 'Art and Feminism Revolution', Exhibition, MoMA, and Global Feminism in Brooklyn Museum, New York 2007.

⁴⁴⁵ Susan L. Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 95

are in Chinese thought, which is defined socially by their relationships and where they are placed in the social hierarchy.⁴⁴⁶

As Jullien and Mann suggest, there is little interest in the nude for artists in pre-20th century Chinese artistry; what is relevant and important are clothing, attire, mind, and nature, rather than the beauty of the body as in the West. What is considered oppressive of women in the history of China, is not a nude as in the West but restrictive clothing and above all the binding of feet which, although oppressive to modern sensibilities, was regarded as highly beautiful by both men and women in the 10th century until the early 20th century, a sign of refinement that constricted female movements, but perhaps exemplifies the oppression and controlling movements of female bodies that Chengyao highlights in her work, and feminists argue against today.⁴⁴⁷ In contrast, Chengyao's naked female body was visible to the public, it is viewed in a glocal context still as a taboo, still unwelcome in the twenty-first century. But being seen as a sign of political advocacy of female subjectivity, it is surprising that Chengyao has escaped prosecution by the communist regime; reading in-between the lines in our conversations suggests she has been warned of some danger and threat to her art practice from the government. However, the shock of naked bodies in the public space is no different in any other country.⁴⁴⁸

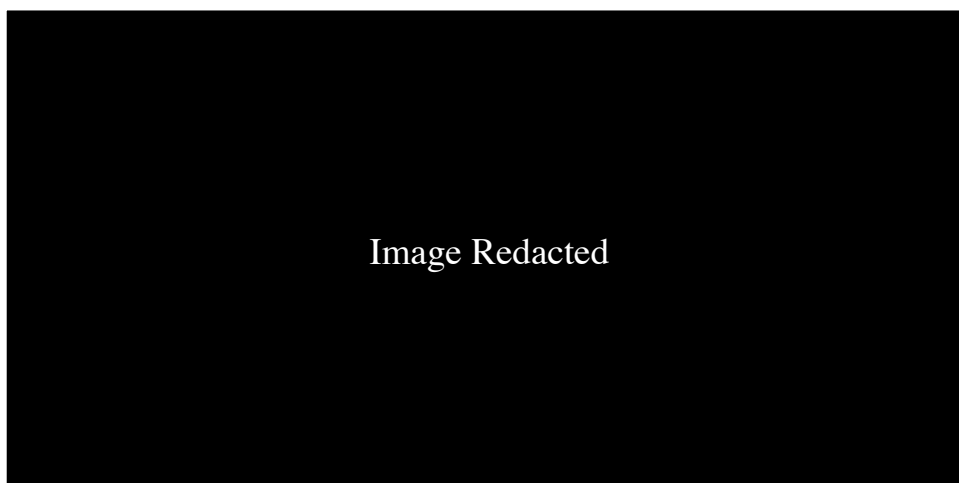


Fig. 3.3: He Chengyao, *Ninety-Nine Needles* 2002, Acupuncture treatment, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

⁴⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁷ Mann, *Gender and Sexuality in Modern Chinese History*, p. 84.

⁴⁴⁸ He Chengyao interview with Leung Kwankiu, on skype 2013.

As for Emin in Britain, the polemic criticism of her work since *My Bed* 1998 is not dissimilar to that of Chengyao in China. Emin does not face the risk of governmental censorship or prosecution, but nevertheless, through the lens of the visibility/invisibility binary, Emin confronted parallel issues as a female artist in the UK, but the difference not only lies in government but cultural heritage and systemic patriarchy; Chengyao lives in a non-democratic system, and Emin lives in a democratic one. The socio-political angle on the visibility/invisibility binary in relation to Emin can again be linked to the actualisation of female subjectivity and the turn to the self, which is a becoming visible of that which had been hitherto not only invisible but also eroded as female artists by their absence. Moreover, the history of art that occluded female artist's subjectivity that is now becoming visible could not have happened without all the waves of feminism to date. Gen Doy situates female subjectivity in Western art history, offering 'a historical view of subjectivity' which highlights subjectivity is something, if not a concrete thing, to be discussed.⁴⁴⁹ Ten years after the Turner Prize 1999, Emin exhibits *Those Who Suffered Love* 2009, London, she said:

My work is a lot more lyrical, it's a lot more feminine, it uses much more poorer materials, and so I decided to use it like a chamber, to express something, so this big room its essentially about what goes on in the mind, and that is why it's a psychic chamber, it's about love.⁴⁵⁰

This exposes a determination or 'vital energy', of Emin's continuation in actualisation of her aesthetic subjectivity, which appertains to invisibility of female artists. The history of art that has excluded female artists is also in danger of ignoring not only the lack the female artists' subjectivity, but the very heart of their own artistic language, an art language that differs from male artists, and we are only perceiving a small glimpse of this in Emin and Chengyao's ontological identification relationship when it becomes visible. Doy places Emin in the context of the assertion of female subjectivity, linking this to the French feminist philosophers Cixoux and Irigaray, who argue for the assertion of women through writing against the dominant, masculine

⁴⁴⁹ Gen Doy, *Picturing the Self* (London: Tauris Press, 2005), p. 7.

⁴⁵⁰ Tracey Emin interview with the White Cube Gallery catalogue, London, 2009. Also see *One Thousand Drawings* (Rizzoli 2009).

symbolic order. Doy observes that it is tempting to see Emin's work as an example of 'écriture feminine' that asserts itself in this way.⁴⁵¹ Regardless of whether Emin is aware of this or not, Doy asserts that it is important to see Emin's work as 'bursting almost incoherently through the constrictions of patriarchal language and the symbolic order of subjectivity it constructs.'⁴⁵² And the patriarchal language is what Emin attempts to challenge with a new nude, with her body as the model and the artist that creates a new nude. Emin's life and her ideas in art practice is exposed, which is her ontological identification relationship that is visible evolving in the public space.⁴⁵³ Hence, within an aesthetic art practice, performativity and visibility become inextricably linked.

The late Lorna Healy observes that Emin has brought many hidden issues – 'repressed meanings around abortion, fear and fantasy of violation and illicit sexual pleasure'⁴⁵⁴ – into the public space. Emin has ensured that her work is not relegated to a sub-category of identity politics but is a serious art practice of ideas and skills.⁴⁵⁵ Emin's *My Bed*, gives depth to visibility of a female artist, which discloses the invisibility of her life in British society of the 1990s. The political reading is not imprecise but ensconced from the personal, as it involves Emin's personal history in visibility as the second aspect of subjectivity. The deep reading of *My Bed* is as crucial as the surface reading, this becomes the depth behind the artwork. *My Bed* is exhibited with a ontological view of her life, and out of a Western society; it is an ontological view because Emin conceives an abstract creative process behind an existential concern of her life, that opens for an ontological interpretation, and embraces a metaphor of an ontological mode of being in world with three aspects of her subjectivity. Indeed, existential concern was important to Emin, especially in her early years when poverty was a social norm and linked to hardship of the time. Emin said at an interview, 'in my 20s, it's not that I didn't have enough money, I had no money';⁴⁵⁶ this is not only significant because of the hidden experiences of her life, but because the invisibility of her subjectivity was a way of life when she was in penury. In this respect, Emin articulates Being, which expresses the way she is being-in-the-world in her art practice, making sense of things in

⁴⁵¹ Ibid., p. 76.

⁴⁵² Ibid., p. 77.

⁴⁵³ Tracey Emin Interviewed by Laurie Taylor, Tracey Emin 'In Confidence' Series 2, 2011.

⁴⁵⁴ Lorna Healy, 'We Love You, Tracey, Pop Cultural Strategies in Tracey Emin's Videos,' p. 171, in Mandy Merck and Christ Townsend (eds.), *The Art of Tracey Emin* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2002), pp. 155–71.

⁴⁵⁵ Tracey Emin Interviewed by Laurie Taylor, 'In Confidence' Series 2.

⁴⁵⁶ Tracey Emin Interview by 20 to 30 - Leaders in innovation.

Moore's terms, existentially and ontologically.⁴⁷ The intrinsic aesthetic is Emin's subjectivity that comes into view for audiences through her artwork being visible. Her work is on the one hand assertion of her subjectivity and yet on the other, it highlights the lack of female subjectivity, this is a metaphor and analogy of invisibility. Furthermore, the visibility of work in performance art or an image on gallery walls with naked self-portraits, also advocates how female subjectivity necessitates ubiquity.

Although globalisation has numerous flaws, namely ecological effects, for artists since 1989 it has thus far been constructive. It has provided: 1. an exhibition space for artists to show and sell their work, 2. A refuge for victims of oppression, 3. Exchange of philosophy and art skills. If we compare *My Bed* (Fig: 2.12) and *Opening the Great Wall* (Fig: 2.11) while different in multimedia, they voice the same consternation, the lack of female subjectivity through their personal narratives. They came from different cultural formations and yet, they both expose bodily visibility: both works are highly visible, as works that transgress expectation, as works that conduct a survey of their female body, and as works that are publically visible, but simultaneously intimate. Both works are therefore revelations of the invisible that becomes visible of female subjectivity they attest to. In spite of difference, *Opening the Great Wall* and *My Bed* find their way into a global art practice. Chengyao herself performs with her actual self, whereas the bed is a work that requires Emin's performance indirectly, there are still major parallels in these functions. They are both engaged in the pursuit of self-actualisation of subjectivity to create visibility as they desire x and suggests women's subjectivity through articulating the personal that links to an ontological signification in the ontological identification relationship; with the becoming of female aesthetic subjectivity and the non-finality of its expression as female artists, their subjectivity was always present but not seen visibly.

⁴⁷ Both Tracey Emin and He Chengyao are 'existential' in their prioritizing experience in their work. They embody Heidegger's idea of Dasein or Being in philosophy. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Mcquarrie (Oxford: Blackwell, 1964).

Part II – The Ontology of Being

I realised that I was much better than anything I have ever made, because already for two years I'd already been thinking that I was better than my work, I realised I was my work.⁴⁵⁸ I can only do what I know..., I wear my heart on my sleeve...everyone has their cross to bear, and I bear mine... I am really happy with art, my art keeps me going, if I didn't have my art, I wouldn't be here that's for sure.⁴⁵⁹

Tracey Emin's quote above unveil her ontological identification relationship process in visibility, underlining an ontology of being. Emin emphasised: 'my work is not about art, it's about life experiences'.⁴⁶⁰ Emin explores her past experience in order to manifest her memories and ideas that reveal themselves phenomenologically, so as to grasp the process of invisibility becoming visibility in an ontological state of being. Similarly, for Chengyao in China; being self-aware is an artist's sensibility, which in this era constitutes her ontological state of being, making sense of things in art practice. Both of their artwork is visible to public scrutiny. It is also an extension of self existentially, which means visibly in exhibition and in public; the artwork becomes a way of experiencing world when exhibited, an organ of perception, to use Merleau-Ponty's terms,⁴⁶¹ to articulate their subjectivity in the twenty-first century. Chengyao says:

I'm actually using meditation and taboo to find a path. I'm trying to use art to find the marks left behind in my pursuit for the truth. I'm trying to materialise the process I undertook in my search. Because of my identity as an artist, I came up with using this simple method to portray [the truth], as well as to remove anything else that is unnecessary. Actually, I believe things like facts and truths are actually very simple – humans are the ones that complicate them.⁴⁶²

⁴⁵⁸ Tracey Emin Interview with Melvyn Bragg, South Bank Show, London 2001.

⁴⁵⁹ Tracey Emin Interview with Laurie Taylor, 'In Confidence', Series 2.

⁴⁶⁰ Tracey Emin interview with Melvin Bragg, South Bank Show.

⁴⁶¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), p. 169.

⁴⁶² He Chengyao Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

When Chengyao articulates ‘Because of my identity as an artist’, demonstrates her identification with her art practice, the invisible subjectivity is visible artwork through performativity, where she identifies herself as an artist. The state of being an artist is herself with artwork, creating an ontological identification relationship in the trajectory of a Duchampian existentialism.⁴⁶³ Chengyao’s subjectivity, the self on the path of becoming, becomes visible as a female artist.

Silvia Fok emphasises that ‘He Chengyao sees her body as an embodiment of her past history and suppression of individuality. She regards her body as a synthetic one, not merely a physical one. She has consciously deployed her body to represent her past, as therapy, which is likely influenced by Joseph Beuys, as well as protest against hierarchy in Chinese society.’⁴⁶⁴ But the word ‘represent’ has a misleading connotation: ‘represent’ suggests acting for someone else or something else. Chengyao’s body embodies her past to reveal her own experiences, her mother’s experience, and experience of their history, for example China, but it does not constitute representation of someone else’s history because she was in that history herself: she was the one who experienced that history, thus she is performing her own memory, rather than representation of herself, Chengyao’s work is a presentation of her being, along with recapitulation of personal memory embedded in artwork abstractly, thus it is in a state of performative. Chengyao’s body as voice articulates a particularity of her history that is unique to her memory that reveals an invisible moment, which performs visibility in artwork.⁴⁶⁵

While Chengyao is communicating to the wider audience with *Public Broadcast Exercises* in 2004, she also exhibits a state of being in the world that voices her environment and society. This work, performed at the *Cruel/Loving Bodies* Exhibition in Shanghai 2004 (and shown in video and still in various countries), reveals a state of being in China where everyone is asked to

⁴⁶³ Also see Peggy Phelan’s *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), Chapter 7: ‘Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction.’ Here Phelan proposes that the ontology of performance is characterized by its non-reproducibility and ‘becomes itself through its disappearance’ (p. 146). Performance is always in the present and disappears once it is completed. Performance is always live: it moves into visibility then back into memory, ‘into the realm of invisibility and the unconscious where it eludes regulation and control’ (p. 147). While this is true, my point about the ontology of performance concerns the identity of self with the performative act and the sense of becoming enacted in performance. This view is influenced both by Heidegger’s notion of Dasein and Irigaray’s notion of work articulating life that is always ‘sexuated.’

⁴⁶⁴ Silvia Fok, *Life and Death: Art and the Body in Contemporary China*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), p. 8.

⁴⁶⁵ Didi Kirsten Tatlow, ‘She, Herself Naked, The Art of He Chengyao,’ *Sinosphere: Dispatches from China*, *New York Times*, Jan 20- 2014.

participate in a physical routine exercise when tuned to an auto broadcasted radio since 1951, which was suspended in 2007 for three years to concentrate on the Beijing Olympics in 2008, and resumed again in 2010.⁴⁶⁶ Chengyao ties her naked body with white and red package tape (sticky side outwards), suggesting the restrictions of her body when the exercise constitutes a governmental regime. This physical exercise is familiar to everyone in China through daily radio broadcasts that she reenacts with a bandaged body; it reveals Chengyao's state of being ontologically, because she is the artist reenacting the daily exercise in China to explore the restrictions of the body by tying her body this way, thus suggesting the restriction of subjectivity in China. This piece can be read as a revelation of Chengyao's movement within a restricted temporal and spatial order: it is performative body visibility to question and thereby create the reality it enacts and illustrates the existential claim that to *be* is to *do*.

This provides a systemic patriarchal reading of *Public Broadcast Exercise*, but if we look at this work as the visible manifestation of an invisible female subjectivity – an exposure that is not only a direct critique, but an ontological statement about the lack of women's subjectivity – then Chengyao's body is a focus of visible subjectivity that reveals an ontology of being in an aesthetic art practice. The work is of being and as Moore suggests, 'making sense of things' but here she is in performativity to make sense of her things, rather than a direct political critique, which means a phenomenological reading of *Public Broadcast Exercise*, at the surface level it is tempting to read it as a political critique, but this is an important reading, highly relevant to the Chinese socio-political situation today, due to lack of human rights.

⁴⁶⁶ Suzanne Merkelson, 'Beijing Reintroduces Mandatory Exercises', Foreign Policy.Com August 2010.

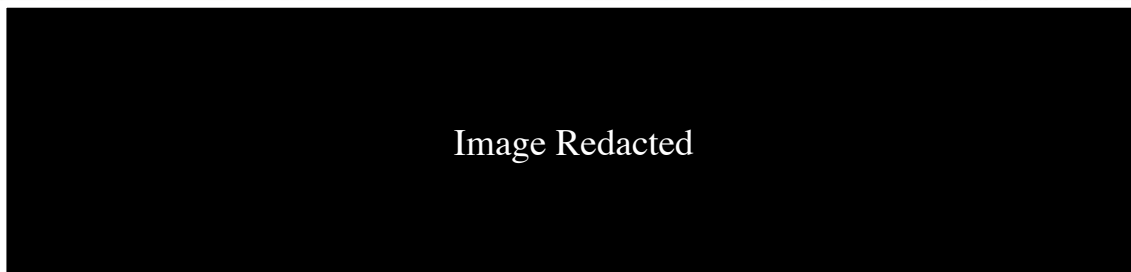
Public Broadcast Exercises 2004

Fig. 3.4: He Chengyao *Public Broadcast Exercises 2004*, Video Still, Photograph.
Shanghai's Dolonnur Modern Art Museum.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Here action performed within an aesthetic realm defines Chengyao and her performance allows the audience to connect with it imaginatively and emotionally. The tape itself, bound upon Chengyao's body creating limited movement, reveals the lack of freedom within her own experience. Furthermore, the movement tore the tape apart making a ripping sound: 'It was as if Chengyao's body was being torn apart',⁴⁶⁷ comments Doris Sung. This is a desire for freedom from restrictions. The tapes loosened and snapped as she performed the calisthenics. The point of this performance was to show the lack of freedom within China.⁴⁶⁸ Doris Sung emphasises a political reading of this work; the breaking free from the restrictions of the tape is a direct critique of the loss of female subjectivity.⁴⁶⁹ Another feminist, the CEO of China Interactive Media Group, Hung Huang, suggested that Chinese women should develop feminist consciousness visibly. By law, 'Chinese women and men are legally equal, but in reality, patriarchy exists in society and culture.' In 2011 a survey by the China Association of Marriage and Family Studies showed seventy percent of women wish to find a good husband over a good job.⁴⁷⁰ In this reading, women become hegemonously oblivious, and being visible is tedious and hence resort to marriage.⁴⁷¹

⁴⁶⁷ Doris Ha-lin Sung, 'Reclaiming the Body: Gender Subjectivities in the Performance Art of He Chengyao,' in Birgit Hopfner, Franziska Koch, Jeong-hee Lee-Kalisch, and Juliane Noth (eds.), *Negotiating Difference: Contemporary Chinese Art in the Global Context* (Berlin: VDG-Weimar, 2012), pp. 113–26.

⁴⁶⁸ Tatlow, 'She, Herself, Naked.'

⁴⁶⁹ Sung, 'Reclaiming the Body', pp. 113–121.

⁴⁷⁰ Hung Huang, 'Chinese Women Should Develop Feminist Consciousness', ed. Amanda Wu, *Women of China*.CN.

⁴⁷¹ Phelan in discussion with Marquand Smith, p. 34. Marquand Smith, *Visual Culture Studies: Interviews with Key Thinkers* (Los Angeles: Sage, 2008), 'Performance, Live Culture and Things of the Heart: Interview with Peggy Phelan,' pp. 131–43

The visibility of Chengyao's work suggests a desire for emancipation with her body as the voice and a desire for freedom from her personal history.⁴⁷² The collective gymnastic exercises is an actualisation and articulation of subjectivity that is particular – it happened in a specific space and time, in China, in the present – and unique to Chengyao herself, and yet is simultaneously visibly signifies a subjectivity of another: the collective experience of restriction. Feminism has long taken on this idea of the self/body identification and that the body, in Grosz's phrase, is 'both object and lived reality (for subject), never simply object or subject.'⁴⁷³ There is also resonance with the body in Chinese sport. Exercise became a central trope in Chinese Communist Party's ideal society which promoted a healthy nation and one that could cultivate the body to an exemplary high standard of performance, competing in Sport on an international scale. But the culture of the body, or cultivation of the body, also came to be important in CCP ideology for general citizens. In another view, Susan Brownwell writes that such bodily cultivation in China includes: '... daily practices of health, hygiene, fitness, beauty, dress and decoration as well as gestures, postures, manners, ways of speaking and eating, and so on. It also includes the way these practices are trained into the body, the way the body is publically displayed, and the lifestyle that is expressed in that display. Body culture reflects the internalisation and incorporation of culture. Body culture is embodied culture'.⁴⁷⁴

Apart from being health conscious there is a monitoring occurrence; this exercise is monitored as a group exercise by a policy in China, and Chengyao is exploring her body and subjectivity further to understand, but under surveillance. Michel Foucault emphasises the power of surveillance (in the famous panopticon, for example),⁴⁷⁵ and these daily exercises might be seen as a kind of surveillance, an internalised regime among the populace and a demonstration of conformity to state power, that is hegemony. Through the *Public Broadcast Exercises*, Chengyao uses the very mechanism of control to question control and to perform visibly as artwork cannot be controlled through mechanisms of the state. This also constitutes a dialectic relationship between invisibility and visibility in her work that renders performativity of the visible imbued

⁴⁷² He Chengyao Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

⁴⁷³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), p. 87.

⁴⁷⁴ Susan Brownwell, *Training the Body for China: Sports in the Moral Order of the People's Republic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), pp. 10–17. Brownwell's is an exemplary study, but for a focus on the Deng Zhouping era, see Jing Wang, *High Culture Fever: Politics, Aesthetics and Ideology in Deng's China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).

⁴⁷⁵ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 195–230.

with an invisible female subjectivity, as it is in Emin's work. Similarly, *Ninety Nine Needles 2002* demonstrate an ontology of being in visibility.

When Chengyao was five-years-old, an official attempted to treat her mother's mental illness with acupuncture; this ancient remedy is a distinctly skilled profession for treating innumerable illnesses, but since the war and cultural revolution, professionals with effective skills have been compromised by amateurs, because all professionals lost their homes and jobs, and were sent to work the fields by Mao, but most never returned according to Dikötter.⁴⁷⁶ The officials who deemed to help Chengyao's mother as a heroic act had been inspired by the deeds of a hero Lei Feng, a soldier with a selfless demeanour who had sacrificed himself for the nation and became the subject of a campaign deployed by Mao and his confederates for propaganda conformity, to 'Learn from Lei Feng' as a good citizen of China, a new version of a good Samaritan of the West.⁴⁷⁷ On the day that Chengyao's mother suffered an unsettling episode, the officials in the spirit of Lei Feng arrived to aid Chengyao's mother, by holding her down forcefully onto a flat surface created out of a door, and attempted to treat her with acupuncture needles. What was supposed to be a healing treatment turned to despair for all, Chengyao watch her mother scream as a five-year-old, but it was not the only occasion, the memory of her mother's treatments constituted the re-enacted of *Ninety-Nine Needles* (Fig: 3.5). The sensibility of Chengyao was obviously affected by her mother's suffering, which became the work of *Ninety-Nine Needles 2002* as an attempt not only to understand and feel her mother's pain, but is 'also an accusation toward society for treating her mother so poorly' as Tatlow suggests.⁴⁷⁸ Chengyao is not only creating work about her mother's experience, but exploring her experiences within herself and art practice, her memories, and to re-enact them is also a state of being, and to discover an ontological identification with her subjectivity that intimately connects in her art practice.

Although the needles were inserted into Chengyao's body by a professional acupuncturist, still at one point she fainted – this becomes an exploration of a threshold or boundary – as she did not anticipate fainting. To recapitulate her memory of her mother's treatment, she is revealing not only her mother but her own memory of her experience: it is Chengyao who becomes visible and

⁴⁷⁶ Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine*.

⁴⁷⁷ Sung, 'Reclaiming the Body', p. 116.

⁴⁷⁸ Tatlow, 'She. Herself. Naked.'

not her mother, as a visible female artist. In 2009 Chengyao's mother passed away.⁴⁷⁹ Chengyao recalls:

When I was a child, my grandmother tried all sorts of folk cures and superstitious methods to treat my mother's mental illness. She hired spirit doctors and forced my mother to swallow Chinese and Western medicine. She even attracted the attention of several People's Liberation Army uncles from a nearby military factory. To treat my mother's illness, they held my mother down on a wooden door used as a table, while one of them stuck acupuncture needles into her. My mother lay on the door screaming and struggling. '99 Needles' is dedicated to my mother, who endured so much shameful wearing down, and as atonement because I stood as eyewitness but could not help.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁹ He Chengyao interview Leung Kwan Kui, Beijing, March 2016.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid.

Ninety-Nine Needles 2002

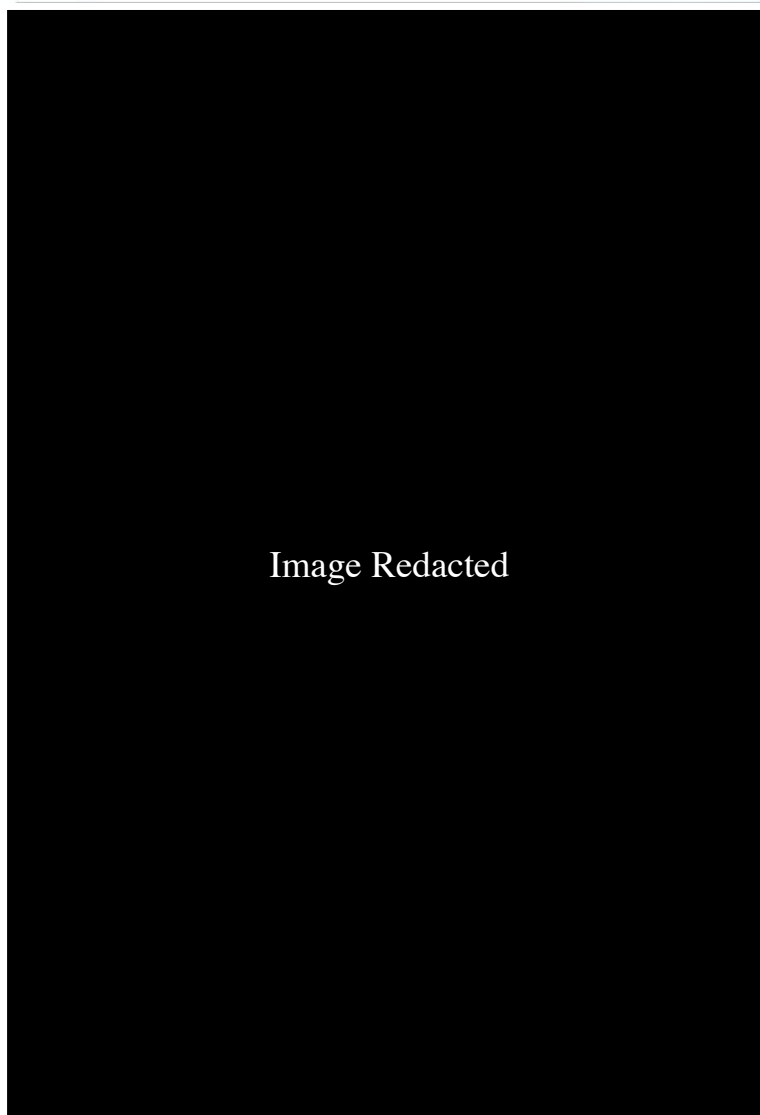


Fig. 3.5: He Chengyao *Ninety-Nine Needles* 2002
Performance, Beijing, Chromogenic Photograph, Brooklyn Museum, New York.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

The tension in *Ninety-Nine Needles* reveals that no matter how many times it is mentioned, there is always another perspective. Yapp observes that in this piece there is endurance in the face of suffering, the experience of time as lingering, and even meditation: ‘He Chengyao utilises the haptic feel of needles on her naked flesh in order to linger within the ordinary and sensation.’⁴⁸¹ In Mandarin, the words for ‘endure’, *jing*, *ting*, *renshou*, and *ai* have a similar connotation to the English words suffering and endurance.⁴⁸² *Ninety-Nine Needles* comes from a memory, which implies a process of narrative that entails her own trauma at the time, but its endurance and continuation of the experience’s tension is in the process of persisting with the idea of pain through time. *Ninety-Nine Needles* is a movement from the invisible to the visible presentation of subjectivity, an enactment of a memory that is lived in real time but with less intensity, where Chengyao lives out the memory of her experience again: she sees her mother’s body as an extension of her own body and her memories presented as extension of her own subjectivity.

The movement from the invisibility of women to visibility through artwork constitutes a feminist process of being and becoming, but Chengyao sees herself as an artist who is a feminist rather than a feminist artist, as pointed out previously. This crucial point separates the first, second, and third waves of Feminism from the present, where female artists are claiming their artistry as their first aim in art practice and their Feminism as a second aim, in this second aspect of subjectivity. According to Yapp, Chengyao demonstrates the situation of Chinese women as ‘lacking full human agency,’ and how women are ‘placed into an economy of objecthood and matter’.⁴⁸³ But apart from seeing her work as political, it conveys the story of Chengyao’s life in which her subjectivity is highlighted in visibility. She not only becomes vulnerable in the public space, as did her mother, her work reveals extensions of herself into art ontologically: becoming visible is the performative of an ontology and statement concerning becoming who she is, the artist; not acting as another’s history but actualising and performing her own journey in art practice – to discover, to explore, to investigate, to engage, to unravel, to embrace, and to exhibit a subjectivity that is becoming and constantly evolving, to use a Deleuzian idea; a never-ending state

⁴⁸¹ Hentyle Yapp, ‘Chinese lingering, meditation’s practice: reframing endurance art beyond resistance,’ p. 146, in *Women’s Performance: a Journal of Feminist Theory*, vol. 23, 2014, pp. 134–52.

⁴⁸² Ibid.

⁴⁸³ Ibid.

of being that is always in a state of becoming, ‘the actualization of tendencies,’⁴⁸⁴ in other words, the self permanently desires the actualisation of subjectivity.

During our interview in 2016, Chengyao suggested that we should not place emphasis on gender and that we are all the same, female or male, and how women and men should respect each other; hence she now embraces a hairless head, bald to indicate non gender, to embrace a freer life (or where genders are blurred, akin to the faceless bodies of Tracey Emin). Furthermore, hair gets in the way of her work, she claims.⁴⁸⁵ *Ninety-Nine Needles* also suggests Confucian filial piety, if the memory of her mother is involved. Confucian classics, such as the *Classic of Filiality (Xiaojing)* and the *Classic of Filial Piety for Women (Nüxiaojing)*, tell stories of sons and daughters who have endured suffering for their parents; *Ninety-Nine Needles* can be interpreted as a filial rite of self-endurance to redeem her mother’s experience of abjection.⁴⁸⁶ But since her mother is oblivious to this, it can become a process of catharsis for Chengyao, claims Lee-Kalisch.⁴⁸⁷ Indeed, Chengyao claims that all her work is not solely for herself but for the chain of generations of women in her family, her mother and grandmother:⁴⁸⁸ But since she is creating the work and being visible, it is not only for her mother or grandmother but also for herself in this life, and they as extension of herself. She enacts an ontology of performativity, bringing the hidden to light, giving voice to the marginalised – where she herself is one – women who are unable to have a voice for themselves – and making visible what was invisible. The lack of female subjectivity into visibility.

Peggy Phelan has referred to a dialectic between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility, but rather invisibility itself can have power.⁴⁸⁹ This is similar to a Buddhist view of life. Invisibility can have a power of its own, as we see in the work of the Guerilla Girls behind masks, their face is invisible, whose power is partly derived from their anonymity and invisibility.⁴⁹⁰ For Phelan, the power of invisibility is also the power of being ‘unmarked,’ which is an ‘active

⁴⁸⁴ Deleuze calls this ‘the actualization of tendencies,’ in A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things* (Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 563.

⁴⁸⁵ He Chengyao interview with Kwankui Leung, March 2016

⁴⁸⁶ Laia Manonelles Moner, ‘Explorations of Genealogy in experimental art in China’, *Journal Of Contemporary Chinese Art*, Volume 1 (1), 2014, pp. 45-63. Also Carole McCann, Seung-Kyung Kim, *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2013), pp. 190-192.

⁴⁸⁷ Sung, ‘Reclaiming the Body’, p. 114.

⁴⁸⁸ Tatlow, interview, *She Herself Naked*, 2014.

⁴⁸⁹ Phelan, *Unmarked*, p. 7: ‘... the binary between the power of visibility and the impotency of invisibility is falsifying. There is real power in remaining unmarked and there are serious limitations to visual representation as a political goal.’

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 19.

vanishing' that 'refuses the payoff of visibility.'⁴⁹¹ Phelan links this to a Lacanian model in which the mirror stage is visible, concealing a hidden sense of subjectivity. While I do not intend to discuss the Lacanian model, Phelan points out that visibility in theatrical performance hides an active invisibility of the actor akin to the Guerrilla Girls. But in *Public Broadcast Exercises*, *Ninety-Nine Needles* or *Opening the Great Wall*, Chengyao is not acting out someone else's story or experience, but performing her own experience in the world, hence performativity; this links an active invisibility of the force of her own subjectivity as process that comes to articulation with her body performance as performativity, to visibly show her state of being in world with her experiences, by subjecting herself visibly to the world propitiously, a soldier among troops rather than the luxury of invisibility, but perhaps in 2017 she has excused herself from her troop of soldiers to become invisible, as a nun, but far from luxury.

The amounts of needles on Chengyao's body in the above work conveys a never-ending process; the external pierced body enacts a movement of becoming from bondage to even freedom, from suffering to potential cure, since acupuncture needles are part of ancient Chinese medicine. Invisibility in this work exhibits the potential of aesthetic subjectivity, that evolves in art practice, and as it moves into visibility, restriction disappears and falls into another invisibility; the invisibility of being. But visibility is complex, when performance ends the original finished artwork or reprints such as drawing, painting, photograph, and sculpture, are still visible in galleries, collectors' homes, or in public spaces. Furthermore, technology of the worldwide-web is all-pervasive virtual visibility on the internet is uncontrollable. Here is a formula to further explicate the visibility and invisibility dynamic.

⁴⁹¹ Phelan in discussion with Marquand Smith, p. 34. Smith, *Visual Culture Studies*, pp. 131–43.

An illustration of the process of invisibility becoming visibility and transition

Unactualisation		Actualisation
Invisibility 1	→	visibility
[Subjectivity as potential]	Transition	[= performativity through time]
Invisibility 2	←	Subjectivity as actual
[= disappearance, vanishing point]		

Deleuze writes in *Immanence: A life* 1995: 'A life contains only virtuals. It is made of virtualities, events, singularities. What we call virtual is not something that lacks reality, but something that enters into a process of actualization by following the plane that gives it its own reality. The immanent event actualizes itself in a state of things and in a lived state which bring the event about. The plane of immanence itself is actualized in an Object and Subject to which it attributes itself.'⁴⁹² Actualisation of self is where consciousness of subjectivity begins to be an active agent, which leads to a creative process, and posits becoming visible in a finite period of time, in exhibitions for example, when it ends, it retrieves and begins again when called upon, which implies there is a life cycle in actualisation while it is constant within itself.

The movement of visibility and invisibility is immanence of a dialectic in actualisation, in the works of Emin and Chengyao. Their desire is constantly active to actualise subjectivity, to engage, to speak, to create, to participate, and in art practice to be visible, and once they actualised their subjectivity visibly, 'invisibility 1' disappears from potentiality to actuality of subjectivity. This means the condition in which subjectivity is not yet actualised and exists as pure potential, waiting, as it were, in transition to be actualised. Such potential, although invisible, is not inactive but exerts force on the visible realm such that the artist comes to actualise her subjectivity. The move from the invisible to the visible in the performativity is the move from potentiality to actuality, which is performativity because through performativity the potential becomes actual and visible. The actual performance piece or artwork is the result of a process of performativity, the actualisation of subjectivity becomes visible. Once actualised and once made visible in art practice, in the artwork, and the exhibition ends, this visibility falls back into invisibility. Subjectivity that

⁴⁹² Gilles Deleuze, 'Immanence: A Life', 1995, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 2001. pp. 25-33.

has been made visible in work, once realised, moves to a vanishing point – but this vanishing point could take anything from a day to hundreds of years, for example Emin’s tent *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* 1963-1995, 1995, vanished in the fire, but this is a grey area and complex, because photographs of this work still exist and are all pervading through the internet, and with free downloads, anyone could own a photo of this work, which means, visibility will not vanish so easily. Another example, Emin’s tent, beach hut, and photographs were potential/invisible, when locked up in Saatchi’s warehouse for months before the fire accident.

With *Ninety-Nine Needles*, the otherwise invisible condition of the self becomes visible in the sequence of actions in which the body is pierced with needles. As invisibility becomes manifest, the performance remains authentic but with an edited truth hence it is never confessional; this parallels the process of subjectivity moving from invisibility to visibility through performativity in performance art, then disappearing back into a second invisibility once the moment’s potential is realised, and time moves the performance on.

As Butler emphasised in *Bodies that Matter*, what is crucial is material corporeality of the performances. The visible is the body and the performance is the realisation of invisible subjectivity. Thus, performativity is inseparably linked to visibility. The materiality of the body is the medium through which subjectivity comes to be voiced.⁴⁹³ Emin and Chengyao’s performance of self is simultaneously ontology of subjectivity, because their subjectivity comes into being, to make sense of things, in becoming artwork. Their subjectivity actualises as artwork, into the performative, actualisation and orientation towards a yet-to-be realised future, and suggests a need for freedom that, in the end, is realised in their ontological identification relationship.

Akin to Chengyao, Emin’s subjectivity is actualised first before becoming engaged in her ontological identification relationship of self and artwork. In 2016 Emin exhibited in the White Cube and Lehmann Maupin galleries of Hong Kong, as part of the Art Basel week, Hong Kong, entitled *I Cried Because I Love You*.⁴⁹⁴ Emin exhibits naked self-portraits in Chengyao’s world, China, which suggests a hybrid of East and West. For example, *Day Dreaming* 2016, something we all do be it in the UK or China, emphasises an invisibility of Emin’s day dreaming, it is something private, but is made visible in Hong Kong, China. Emin exhibited her work with an intimate and sexual tone, with a global perspective in mind; she said that sex in China is no

⁴⁹³ Butler, *Bodies that Matter*, pp. 37–8.

⁴⁹⁴ Tracey Emin, *I Cried Because I Love You*, ex. Cat (London: White Cube, 2016). *Day dreaming*, p. 77.

different to sex in other countries,⁴⁹⁵ although this is true, it is debatable in different societies that are strict, with variable social and cultural formation of individual experience. But nevertheless, sooner or later sex is a normal state of being however strict China or other countries are about nakedness or nudes. Works without features on faces, or in some images without a head on the body, are not an amputation or due to a lack of skills, but rather, as she claims, she wants the work to be about any woman, not just about her, and suggests it could be anyone in the image.⁴⁹⁶ The viewers see *Day Dreaming* 2016 (Fig: 3.6), drawing in black acrylic on canvas, as Emin herself, laying back onto a space; this image of a body without a head is akin to Chengyao's work above, or Francis Bacon's faceless bodies, or Gustave Courbet's *L'Origine Du Monde*, or Duchamp's *Etant Donnés'* female body. But Emin draws our attention to the lack of daydreaming, lack of subjectivity, lack of freedom, lack of lack, the faceless body is of elsewhere, of another, of waiting for actualisation, which we all do without consciousness; without a head, we are unconscious, this is showing invisibility of female subjectivity, and of Emin's subjectivity in the past. She is exhibiting visibly in an exhibition and discussing desire; daydream moments are longing, the invisible desiring becoming visible, suggested here by the title that accompanies the image. Her works reveal her subjectivity. Furthermore, her words accompanying the work: 'Everybody's loved someone so much that it hurts... you feel that it's going to kill you if you don't see them. It's about that feeling of love and understanding love.'⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵ Tracey Emin, interview with Griselda Brown, FTs Hong Kong, March 2016.

⁴⁹⁶ Tracey Emin, interview at White Cube, 'Those Who Suffered Love', London, 2009.

⁴⁹⁷ Tracey Emin, *I Cried Because of You* 2016, White Cube Gallery Catalogue, Hong Kong 2016.

Day Dreaming 2015

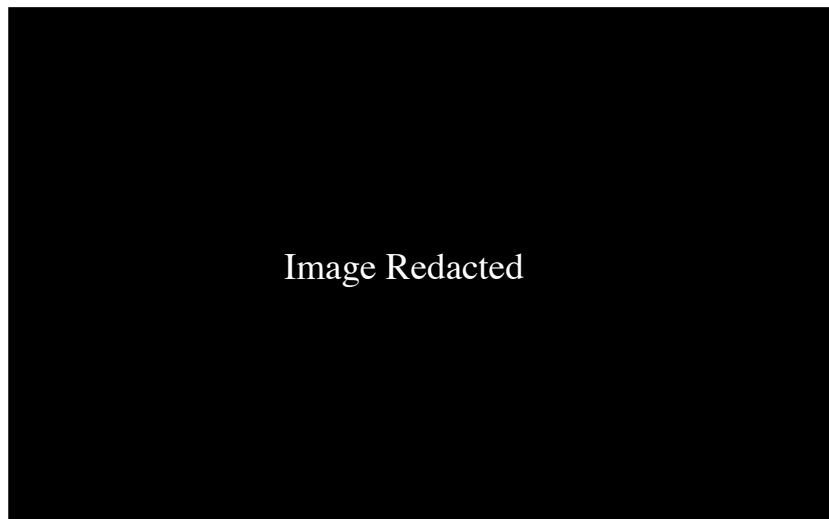


Fig. 3.6: Tracey Emin, *Day Dreaming* 2015
Acrylic on canvas 20.4cm x 25.3cm. White Cube Gallery, Hong Kong 2016.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

Dreamt of You 2016

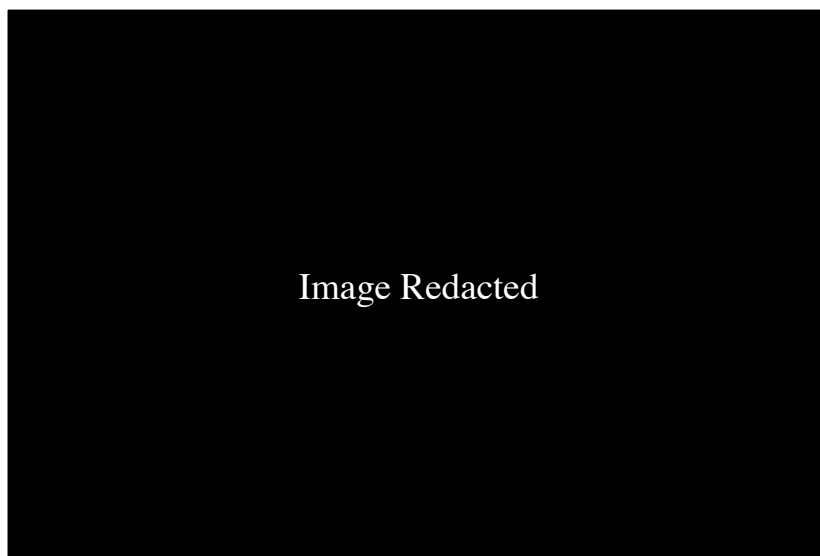


Fig. 3.7: Tracey Emin, *Dreamt of You* 2016
Acrylic on canvas 20.3 x 25.2 cm
White Cube Gallery, Art Basel Week, Hong Kong 2016.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

Emin's work here, the body itself becomes a voice, *Dreamt of You* 2016 in raw red, black and white, and shadows of pinkish acrylic paint on canvas, narrates her experience of love, pain, and visibility, which becomes an extension of Emin. *Daydreaming* and *Dreamt of You* exhibit something deep and private, when visible, they become an exploration of invisible subjectivity. As Emin said, 'it is me drawing myself, but the work is not only about me, it is also about people who view the work; they see the work and think about their own life, if it had my face on the image it would not have that affect.'⁴⁹⁸ These faceless bodies also present an inclusive sense of subjectivity. At an interview with Tim Marlow in Art Basel, Hong Kong 2016, which I attended as one of the audience, Emin responded to a question I asked:

KK: ...I wonder if you could tell us a little about the nude and your work on the body and the self, the nude of the past and the nude now, what are your thoughts about that?

Emin: 'First, is not the nude, is nature, the body is nature..., I thought... I wish I was in France, I wish I was in nature..., then suddenly I realised...I was nature..., I am flesh, I am blood, I am water, I am all these structures which is completely nature, they come from exactly the same place as the rest of the world; that is why I use my body in my work, not because I want to make a beautiful image of a body or do what men have done in history in the past, I want to connect the quickest way to nature, and the quickest way is obviously through me.' Tim Marlow responded, 'Pollock said "I am nature" and it's been a contentious remark, Tracey didn't say that did she? She said nature came through her, and gave a complicated and nuanced answer.'⁴⁹⁹

However, in *What Do Artists Do All Day* interview, Emin said, she would 'like to create some nudes' while holding a paint brush ready to work. This is not Emin having double or multiple personalities, she is talking about the new nude; her distinction between the body and the nude, maps onto my distinction between objectification of the traditional nude and subjectivity of the

⁴⁹⁸ Tracey Emin, In Conversation with Sir Norman Rosenthal, Independent Curator and Writer, London. Filmed on site at Art Basel in Miami Beach, 2013.

⁴⁹⁹ Tracey Emin interview with Tim Marlow and David Tang, *I Cried Because I Love You* Exhibition, Hong Kong, 21-March, 2016.

new nude. It is the vicissitudes of visibility that she is exposed to the public at different moments of her life. Her thoughts and ideas, are often being in the moment, excluding another moment, in different moments when she has different projects in mind, but they are incoherently read because different projects bring different perspectives. Therefore, it is crucial to view Emin with three aspects of her subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and the univocity in art practice, and all three aspects are in each work.

As Deleuze writes in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation* 1981, 'But here, the new position of the body in relation to the contour shows that we have arrived at a more complex aspect (even if this aspect was there from the start). It is no longer the material structure that curls around the contour in order to envelop the Figure, it is the Figure that wants to pass through a vanishing point in the contour in order to dissipate into the material structure.'⁸⁰ Deleuze also making sense of things when he discuss Bacon's painting of the *Figure at a Washbasin* of 1976. He deals with aspects of each part of the painting, and often it is in aspects one, two, three, or four. For example, on page 154, he writes, 'There are several aspects in the values of the hand that must be distinguished from each other: the digital, the tactile, the manual proper, and the haptic.' But he does not link these with Bacon's subjectivity, what is also crucial is the link between the painting and Bacon's subjectivity.

Emin's work here, the naked-self-portraits play with concealing and revealing, invisibility and visibility; the experience of body is also Emin's memories. On the one hand, the work is a naked self-portrait of Emin herself, making visible an invisible subjectivity; on the other, it is a work that erases Emin as a personality. The particularity of the work belies identification with Emin as a person yet could only be an exploration of Emin's history and not the history of another, which becomes a performative. It is this ambiguity of simultaneous concealing and revealing that gives the work its abstraction, drawing from her personal to visible performativity. Another difference between Emin and Chengyao's work, is that, Emin's work is mostly virtual in performing paintings, drawings, sewing, sculptures, neons, bronze, writing, and ready-mades; which is performativity through multimedia. Similarly, Chengyao's work is mostly actual with body performance art, but she also performs in painting, drawing, film, and ready-mades, which is also performativity in multimedia but different cultural formation. They both work with a

⁸⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *Francis Bacon: the logic of sensation* 2002 (1981), pp. 15-17.

mechanism of subjectivity becoming actualised as artwork questioning invisibility and visibility of female subjectivity. Chengyao's faceless bodies delivers the same affect as Emin's faceless bodies.

In *Two Rolls of Tape*, Chengyao continued to highlight the lack of female subjectivity. In this piece, she is bound with yellow tape and over a period of thirty minutes gradually breaks free. Concealment shows restriction; Chengyao exists latently beneath the rolls of package tape that threaten to suffocate her, but she breaks free from the tape, bringing the performance to an end, although these photographs live on; her visible subjectivity continues in her work, while she continues to explore, to make sense of her world. The restriction that overpowers female subjectivity is invisible in this work, a metaphor for the repression and oppression of women. Although she does not perform this piece naked, she is the artist with her own body, metaphorically naked and the central idea is making sense of things within a feminist relevance. She created a theme with her body: her subjectivity is the foundation of her work, it is her self-portrait,⁵⁰¹ similar to Emin's faceless bodies that question the female body with uncompromised narratives, they both create uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity, and do so with multimedia.

The *Two Rolls of Tape* draws out the potential to visibility, the bare selfhood constricted within Chengyao breaking free from the tape can be a metaphor of self actualisation during the potential phase. Although, this cannot be interpreted as symbolic or a representation, as Chengyao's body is self presenting, because the performativity enacted is something in itself, for its own sake, in which signifier and signified are one. Chengyao's subjectivity becomes liberation and realisation of its potential and this indicates a sense of giving birth to herself with a sense of inclusivity; it is also about the other, the audience who views the work, this parallels Emin's faceless new nudes. Chengyao remarks:

Feminism is a remote topic in my country where I live. China is always a male-dominated world, although the Chinese Communist Party had tried to abolish the old male-dominated system so that everyone had a right to obtain an occupation. We had already shortened the discrimination between male and female and established the "equal rights" constitution between

⁵⁰¹ He Chengyao Interview with Kwankiu Leung, March 2016.

female/male. But in fact, the Equality is not based on the rights from individual liberation and fair opportunity. There is still existing sexual unfairness, discrimination in social status as well as between female and male. Most people still conform to the traditional sexual division of labour. Individual value and rights of female are still ignored.⁵⁰²

While Chengyao attempts to agree with her government and people, it is crucial to point out here that the laws of the government that attempt to change feminism have not been affective, due to reactions and communications between male and female, and the homogeneity of each domain of male or female from a traditional patriarchal society. Perhaps feminist law could include a quota system, and as Xiao Lu said in our conversation, ‘at least then women can have a chance to contribute, at least they can speak freely’.⁵⁰³ Female subjectivity is explored by many Chinese female artists in China, and Chengyao here is in solidarity with the feminist confederates. She enters introspection from invisibility to visibility, she is testing the waters of what is possible for female subjectivity with her body, but with a ‘Chinese vision of feminism’.

⁵⁰² Cited in Eva Kit Wah Man, ‘Expression Extreme and History Trauma in Women Body Art in China: the Case of He Chengyao,’ Mary Bittner Wiseman and Liu Yuedi (eds.), *Subversive Strategies in Contemporary Chinese Art* (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 186–7.

⁵⁰³ Xiao Lu, interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, 2016.

Two Rolls of Tape 2016

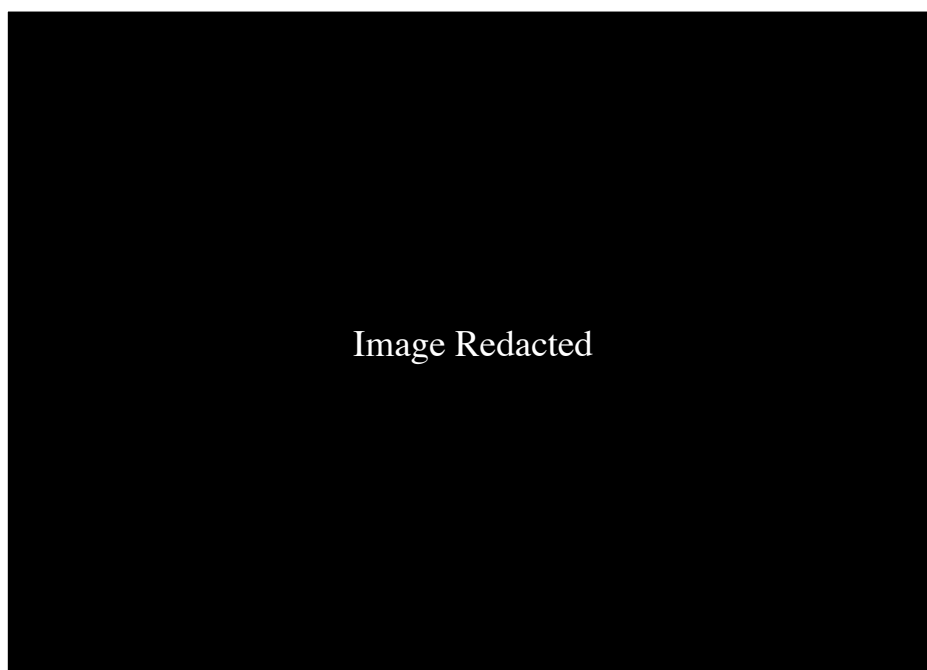


Fig. 3.8, 3.9: He Chengyao *Two Rolls Of Tape* 2016
Xiang Xishi Contemporary Art Center (X-CFCA), Xi'an, China.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

In 2010, Chengyao created the work with red balloons without a title, in a ‘Live Action, Redtory Art & Design Factory’, in Guangzhou. The red or yellow colour Chengyao often uses signifies something rather than nothing, and is not coincidence; apart from aesthetic reasons, red or yellow are colours that have been suggested to mean China; as in *Of Other Spaces* 2004 or 2017 (Fig: 2.25-2.26, 4.27). As we also see in Ai Weiwei’s work *Sunflower Seeds* 2010 for the Turbine Hall in Tate Modern, London. Mao is sunflower yellow, and seeds are the people who used to worship Mao and aid him to win his war and ideology, but after his death in 1976, many citizens find error in worshipping Mao. But Mao had many loyalists to continue his ideology, perhaps this means he still rules but from his grave, as did the first emperor of China and his tomb, that no one dares to touch where he lays for over two thousand years.

As for Chengyao’s red balloons, *Untitled* 2010, her naked torso below carried red balloons that she then proceeded to burst, one by one. The sound and air were released through deliberate bodily movements, breaking each balloon until they all burst, and the leftover skin was then exhibited as broken fragments on a wall. Bursting balloons is a metaphor, suggesting, her body witnessed many people being burst into disappearance, the balloons popped to create a sound as if someone has been shot and vanished. It showed the loss of air, lack of air leads to death; after death of the balloons, she hangs the balloon skins on the wall. The invisibility of balloons is the invisibility of people, the red people, she hangs their skin on the wall as remembrance. Chengyao, herself is visible during the work, again in the frontline of feminism, in protest against the violence of eradicating subjectivity, which is freedom of speech. The invisibility of subjectivity comes into view through Chengyao’s energetic process of self-actualisation that forces visibility through performativity of her body and speech. There is a parallelism here to *Ninety-Nine Needles*, it attempts to exhibit the violence on the body, which is reflected through bursting red balloons. Red is also a sign of good health or good luck during New Year, where everyone exchanges red packages with money for prosperity wishes. Since ‘China is always a male dominated world’, then the male citizens have the power to change inequality.

Furthermore, the works above are an extension of Chengyao’s self, as an ontological identification relationship, the work is an ontological articulation of movement from invisibility to visibility to make sense of being. This identification of self and work is akin to what Merleau-Ponty calls ‘the flesh’ in his work *The Visible and Invisible* 1968.³⁰⁴ The ‘flesh’

³⁰⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1968), p. 131: ‘The two leaves of my body and the leaves of the visible world... It is between these

is the most basic idea for Merleau-Ponty, even prior to perception, that unites the subject and the object, and is characterised by chiasm, which can be seen as reversibility, interweaving, or interconnecting,⁵⁵ or similar to a head that you can only see the front or the back, but not both at the same time. It is also the seen and the see-er, or the touched and the toucher; as when I hold my hands together, it is hard to distinguish which is being touched and which is touching: there is a reversibility of perception and one can switch from one way of experiencing it, the hand being touched, to the other, the hand touching. This is to overcome dualism of subject and object as well as visibility and invisibility. Merleau-Ponty's point touches the visibility and invisibility of this work, when the balloons are full it is a sense of perception, and when it is burst, it is a sense of the flesh. It is an ontology of being to make sense of things.

Untitled 2010, 1, 2, 3, 4.

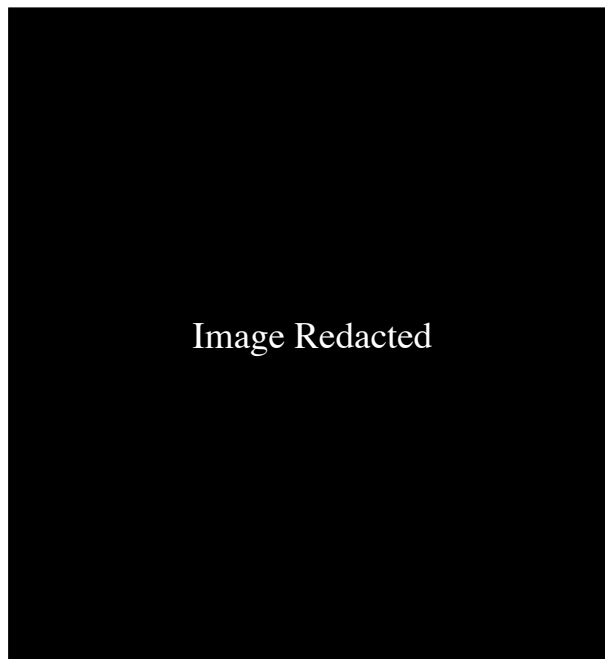


Fig 3.9: He Chengyao *Untitled*, 2010
Live Action, Redtory Art & Design Factory, Guangzh
[Image redacted due to copyright]

intercalated leaves that there is visibility... All this means: the world, the flesh not as fact or sum of facts, but as the locus of an inscription of truth...'.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Ibid.

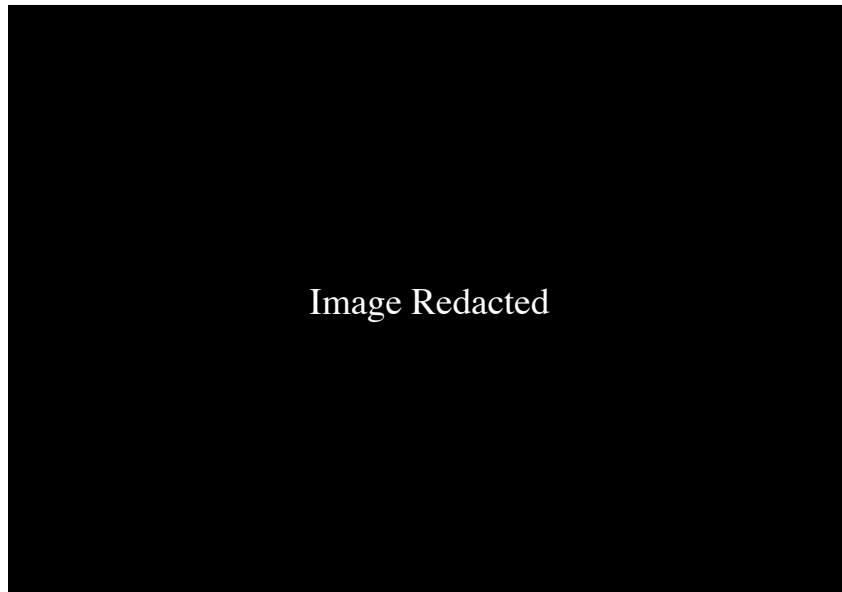


Fig 3.10: He Chengyao *Untitled*, 2010
Live Action, Redtory Art & Design Factory, Guangzhou
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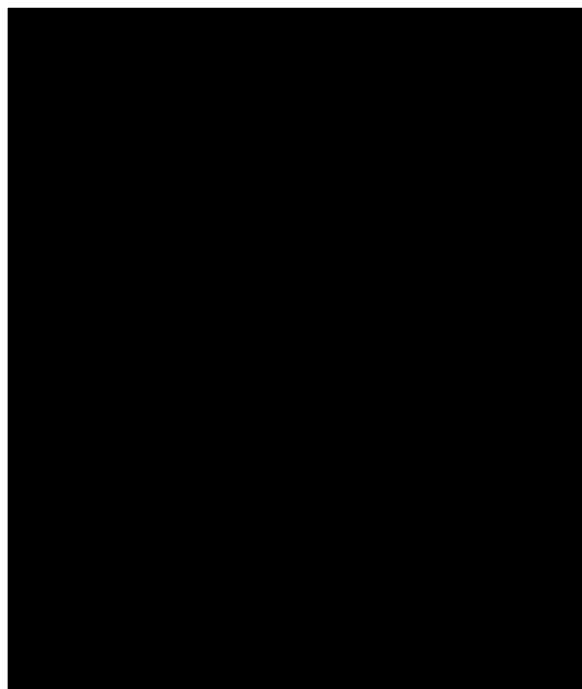


Fig 3.11: He Chengyao *Untitled*, 2010
Live Action, Redtory Art & Design Factory, Guangzhou.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

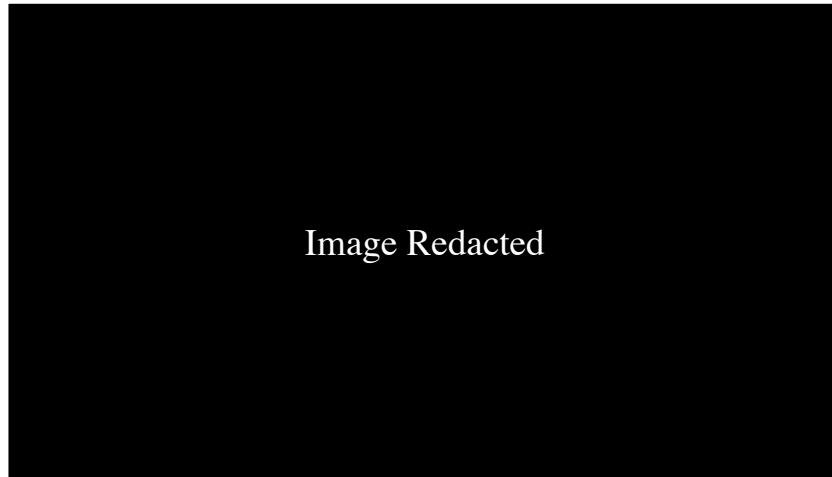


Fig 3.12: He Chengyao *Untitled*, 2010
Live Action, Redtory Art & Design Factory, Guangzhou.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

Furthermore, if Emin or Chengyao's work is seen in the idea of reversibility, then the revealing body movements, that can be perceived as 'object' – the objective movement of the body through space/time – and also as subject, the one who moves in that manner. The body is both subject and object: the visible is an extension of the invisible, and the invisible is only understood because of the visible. This reversibility of the visible and the invisible in their work provokes further reflection on feminism as double refraction. As Grosz observes: 'What Merleau-Ponty seems to offer feminists like Irigaray is not simply a common theoretical struggle but, more positively, elements that may augment or enrich feminist theory itself. His emphasis on live experience and perception, his focus on the body-subject, has resonances with what may arguably be regarded as feminism's major contribution to the production and structure of knowledges – its necessary reliance on lived experience, on experiential acquaintance as a touchstone or criterion of the validity of theoretical postulates'.⁵⁰⁶

While Irigaray emphasises the difference between the sexes, she agrees with Merleau-Ponty's embodied nature of human life: we are not minds distinct from bodies. But Irigaray claims men have to create their own identities and give space to women to do the same,⁵⁰⁷ because thus far women can only 'speak' if the space is given by men and then it is not theirs, and so women have 'lips that cannot speak'.⁵⁰⁸ Irigaray's work attempts to draw our attention to

⁵⁰⁶ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, p. 94.

⁵⁰⁷ Luce Irigaray, *Ethics of Sexual Difference* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1993), part 4. See also Irigaray, *To Be Born*, pp. 25–6.

⁵⁰⁸ Carolyn Burke, 'Introduction to Luce Irigaray's "When Our Lips Speak Together"', *Signs*, vol. 6 (1), 1980, pp. 66–68; Hilary Robinson, *Reading Art, Reading Irigaray* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2006), p. 132.

a different perception of women's space of becoming, actuating subjectivity, or to give birth to oneself. Becoming oneself, which has hitherto been invisible, Irigaray suggests, such portrayal would be an act of truthfulness.⁵⁰⁹ Women, she observes, have been expected to 'keep quiet' about what they go through, which has resulted in physical symptoms such as paralysis.⁵¹⁰

Emin and Chengyao's work is a way of life, and they attempt to render subjectivity visible. If, as Pierre Hadot said of the ancient Greeks, philosophy is a way of life,⁵¹¹ then for Emin and Chengyao art is a way of life, as Emin claims in *I Need Art Like I Need God*, which suggests that Art is God for her but also reminds us that we are subject to outside forces at play in art practice. To claim that Emin and Chengyao's art is a way of life is to make a claim about the ontology of their work and the connection between life and work 'to make sense of things', as Moore posits. This is a philosophical performative understanding of their work in actuality and formation of their life and artwork as a process of being and becoming in the history of art. Thus, an ontology of being reveals who they wish to become authentically through their artwork and art practice with edited truth. As Christ Townsend has observed about Emin's work, it is more sophisticated than its reception.⁵¹²

Comparing the works of Emin and Chengyao informs us about female artists' exploration of their existence and through their works we can further understand their way of making sense of their world, and the female subjectivity they embody. The artworks of Chengyao and Emin are modes of exploring their being, their *Dasein* to use Heidegger's term, and perhaps are somewhat akin to Heidegger's idea of things being 'ready to hand', that the being of things is revealed in their use, as with the use of a hammer, we can only understand it through using the hammer, and seeing it visibly.⁵¹³ Similarly, the artworks of Emin and Chengyao's exploration in making sense of things through subjectivity, in a parallel way to Heidegger's *Dasein, Being*, and also *Mitsein* (being with another), Emin or Chengyao and their materials are used not only to understand the meaning of their lives that embody becoming visible but also the visibility of another when exhibited. But being visible also creates doubts of art practice.

Irigaray, '

⁵⁰⁹ Luce Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous: Towards a Culture of Difference*, trans. Alison Martin (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 101.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013).

⁵¹² Chris Townsend, *Art and Death* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008), p. 53.

⁵¹³ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 200.

Part III – Doubts of Art Practice

I gave up painting, I gave up art, I gave up believing, I gave up faith, I had what I called my emotional suicide, I gave up a lot of friendships with people, I just gave up believing in life really and it's taken me years to actually start loving and believing again.⁵¹⁴

Tracey Emin's appliquéd blankets articulate her narratives of self-doubt as well as her experience, self-portraits, and invisibility and visibility of her life. As Susan Hiller once said, 'Self Doubt is Always Present for Artists'.⁵¹⁵ The Hayward Gallery exhibition, *Love is What You Want* 2011, exhibited ten significant, colourful Appliquéd blankets. This is another example of a retrospective of Emin's work and life, following a tradition of retrospectives. Emin's debut exhibition at the White Cube Gallery, *Tracey Emin: My Major Retrospective 1963-1993*, 1994, was the first 'retrospective' of her work. In 2011 Cliff Lauson observes when he saw the show, Emin's practice and life are intertwined.⁵¹⁶ Emin is not only creating art, she is living art, art is a way of life: a retrospective is an ontology of being for Emin. This exhibition showed Emin's Appliquéd blankets with words, neons with words, wood and metal sculptures with words, and drawings and paintings with words, exemplifying her subjectivity, crucial in her work,⁵¹⁷ demonstrating her thinking as well as her experience in her ontological identification relationship. She actualises her subjectivity not for self-love or narcissism, as many historians and critics have claimed,⁵¹⁸ but for making sense of her life visibly and publically as an artist.

Rosemary Betterton has observed that Emin's appliquéd blanket work resonates with a tradition of 'domestic femininity' in Britain, and also with a tradition of Suffrage demonstrations⁵¹⁹ and even with modernist decadence.⁵²⁰ These blankets have been created with

⁵¹⁴ Carl Freedman, Honey Luard, *Tracey Emin, Works 1963-2006*, Conversation with Carl Freedman (Rizzoli International Publications 2006), p. 67

⁵¹⁵ Susan Hiller. 'Self Doubt is Always Present for Artists,' *The Guardian*, 15th November, 2015

⁵¹⁶ Cliff Lauson, 'Love is What You Want,' p. 9, in Tracey Emin, *Love is What You Want* (London: Hayward Gallery, 2011), pp. 9–30.

⁵¹⁷ Emin, *Love is What You Want*, p. 46.

⁵¹⁸ For example, Brian Sewell, review of *Love is What You Want* at the Hayward Gallery, 2011, *Evening Standard*, May 19, 2011. Also see Julian Stallabras, *High Art Lite*, 2nd edition (London: Verso, 2006).

⁵¹⁹ Betterton, 'Why My Art is Not as Good as Me,' p. 38. See also Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2011); Alexandra M. Kokoli, *The Feminist Uncanny in Theory and Art Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 110-11.

⁵²⁰ Julia Skelly, *Radical Decadence: Excess in Contemporary Feminist Textiles and Craft* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 73-100.

much labour and dedication, each letter sewn individually onto the blanket with a creativity in which the ‘decorative feminine ground’, to use Betterton’s terms, is overlaid with texts ‘which radiate an aggressive, tense and sometimes hostile energy.’⁵²¹

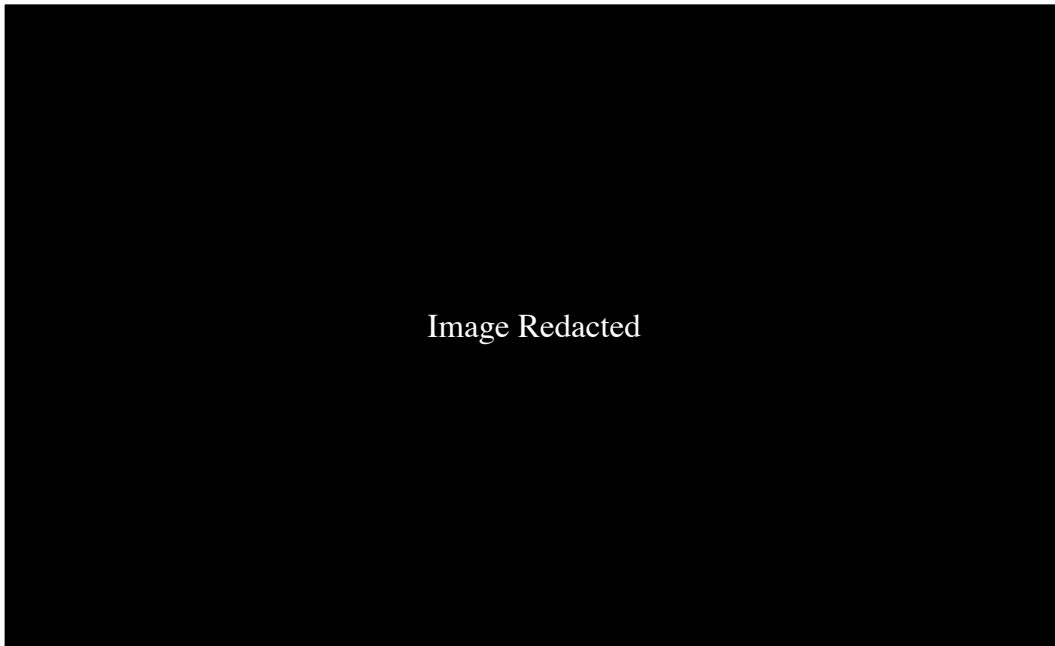


Fig. 3.13: Tracey Emin *Love Is What You Want 1*, 2011, Hayward Gallery.
 Appliquéd blanket 263 x 214. Emin’s Studio, London.
 [Image redacted due to copyright]

This sentiment echoes Gulia Lamoni’s view, who has worked on Emin’s textiles. She observes that Emin’s textile work reflects ‘a naïve and cheerful world of childhood’, yet this imagery is disrupted by the kind of text that is sewn onto the blankets. The method of weaving and sewing ‘covers up, and then uncovers, the narrative of aberrant violence.’⁵²² The appliquéd blankets make visible the invisible story that itself contains a violence towards not only Emin but female subjectivity that attempts to render it invisible: through these works we see another perspective of how Emin’s invisible history comes to visibility and being visible with subjectivity over time is immensely positive. Emin herself indicates that these blankets are

⁵²¹ Ibid. She continues: ‘The iconoclasm of the texts is at odds with the painstaking and detailed procedure of sewing each letter one by one onto the ground, just as the violent expression of the words belies the warmth and security implied by the blanket.’

⁵²² Lamoni, ‘Philomela as Metaphor,’ p. 185.

about making love when it 'is really amazing, just like mind-blowingly, extraordinarily fantastic.'⁵²³ This runs deep in the colourful words on the blankets.

Psyco Slut 1999 for example illustrates the movement of subjectivity from invisibility to visibility.⁵²⁴ Since 1993, Emin has produced blankets for her bed or as works of art from materials found around her home: loose pieces of fabric that are related to her since childhood one way or another, from her mother to grandmother's clothes, or her childhood clothes or from furniture. This is then used as a collage to sew onto a large wool, cotton, or calico as appliquéd works; with her experiences in mind, she carves her thoughts into words to sew each letter onto the fabric, each letter one by one, this is different to a brush stroke with paint onto canvas or paper, or printing with a roller on paper. Sewing becomes the voice of women; her experience of life as a female who lacked subjectivity, creates a double refraction by making personal, invisible, negative experiences visible through the métier of female sewing, which refracts as a political critique again and again, to drum in female subjectivity that needs to be heard and seen ubiquitously. *Psyco Slut*, as one of the first blankets Emin created, is more precious than the latest ones. The rawness of self doubt of Emin's subjectivity fills these works.

They are a play of words; parallel to Emin's experience as a teenager dreaming of becoming a dancer, shattered by the doubts of herself, *Why I Never Became A Dancer* 1995, and the abusive name callings of 'slag, slag, slag' by a group of boys during her dance for a place in a national competition, which she views as being why she never became a dancer.⁵²⁵ This reveals the abrasiveness of excitable speech, according to Butler name-calling is a kind of excitable speech, performed at a time of excitement, and is 'a tacit performativity of power,'⁵²⁶ and in the consensus of a group, and what René Girard calls, mimesis, when one person copies another during the abuse, and Emin becomes a scapegoat for the abusers.⁵²⁷ *Psyco Slut* was an ironic title suggested by Emin's friend Hamish, and the cowboy boots were suggested by her friend Mini, the blanket was a found item in a street of New York; while exploring psychotic moments with drinking, drugs, and sex in New York's actual sex and the city, after not winning the Turner Prize 1999 in Britain.⁵²⁸ Giulia Lamoni links *Psyco Slut* to the myth of Philomena, a princess in Athens who was raped and mutilated by her sister's husband. She finds revenge and

⁵²³ Emin, *Love is What You Want*, p. 165.

⁵²⁴ Emin, *Love is What You Want*, p. 47.

⁵²⁵ Tracey Emin, *Strangeland* (London: Sceptre, 2005), pp. 45–6.

⁵²⁶ Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 159–63.

⁵²⁷ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

⁵²⁸ Emin, *Strangeland*, p. 192.

is transformed into a nightingale, an appropriate image for Emin, for whom birds are a symbol of freedom in visibility.⁵²⁹

Psyco Slut 1999

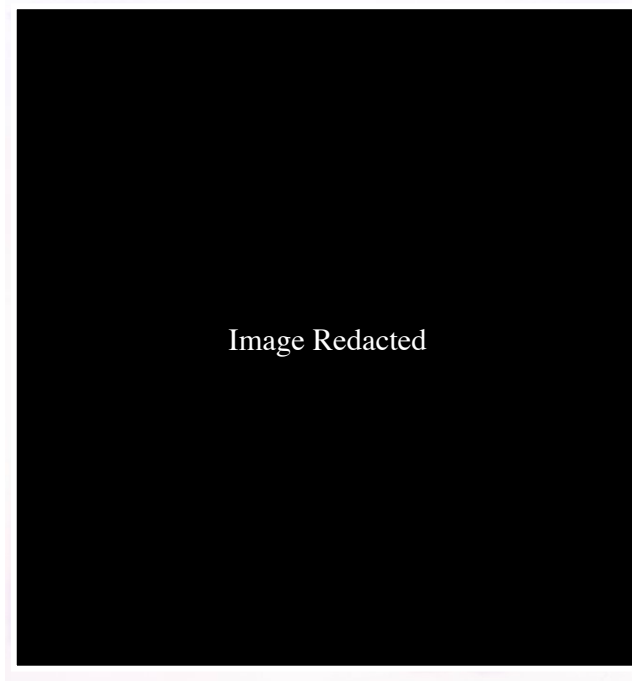


Fig. 3.14: Tracey Emin, *Psyco Slut* 1999
Appliqué Blanket, 244 x 193, Hayward Gallery 2011

[Image redacted due to copyright]

Among the many portraits of Emin, perhaps *Death Mask* reminds us of how Emin wants to put the past behind her, put doubts behind her, in sympathy with her younger self, to put to rest doubts of one's work, and recreate a new self through a process in which she could only voice her truth in parts and not as a whole in art practice, forming it into artwork. With *Bronze*, Emin has found a new passion, similar to Bourgeois's bronze sculptures. Emin created her own face as a death mask with distressed bronze and gold leaf in 2002; it was on loan to the National Portrait gallery in 2005. With mostly male artists on display, it shows how men explored their mortality through self-portrait much more than female artists. It is a significant moment for Emin not only in terms of watching herself grow, but the old self that she suggests is dead through this self-portrait fixed in bronze, creating a space for the new self to be born, in

⁵²⁹ Lamoni, 'Philomela as Metaphor.'

Irigaray's terms, she gave birth to herself, but only by killing the old self. She nevertheless actualises her subjectivity to do so in this second aspect of her subjectivity. And yet, in spite of consciousness of death of herself here, it is Emin's self that becomes visible; but watching her death from above is surreal, which is now sleeping on her patchwork embroidery inside a glass box to preserve the invisible old self. She has taken her mask off her face and reveals her new self. But becoming who she wants to be the old self had to die for her subjectivity to grow. Dissimilar to the Guerilla girls, who still wear their masks during every performance, we are still oblivious to who the girls are behind their masquerade. Emin presents herself unmasked, constituting her work. The question is to what extent the removal of one mask reveals, and whether there is a true self beneath masks, a theme articulated in theatre by Artaud in the 1920s.⁵³⁰ On such a view, presentation of subjectivity is presentation as person in the original Latin sense of *per-sonare*, 'the mask through which (*per*) resounds the voice (of the actor).'⁵³¹ While Emin could be said to 'speak through' her art, this is the articulation of subjectivity that she identifies in artwork; hence presenting an ontological identification relationship, between self and artist's material in artwork, is distinct from the Artaud model of masks in theater studies. Masks hide oneself and can be doubts of oneself, of not being enough. When actors act, they are not themselves, but narration of another for example, which is similar to the masks of the Guerrilla Girls.

⁵³⁰ Nicoletta Pireddu, 'The mark and the mask: psychosis in Artaud's alphabet of cruelty,' *Arachnē: An International Journal of Language and Literature*, vol. 3 (1), 1996, pp. 43–65.

⁵³¹ Marcel Mauss, 'A Category of the Human Mind: The Notion of Person, the Notion of Self,' p. 14, in Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins, and Steven Lukes (eds.), *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), pp. 1-25.

Death Mask 2002

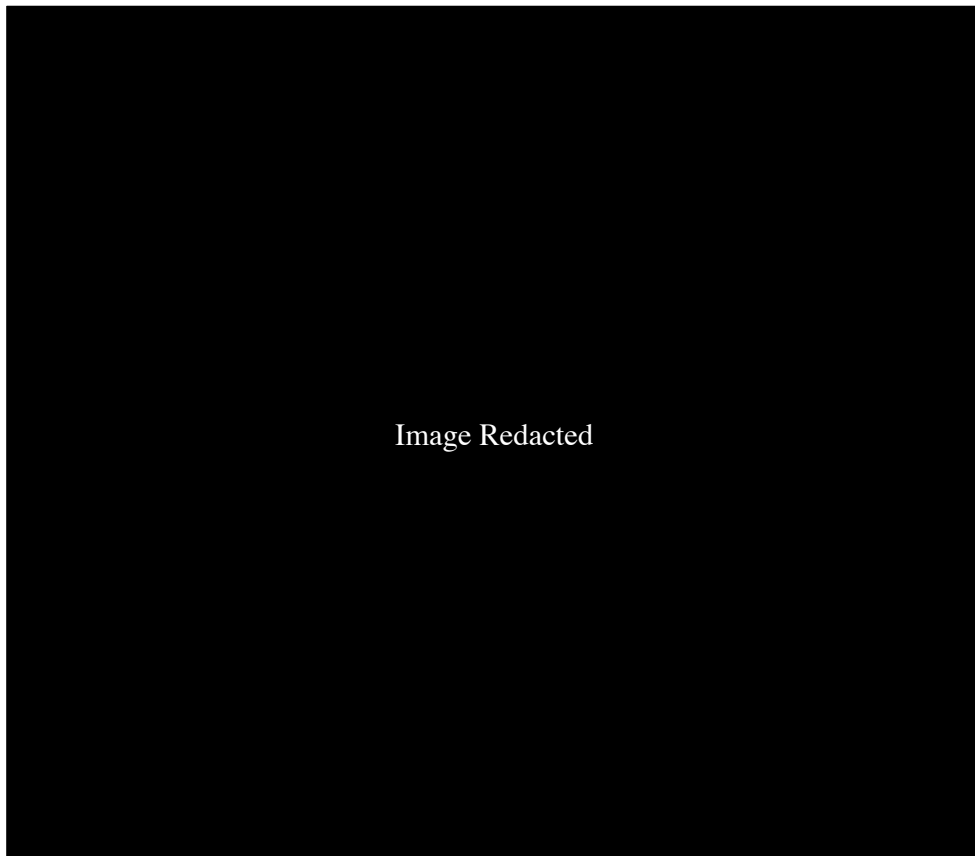


Fig. 3.15: Tracey Emin, *Death Mask 2002*. Black Patented Bronze. And Non Painted Mask 19.5 x 17.5 x 23.5. Vitrine: 33cm x 28.2cm x 29.2 cm. Emin viewing her own Death Mask. National Portrait gallery London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Tracey Emin Looking At Herself 2002

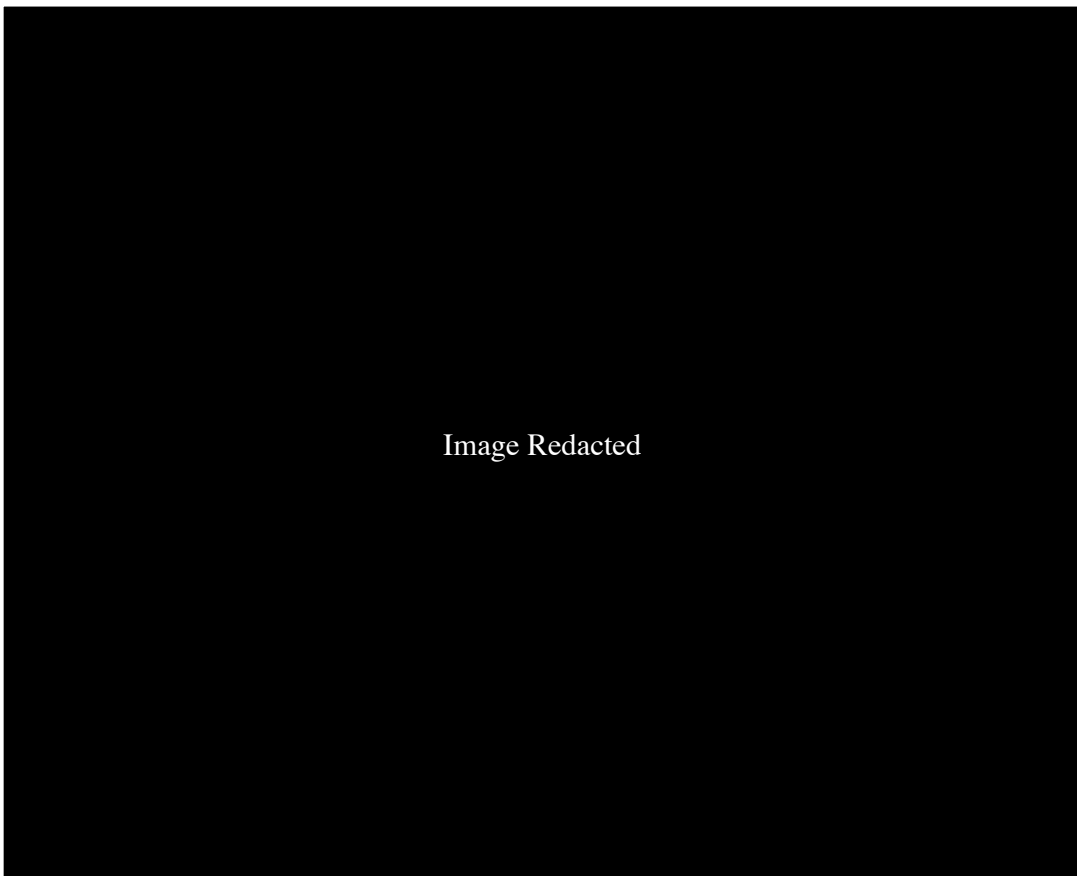


Fig. 3.16: Tracey Emin, *Death Mask* 2002. Black Patented Bronze. And Non Painted Mask
19.5 x 17.5 x 23.5. Vitrine: 33cm x 28.2cm x 29.2 cm. Emin viewing her own Death Mask.
National Portrait gallery London.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

The history of artists exploring life and death in bronze, exhibited in the NPG, until recent history has been mainly male artists. Showing Emin's Bronze Self-Portrait in the same space as the male artists could demonstrate a turn towards taking female artists seriously at long last in Britain, this also reveals the doubts of female artists for centuries.

Since visibility can also posit doubt in art practice, Emin and Chengyao's responsibility is not only for themselves but for the public when they are visible: suggesting 'I am alone to accept what happens in the world and make sense of my life'; meaning comes from experience and is articulated in their being and becoming artists. Irigaray, in a Heidegger trajectory, suggests that, by giving birth to oneself, we have the need to inhabit the world by dwelling in ourselves.⁵³² The movement of being to reveal oneself through artwork is a journey from invisibility to visibility, from the unseen virtual and actual to the seen with all its vicissitudes of life.

In the spirit of feminism, Chengyao and Emin open themselves out, which is both specific and particular to their local, global, social, historical, and gendered situation, and at the same time a common feature of human beings. If the male perspective of being from Merleau-Ponty shows the way we are in the world as embodied creatures and extensions of the world, then a female perspective of the world seems appropriate to our advancement of feminism. Emin and Chengyao's naked self-portraits that gave birth to their new nudes, show a female perspective of the world, and female artists reveal something that male artists cannot see or are capable of knowing from a female perspective, for example, giving birth, breast feeding, or a female period.⁵³³ Irigaray emphasises, 'Our sexuation supplies us with a setting – a *Gestell* Heidegger perhaps would say – for the organization of the living, a frame which makes possible to return to, and a living within us, without going no [sic] further than an abstract and undifferentiated universality of life. Our sexuation represents a limited structure that life itself gives in order for us to develop according to our singularity.'⁵³⁴

Irigaray is suggesting again to respect one's difference in unique sexuation, to respect male or female, as human beings who are attempting to live alongside each other and should respect our singularity. We often doubt the sex of the other male or female creating competition and disharmony within society. The moments of doubt are also shown with invisibility and visibility of Emin and Chengyao's art practice, and the issue of visibility and invisibility itself, of subjectivity that is often neglected – self doubt, doubts by the wider public, and doubts by

⁵³² Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 25.

⁵³³ Tracey Emin, interviewed by Laurie Taylor, 'In Confidence', Series 2.

⁵³⁴ Irigaray, *To Be Born*, p. 3.

art establishments. Chengyao and Emin both faced critics who doubted whether they were even artists.⁵³⁵ This creates self doubt that is deeply rooted in a history of patriarchy, and often occurs invisibly, as Irigaray suggests, it could paralyse. History shows that their male contemporaries are not to blame, but the systemic society from the beginning.⁵³⁶

The doubt about female art practice has a long history and female artists in the 60s and 70s continue to face resistance to their work, with galleries operating a de facto exclusionist policy.⁵³⁷ For example, in 1996 in New York the Guerrilla Girls highlighted that there were no exhibitions of female artists in major galleries except one.⁵³⁸ Sometimes female artists' work was closed down. For example, an exhibition by Margaret Harrison, the founder of the London Women's Liberation Art Group in 1971, was closed down by police that same year on the grounds of indecency.⁵³⁹ Although, since then, there has been more positive engagement with feminist art in the museum curating context.⁵⁴⁰ The visibility of Emin after *Everyone I Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995, and the Turner Prize nomination for *My Bed* 1998 was a defining moment, but it also prompted further doubts from art critics, who disrespected and disparaged the notoriety of Emin's work with hostility.⁵⁴¹ This suggests that a surge of doubt towards her person and her work which turned into uncertainty for Emin, not only from postmodernist critics as part of their job to criticize, but from the public who themselves were doubting artists and art establishments who see Emin as an artist. The public were the real critics that doubted Emin or Chengyao, as female artists whose skills were also under attacked. Drawing or painting skills in the critics' eyes suddenly became crucial in the 90s, 00s, and 10s⁵⁴², and showed how it had carried doubts to the wider art system. The art schools and establishments are reviewing their art programmes and changing the way art students learn skills today, because in the latter part of the twentieth century, art schools did not teach skills like the old masters, due to the

⁵³⁵ He Chengyao, Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ For example, the Whitney Gallery, New York, had such a de facto policy and was subjected to feminist protest in the 1970s. Hilary Robinson, 'Activism and Institutions,' p. 44, in Hilary Robinson (ed.), *Feminism Art Theory, an Anthology 1968-2014* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015), pp. 44-50.

⁵³⁸ Kim Kanatani and Vas Prabhu, 'Instructional Resource: Artists Comment on Museum Practices,' *Art Education*, vol. 49, no 2, 1996, pp. 25-32.

⁵³⁹ See Dominic Lutyens, 'Margaret Harrison, a Brush with the Law,' *The Guardian*, 7th April, 2011.

⁵⁴⁰ For example, Hannah Martin-Merchant, 'Engaging Publics with Arts Institutions: The Frameworks of a Feminist Pedagogy,' *n. paradoxa* vol. 39, 2017, pp. 38-55: 'The identification and theorisation of feminist pedagogies can act as a catalyst for future questions, practice-based and observational research concerning both feminism and pedagogic practice in museums and galleries of contemporary art. A feminist pedagogy can foster increased engagement from different audiences, enabling diverse publics to adopt increased agency both in relation to art production and the experiences of their own learning.'

⁵⁴¹ Chris Townsend, *Art and Death*. p. 53.

⁵⁴² Jonathan Jones, 'Tracey Emin: confessions of a conservative artist with nothing to say,' *The Guardian*, 21-January 2014.

Duchampian trajectory.⁵⁴³ Emin's work would not have been allowed to be exhibited in 60s' or 70s' Britain, but ironically, Emin is now visible to an incredible degree, akin to her male contemporaries, and surpasses their popularity during the 2000s and 2010s.

In 2000s China, Chengyao's doubts concerning her work were also enormous, she did not realise her work would attract such a high degree of attention. Liao Wen emphasised that male artists rejected exhibiting alongside female artists, hence establishments often have a huge problem with unisex group exhibitions in the 80s and 90s, when the Chinese government permitted Western art.⁵⁴⁴ This suggests that female artists' work was doubted by their male contemporaries and art establishments. The confusion is a difficult one to grasp, for the Chinese government welcomed Western influences and female artists embraced Western thoughts as much as their male contemporaries did. What is crucial here is how female artists began to develop their minds through art praxes similar to Emin in the UK.⁵⁴⁵ Artists such as Chengyao, Xiao Lu, Xiang Jing, Hu Yifei, Dong Jinling, Zhang Binbin, Yu Hong, and Wu Weihe in this era, welcomed the new discovery of Western art despite subjugation, privately or publicly. But after the atrocity and grievance of June 4th '89, female artists took steps forward to support male artists who suffered prosecution, but are monitored constantly by state police, displaying doubt about the effect of female and male artists. Hence, exhibitions are mostly monitored and even controlled by government when their works are exhibited. This undermines not only female artists, who were the new allies visibly, whose work is not the forefront of the political agenda, but male artists' exhibitions were also checked and questioned. Female artists were still invisible until the focus on the female body with Xiao Lu, Chengyao, Xiang Jing, Dong Jinling, Yu Hong, and their contemporaries in China, and from a global perspective as well as Emin and her contemporaries in Britain. Thus, we find that Emin and Chengyao's work simultaneously voiced similar concerns of female art practices from the 1990s until the twenty-first century.

From a global view, Chengyao in China encounters further confusion; on the one hand the Chinese public and her contemporaries were attempting to put June 4th '89 behind them, while fear looms, thus accepting Chengyao's performance art was met with confusion and doubt by the public;⁵⁴⁶ it was not until 2006 Chengyao exhibited in the UK, and in 2007 in Brooklyn Museum to exhibit her work in New York for a group show called *Global*

⁵⁴³ Anita Taylor, 'Why drawing needs to be a curriculum essential', *The Guardian*, May 29th 2014.

⁵⁴⁴ Liao Wen interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

⁵⁴⁵ Sarah Lucas and Tracey Emin interviewed JoJo Moyes, *Independent*, Oct 1997.

⁵⁴⁶ He Chengyao interview with Monica Merlin, Beijing 2013.

Feminism.⁵⁴⁷ Her work is connected to the West, because performance art comes from America and Europe. In China, feminist curators such as Liao Wen and the Chinese art establishments reviewed their situation with regard to female artists' exhibitions, but the hard-fought struggle was brutal and slow.⁵⁴⁸ Doubt is visible and continues to appear even in the 2010s; While Gao Minglu claims to see the importance of female artists,⁵⁴⁹ but when Gao and Fei Dawei compiled and published a historical archive of the avant-garde movement of four hundred and nine pages, only four pages were of female artists.⁵⁵⁰ This diminutive inclusion of female artists is still hard to grasp but not surprising as we are negotiating spaces for male artists and female artists' careers. There was a World of Women exhibition in Beijing at the Central Academy of Fine Art in the 1990s,⁵⁵¹ but such exclusive exhibitions arguably have the tendency to marginalise or ghettoise female artists, relegating them to the margins of the art scene rather than the forefront of contemporary art.⁵⁵² But Chengyao's naked self-portraits are a strong contribution towards feminism that attempts to highlight the lack of female subjectivity in the public sphere. Ralph Crozier remarked in 1995 that: 'The Communist Revolution in China has not been very helpful to female artists or their art practice. Neither has the post-Mao 'reform era' of the last fifteen years with its opening to the West, loosening of political restrictions and experiments with consumerism and a market economy.'⁵⁵³ While we understand the brutality of war that all Chinese citizens endured, including those in government, but still, the lack of female subjectivity and female contribution during the cultural revolution or the great leap forward was never acknowledged publically in China, which begs further questions. Hence Chengyao and her confederates are questioning: why do women not have the privilege of voting or holding a space in government when they were the ones who helped 'hold up half of the sky' to win Mao's ideological war? This reveals an abandonment of what they promised women and creates a betrayal of women who trusted communism to liberate them when they are not

⁵⁴⁷ He Chengyao was a featured artist in *Global Feminisms*, curated by Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin. Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art, Brooklyn Museum, Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (eds.), *Global Feminisms* (New York: Merrell Publishers, 2007).

⁵⁴⁸ For example, Chinese authorities closed down a feminist art exhibition as late as 2015. Tom Phillips. 'Beijing shuts down art exhibition on violence against women,' *The Guardian*, November 26th 2015.

⁵⁴⁹ Gao Minglu, "'Particular Time, Specific Space, My Truth': Total Modernity in Chinese Contemporary Art', in Terry Smith, Okwui Enwezor and Nancy Condee, eds, *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2008), p. 134-135.

⁵⁵⁰ Gao, *Total Modernity*, pp. 23-26.

⁵⁵¹ Wu Hung, *Contemporary Chinese Art 1970s-2000s* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2014), p. 222.

⁵⁵² Kate Mondloch, 'The Difference Problem: Art History and the Critical Legacy of 1980s Theoretical Feminism,' *Art Journal*, vol. 71 (2), 2012, pp. 18-31.

⁵⁵³ Ralph Crozier (1995) 'Nine straws in the wind a group exhibition of young women artists in Beijing,' *Third Text*, 1995, vol. 9:31, pp. 97-101.

prioritised or acknowledged since the war.⁵⁵⁴ The causes of such neglect are complex but entail entrenched patriarchal values that reach deep into the past and take time to evolve. The lack of acknowledgement creates invisibility of women, thus a lack of female artist visibility. It is in contrast to this that Emin in the UK gains liberty to create her work and voice her thoughts without fear but doubts from critics still looms.

The issue of the visibility or invisibility of female artists' work is thus a political decision by galleries about inclusion and exclusion. This raises questions regarding the criteria whereby a particular work is excluded from exhibition. Such decisions are ostensibly on aesthetic grounds only, but there could be covert bias in the decision-making process. Since the early 2000s, feminist curatorial policies have begun to have some effect: in Spain being in the West, for example, the socialist government introduced a law for institutions to critically examine and evaluate their policies regarding the inclusivity of women.⁵⁵⁵ Perhaps sooner or later it will be global.

But appearance of female artists' work in galleries is a manifestation of their subjectivity being visible, it is about their presence as female artists in the public sphere and not as representation. If modernity, characterised by developments in science and technology, is also about the actualisation of female subjectivity, or self-assertion as it has been characterised by Hans Blumenberg,⁵⁵⁶ then the continuing growth of visibility for female artists in galleries is also about self-actualisation for female aesthetic subjectivity.

The work *Homage to Edvard Munch and All My Dead Children* 1998 (Fig: 3.17) below, is a film that Emin re-enacts her version of Munch's famous *Scream* 1893 on the same pier; Emin's shrieking scream for nearly a minute was far more chilling than Munch's *Scream*.⁵⁵⁷ Her naked body bowed over to show homage, respect, and admiration for Munch as the title suggests, along with paying homage to her dead children because of the abortions she had, she exhibits her respect and acknowledges their existence, to show their deaths are not the end of someone, they are invisible but not forgotten for Emin, especially when Munch's work is

⁵⁵⁴ Sasha Su-Ling Welland, *Experimental Beijing: Gender and Globalization in Chinese Contemporary Art* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), pp. 20-25.

⁵⁵⁵ Maria Lopez Fernando Cao, 'Mujeres en las Artes Visuales (MAV)/ Women in the Visual Arts: Seven Years of Work,' *n. paradoxa*, vol. 38, 2016, pp. 74-80. On the issue of feminist curatorial practices, see the 2006 edition of *n. paradoxa*, vol. 18.

⁵⁵⁶ Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Mas: MIT Press, 1983), p. 138.

⁵⁵⁷ Carl Freedman, Honey Luard, *Tracey Emin, Works 1963-2006*, p. 391-397.

influential in our present day. Rudi Fuchs remarks: 'Somehow Emin's version of Munch's universal image of anguish is more horrifying than the original picture.'⁵⁵⁸

But there is also a suggestion of doubt with this homage, while it reveals how she feels in empathy with Munch and herself, with an ethical notion of respect, she is also looking to a male artist for her work, this not only exhibits a harmony with Munch but also a catharsis in self doubt, similar to the work of Chengyao's *Homage To Duchamp* 2001 (Fig: 2.6), or *Salute to Mama: Respect To Joseph Beuys* 2001, who not only looked to Duchamp or Joseph Beuys for approval but a catharsis of self doubt in art practice. In this respect Emin and Chengyao are still artists who doubt their own creativity, as Emin often says she knows she is not a good artist, this is doubt, which also contrasts to arrogance. There are no male artists who title their artwork using homage to any female artists thus far. They both perform their naked self-portraits and visibly claim a subordinate position in these works.

Through examining selected works I have shown how visibility entails an ontology of being and how Emin and Chengyao develop the process of self and art practice with visibility as the second aspects of their subjectivity. Accompanying this is an element of doubt that exemplifies a hesitation characteristic of female subjectivity in the history of female artists. But a distinct element of their art practice is a quality of inclusivity, which leads my discussion to univocity in Chapter four.

⁵⁵⁸ Ibid.

Homage to Edvard Munch and All My Dead Children 1998

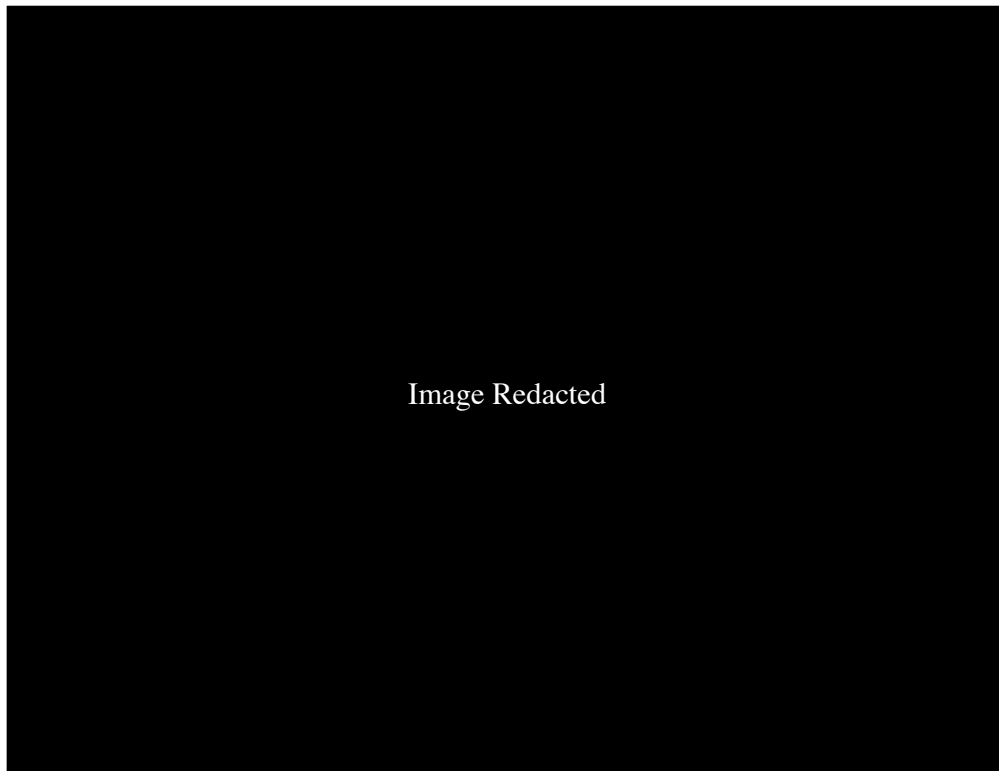


Fig: 3.17: Tracey Emin *Homage to Edvard Munch and All My Dead Children* 1998.
Single screen projection. Fear, War, and The Scream 2004.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

Chapter 4 – Univocity of Faceless Bodies

Because previously I, on the fifth of this month, I'm going to do a live performance called 'Breathe', and that was why I cut my hair. I shaved it all off. I didn't want it to get in the way of my performance. I want my identity and gender both to be neutral. I want to portray a side of me that is neutral, with zero interference. I can show you my pictures later – I can send them to you afterwards if you need them. Here, for 'Breathe'. It was performed on the fifth of March. I used my mouth to exhale, like, 'ha, ha', with the intention of trying to tear apart, breathe through this piece of paper. This is not just about my self. See, here, it's torn apart. This is about, the feelings I have to this world as a person. And that is the reason why I wanted to perform this with a neutral identity. Because this isn't just about females.⁵⁵⁹

The last Chapter explicated visibility and invisibility of Emin and Chengyao's work, which brings me to this chapter discussing works relating to Emin or Chengyao's third aspect of subjectivity. The previous two chapters showed how performativity and visibility constitutes Emin and Chengyao's first and second aspect of their subjectivity, which leads to the third aspect of their subjectivity, univocity, in this chapter. Again, my original contribution to knowledge compares Emin and Chengyao's work and how their art practice comprises an ontological identification relationship that reflects their three aspects of subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity in their new nudes. The term Univocity is borrowed from Deleuze's last essay before he died *Immanence: A Life* 1995, a concept that is also expressed by the idea of Bodies Without Organs (BWO) that he and Guattari adopted from Artaud, explained in a *Thousand Plateaus* 1987.⁵⁶⁰ The Body is one fundamental component of the human condition we can all identify with, that we cannot disregard so easily, however we attempt to deconstruct, reconstruct, or annihilate it. Deleuze and Guattari remarks: 'It is nondesire as well as desire. It is not at all a notion or a concept but a practice, a set of practices. You never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is

⁵⁵⁹ He Chengyao Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

⁵⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1987), p. 150-158.

a limit. People ask, So what is this BWO? – But You’re already on it, scurrying like a vermin, groping like a blind person, or running like a lunatic: desert traveller and nomad of the steppes. On it we sleep, live our waking lives, fight – fight and are fought – seek our place, experience untold happiness and fabulous defeats; on it we penetrate and are penetrated; on it we love. On November 28, 1947, Artaud declares war on the organs: To be done with the judgment of God, ‘for you can tie me up if you wish, but there is nothing more useless than an organ...’ ‘Miss X claims that she no longer has a brain or nerves or chest or stomach or guts. All she has left is the skin and bones of a disorganised body. These are her own words’⁵⁶¹ These words relate to Emin and Chengyao’s subjectivity/desire, which consists of univocity that constitutes the third aspect of their subjectivity, this is revealed in their faceless bodies, they are akin to Miss X in art practice suggesting, the world relates to us as if we have no brains or organs that matter, they declare war on the lack of female subjectivity. Deleuze and Guattari continues to say there is ‘The *paranoid body*: the organs are continually under attack by outside forces but also restored by the outside energies.’ And there is ‘The *Schizo body*, wagging its own active internal struggle against the organs, at the price of catatonia.’ And then there is ‘the *drugged body*, the experimental schizo: ‘the human body is scandalously inefficient. Instead of a mouth and an anus to get out of order why not have one all-purpose hole to eat and eliminate? We could seal up nose and mouth, fill in the stomach, make an air hole direct into the lungs where it should have been in the first place.’⁵⁶² Deleuze and Guattari are addressing the body in commiseration with Artaud’s ‘war on the organs’. Suggesting the body is a complex array of diseases affected by outside forces and restored by outside forces, which includes the psychic. The body is problematic, and yet it is in this disease that we unite in Univocity, in inclusivity.

Emin and Chengyao’s work attempts to communicate from opposite sides of the world in their exhibitions; the body, especially the female body that is broken, must be addressed, and they do in multimedia through an ontological identification creative process with three aspects of their subjectivity. The brokenness of the female body exhibitions attracts critiques from a global postmodern society. This explicates why some of Emin and Chengyao’s new nudes are faceless bodies and why some of Chengyao’s performances exhibit her body disappearing altogether, and why she and Emin are discussing inclusivity in their work about *Breathing* with another and why their words such as the quote above draws our attention to not only their subjectivity but the vicissitudes of life, and the lack of female subjectivity with

⁵⁶¹ Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 149-151.

⁵⁶² *Ibid.*

faceless bodies in univocity with feminism. It demonstrates the way in which their work is both unique to each artist but inclusive of another, which is the fundamental idea of 'I desire x' as explained in the Introduction and Chapter One, the desire to be inclusive of male or female, artists or otherwise, yet being unique with 'nondesign and design' as Deleuze and Guattari suggested.

Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity is always in a process of becoming, especially when they can give birth to themselves in Irigaray's terms, and they can also reconstruct themselves as Butler suggests. Univocity is not universality, in that it comes from a particularity that attempts to voice something they believe in, an event, or a cause they wish to preserve, such as art, or feminism, or family, or being oneself among others with the same idea of being. In the same cause, the one voice of being particular subjectivity, is also the one voice of another's being and is something that they can debate, argue about, or fight against but together, between two persons, or a hundred persons, or in their thousands, or the whole world in this aspect of their desire/subjectivity. Hence univocity is both particular and inclusive. Emin said that she decided not to draw faces because they get in the way of a direct experience for the audience, this is similar to Chengyao's quote above, as Emin does not want the work to be simply about her, and yet, she is the model and the artist for all her works. How do we account for this contradiction? The answer to this question is in her three aspects of subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and for this chapter – Univocity. This is not Emin hidden under a duvet but connected with whoever views the work. In an interview with Norman Rosenthal, she emphasised how a lot of her paintings have no faces because she wants the work to also be about other woman.⁵⁶³ Emin creates new nudes in response to the lack of female subjectivity in the history of the traditional nude, where women were used as the model, as an object without subjectivity, she attempts to reverse the traditional nude and turning herself into the model of a new nude similar to the feminist artists in the 60 and 70s; it is a self-portrait that highlights not only herself but another, and which desires to connect with another. When another person, male or female, views the work, the self-portrait of Emin also becomes them. There is a dynamic interaction between audience and artwork, arguably to make a connection to the audience. This connection is an identification of the subjectivity of the viewer with the subjectivity contained in the work; the work speaks to them, even though they may dislike the work, it may have the same voice about feminism, or the topic of the work, or something that touches them one way or another. This happens because of the third aspect of their subjectivity, is within them, and hence shows

⁵⁶³ Tracey Emin, in conversation with Sir Norman Rosenthal, Independent Curator and Writer, London 2013.

in the artwork itself, univocity with particularity resonates with the particularity of the other. The faceless body indicates particularity without personality or individuality as the third aspect of subjectivity is fundamental to further understand their uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity, which constitutes three aspects of their subjectivity that one can identify with, for example, feminism or a feminist voice of being. Emin claims, when people see her work, they will think about their own lives: what they have been through in their experience of love, heartache, pain, suffering, sex, abortion, and how everyone experience the vicissitudes of sex no matter what country they live in.⁵⁶⁴ Similarly, Chengyao in China said that her work is about her mother and grandmother who cannot speak for themselves; and how her work is about them and their pain, experience, and memory, but which is also about her own pain.⁵⁶⁵ This entails empathy in line with a post-contemporary view of art practice.

Part I of this chapter will discuss Particularity in Univocity, Part II will discuss Abstract Visual Ethics, and Part III will discuss the Concept of Freedom. The term univocity as an aspect of subjectivity out of the three aspects is the unique particularity of each artwork as it is in each person. This particularity entails an ethical perspective within Emin and Chengyao while they create their artwork during the process of the ontological identification relationship, because ethics also involves another person in an exhibition. Artists have a responsibility, as do art establishments, to say whatever they desire within the remit of possibilities, that artists can do whatever they wish anywhere in the world is a myth. Despite Emin's sexuality, or walking out in the middle of a TV program drunk, or Chengyao's nakedness in public, or the behavior of masters such as Francis Bacon's decadent maverick persona, or the amount of womanising in male studios with traditional nude, their work is the one thing they know they must stay true to; it is who they wish to be, even the random play of music in John Cage, or the lack of consciousness while creating an artwork in order to be conscious, deep down, they wish to be responsible not only towards their public but towards their art praxis, as do Emin or Chengyao with their work.

They feel responsible towards their art praxis, there is also an expectation of them from art establishments as much as they themselves have an expectation of their own work. But they are working towards something ethically connected to another in this third aspect of subjectivity. Furthermore, inclusivity and particularity of univocity entails freedom of being, because being particular and being inclusive of others implies a freedom of comportment

⁵⁶⁴ Tracey Emin Interview with Tim Marlow Hong Kong 2016, with Stephen Sackur London, June 2012.

⁵⁶⁵ He Chengyao Interview with Leung Kwankiu 2013, 2016 and 2017, with Monica Merlin 2013.

towards others in an ethical manner, however minute, be it to fight together, play together, being together for a cause, or even being patriotic, the one voice suggests a univoicity of being.

Part I – Particularity of Univocity

For complex reasons female artists often return to the subject of the body, among them the desire to actualise subjectivity in a patriarchal world and to reclaim bodily experience, to assert the field of the body as political statement against patriarchy, and to assert the body as a realm of encounter and enquiry that goes against any anti-body religious, sensibility. We see this with the collaboration between Emin and Bourgeois.

Deep Inside My Heart 2009-2010

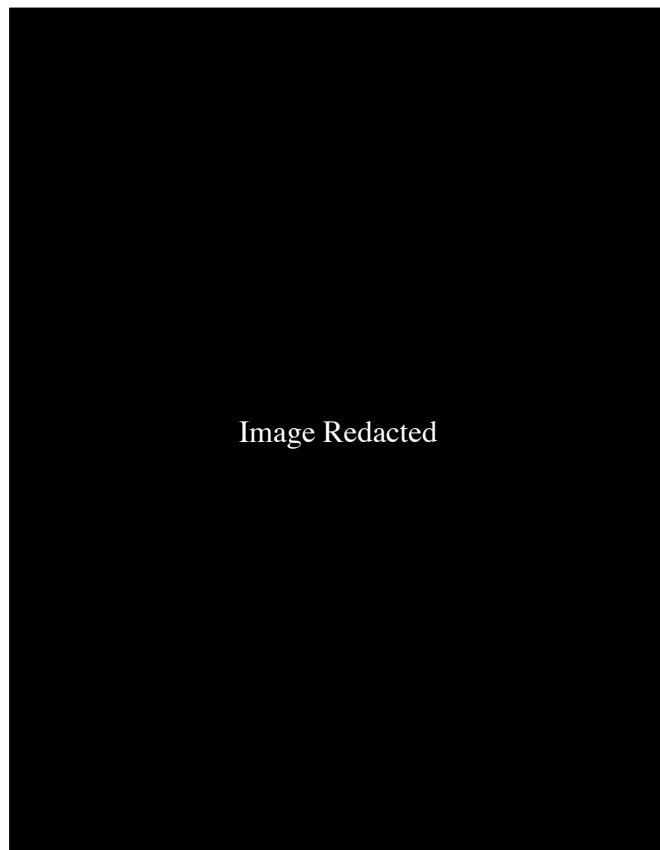


Fig. 4.1: Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois, *Deep Inside My Heart* 2009-2010
Archival Dyes Printed on Cloth, *Do Not Abandon Me*, Hauser & Wirth 2011.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

They produced work in collaboration such as *Deep Inside My Heart* 2008-2010, which was one of the sixteen works Bourgeois created in a series for Emin to build on, it took Emin nearly two years to add to Bourgeois images. This image exhibits a pregnant female torso with the black and blue image inside the womb space, which could be a foetus or something that has died inside. Again, the head is absent and being pregnant presents the artwork as the birth of themselves. Bourgeois' work has been another inspiration for Tracey Emin.⁵⁶⁶ Alas Bourgeois died May 2010 before the exhibition was held in Hauser & Wirth, London, February 2011, however, Emin did return the finished paintings to Bourgeois who was delighted to see the results.⁵⁶⁷ While such work is open to psychoanalytic interpretation,⁵⁶⁸ this thesis investigates the ontological interpretation of their work, although there is no contradiction here necessarily, as both are an inquiry into the nature of being in the world. Emin and Bourgeois' concerns are parallel to Chengyao in China, but their significance here underlines a univocity of being in a global feminist art practice in the twenty-first century regardless of catharsis, because being female artists in this era attracts further problems such as doubts as discussed in chapter three.

The primary site for the articulation of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity is in their naked self-portrait/new nude, since the body for them is a precarious sensibility that needs to be reclaimed, reflected, and remodelled. The history of the nude in art practice has been broadly the process of identification of gender with biological destination and how the female body is related to matter and male related to mind. If there were to be another way of exhibiting the female body, then it would undermine this self-validating loop (the traditional nude), although on another view this attempt in some way continues to validate it (the new nude). While there may be other strategies that feminist practitioner artists have devised, such as taking control of the presentation of women, it is the new nude in particular that draws our attention to the invisibility and the visibility of the lack of female subjectivity. The new nude is an idea born out of the sense that artists need to turn the traditional nude on its head since the 60s feminist female artists.

The examples of Emin and Chengyao's work that exhibit a new nude necessitates an interpretation of their work in terms of univocity as the third aspect of subjectivity, the very

⁵⁶⁶ Tracey Emin and Louise Bourgeois, *Do Not Abandon Me*, (London: Hauser & Wirth, 2011). Also, *The Guardian*, Charlotte Higgins, Chief Arts Writer. December 2010.

⁵⁶⁷ Arifa Akbar, 'When Tracey Emin met Louise Bourgeois' *The Telegraph*, February 15th 2011.

⁵⁶⁸ Jane Rendell, *Site-Writing: The Architecture of Art Criticism* (London: I.B.Tauris, 2010). Also see Bracha Ettinger, *The Matrixial Borderspace* (University Of Minnesota Press, 2006). And also Griselda Pollock, *After-Affect/After-Image: Trauma and Aesthetic Transformation in the Virtual Feminist Museum* (Manchester University Press, 2013) – *Visual Politics of Psychoanalysis: Art and the image in Post-Traumatic Cultures* (London: I.B. Tauris 2013).

fact that their work connects with another, in collaboration, or connecting with the audience, and drawing our attention to another feminist voice; who also wishes to make sense of their lives, their environment, and their ontological identification relationship. Faceless bodies are similar to *Bodies without Organs* that draws our attention to bodies that matter. From their personal experiences of love, heartache, sexuality, abortions, pain, rape, mental illness, and so forth, which relates to corporeal concerns. These contingencies are univocal with most women, if not also for men.

The themes they are concerned with, such as *Breathe* (Fig: 4.8-9) and *Breathing* (Fig: 4.2-7), indicates human condition that is inclusive, we all have to breathe to survive. Emin's *With You I Breathe* 2010, evinced something that she does not only on her own but also with another. The air that we breathe in is the same air as another, love is another participation we do with another, partnership is another, or play with or among another, and so forth. The idea of univocity as the third aspect of their subjectivity is an intrinsic value for this interpretation in consonance with the data of Emin or Chengyao, and also rendering the Deleuzian paradigm of Univocity into a theory about Emin and Chengyao's work. As the first two aspects have shown in the previous chapters, performativity and visibility connect and fundamentally constitute their subjectivity, this third aspect of univocity also connects with the first two aspects as a formula similar to a bloodline as shown in the triangle, they constitute their subjectivity, which is reflected by their work phenomenologically. This explicates the contradictions of why there are faceless bodies, apart from what most claim as lack of skills; perhaps Emin lacks some skills, hence with a humble heart she further attends drawing and painting classes, but in a deep sense, in concept based art practice since Duchampian trajectory, her creative mode of being in her ontological identification relationship is far more crucial than perfect graphics on paper. She is open about learning as a human being, and skills and abilities are learned throughout an artist's life, as Picasso once said, 'It took me four years to paint like Raphael, but a lifetime to paint like a child.'⁵⁶⁹ Inclusivity or univocity of others is not new but it has never been interpreted as univocity in Emin or Chengyao's work as an aspect of subjectivity before.

This rendering of the naked self portrait without a face performs the particularity of Emin or Chengyao, but it is also a metaphor that explains the lack of female subjectivity. The viewers who feel the same participate in the same voice of being, then it grows to another, then another, and so forth, and the voice of univocity extends. Their faceless body also attempts to

⁵⁶⁹ Daniel Honan, 'What is the Big Deal' *Big Think* 2007-2018.

remind some audiences to be aware of self, that there is a lack of subjectivity and space for women or indeed female artists. Through a feminist voice the faceless body exhibits identification and indicates the particularity of each work beyond self for a deeper cause than personality; Emin or Chengyao's work exhibits particularity without personality, hence without a face, head, or even a body. They are making sense of things by enacting subjectivity in their own body as female nudes that question the crucial history of the traditional nude, which is simultaneously about the subjectivity of the viewer, 'I' in this third aspect.

This also suggests the practice of empathy. There is a relationship between the idea of univocity and empathy. The aspect of subjectivity that is univocity is a single voice of being, with another person, or group, or family, and this very fact implies an openness to the other. Indeed, while the naked faceless bodies evinced lack of subjectivity as the body without a head shows, but if we look deeper, we find what the message of the artists are attempting to communicate is inclusivity and univocity. When Chengyao exhibited abroad, it was always in the spirit of Chinese tradition, she is concerned with the ideal of vital forces that extends in this third aspect of her subjectivity, a global hybrid aesthetics with inner force of the body, which is both Chinese and Western, as Deleuze also citing Bergson terms, 'Vital Forces'; but her ontological identification relationship includes the forces of an ancient concern of China *breath, breathe, and breathing*, the qi that goes in and out of body, the air we all breathe, with the energy of her Chinese body. Despite the influence of Western art, a Chinese performance is Chinese art, speaks Chinese, thinks in Chinese. Similar to Chengyao who is interested in the West, Emin in her cultural formation of Britain and Europe, is also interested in China, she once said on her blanket, 'Sometimes I want to have children. Not my own, but other people's children, Chinese people's children'... 'And sometimes I don't understand this world'.⁵⁷⁰

The intensity of memories for both Emin or Chengyao are unique materials to encounter for their work; they are making sense of their particularity, which is inclusive during their ontological identification relationship process. The memories are lived experiences on different levels, according to Paul Ricoeur: memories are not only a story told, but when a memory is revealed, it is to live the experience again, only with less intensity.⁵⁷¹ This would explain why Emin created *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With 1963-1995*, 1995, and Chengyao created *Opening The Great Wall* 2001, and their other artworks mentioned in this thesis. Their memory is embedded to the unique particularity of each work, which is from their subjectivity to the

⁵⁷⁰ Adrian Searle, 'Ouch!: Tracey Emin's new show is full of angst and trauma. But there's more to art than pain', *The Guardian*, November 2002.

⁵⁷¹ Paul Ricoeur, *History, Memory, Forgetting* (Chicago University Press, 2004), pp. 5-8.

subjectivity of another or audience; to exhibit is to be visible, is to be potentially inclusive. The knowledge of their personal experiences becomes a fulfilment of a cycle of understanding their work, such as a hermeneutical spiral. Each work therefore articulates the unique voice of their subjectivity, as univocity, a concept Deleuze orientates his thinking towards a notion of the self that has continuity and yet is characterised as difference (from itself and from others, something unique that nevertheless is repeated – particularity). Difference includes another; the self identifies with another.⁵⁷² Instead of attaching his thinking to the representational model Deleuze moves toward encounters with imperceptible forces in the realm of becoming. His project describes human subjectivity as a non-dualistic and interdependent process open to a chaotic flux that maintains the subject as open.⁵⁷³ In this respect human subjectivity is undecidable, a heterogeneous flux mixing both body and mind. Deleuze's disavowal of representation in turn implicates the difference between being and becoming and with this the lack of stable or fixed identity. But one thing that can be said about the process of subjectivity is that it is a unique voice of being; being is particular rather than purely individualistic or universality, but each subjectivity is also a univocity within a particularity in the same instance, and that is why it necessitates this third aspect of subjectivity within Emin and Chengyao's ontological identification relationship. Furthermore, univocity is not an isolated concept but each particularity is linked to others in a connectivity that is similar to the infinite possibilities of rhizomes that not only interconnects humans, but also nature, animals, insects, earth, water, fire, and space, without an end or beginning, always adding more and more, connecting in any giving point. 'The rhizome is an anti-genealogy'.⁵⁷⁴

This means we are the same but different at the same instance without the control of time or hierarchy. Deleuze and Guattari claims that 'artists are like philosophers' is another connection.⁵⁷⁵ Moore suggests the job of a philosopher is to 'make sense of things', then Emin or Chengyao's ontological identification relationship is thus here to 'make sense' of their lives in art practice, with performativity and visibility, and when their work is exhibited it includes univocity. The web of causation that results in the plant is complex, including the right soil, sunlight, moisture, but the plant has no telos other than its growth and the rhizome is the root system of interconnections with no telos other than their innate connectivity. So, their telos is

⁵⁷² A.W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 554.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota press, 1987), p. 11.

⁵⁷⁵ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* Trans Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), pp. 172-173.

interconnectivity to reproduce and being fed by sunlight. Deleuze claimed that his book, also forms a rhizome with the world,⁵⁷⁶ so as analogy we might say that Emin and Chengyao's work forms a rhizome with the world, which is a vital force but one with some crucial telos of communicating the lack of subjectivity from their uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity. They signify themselves and while at one level they are presentations of their subjectivity as artists, at another level they transcend their subjectivity through artwork. This web of interconnectivity is a dynamic play of forces that interact and create an interdependent relationship, similar to their ontological identification relationship that involves making sense of materials in art practice, such as their subjectivity/desire, but in the third aspect of subjectivity – univocity, they wish to bracket the self for another.

For Deleuze and Guattari, *Bodies Without Organs* are without a subject or an object, it is a neutral metaphorical concept of a Being among their rhizome strata, always interconnecting in multiplicity, which through interconnectivity, creates the virtual becoming actual. Bodies are virtual becoming actual, virtual is alive as much as the actual.⁵⁷⁷ This means, faceless bodies of Emin or Chengyao are virtual becoming actual, where their virtual being becomes actual, when their subjectivity is actualised, becomes actuality. Drawing out the relationship between univocity, individuality, and the rhizomatic, there is firstly the one voice of being coming through, but with interconnectivity, for example, for Emin or Chengyao, when their work is exhibited it interconnects with the public. This univocity is particular to them but goes beyond individuality if by that we mean personality, the surface characteristics of the artwork such as colour, race, personality and so on is bracketed or momentarily put aside for the purpose of another. Thus, the univocal particulars in any system (such as ants in a colony or people in a society) are connected by webs of rhizomes. Rhizomes are lines of communication and energy transfer connecting particulars, like the mycelium of fungus. Within the field of art, Emin and Chengyao might say that their work are particulars and yet connected through invisible rhizome connections to artist, audience, and other artworks or the global stage.

Faceless bodies suggest a desire for univocity similar to Deleuze's desire for univocity with *Bodies Without Organs*. Deleuze and Guattari are concerned with interconnectivity, rhizomes, connectivity, and voice, and bodies without organs can do that. In 1995 Deleuze wrote his last article, that suggests a plane of immanence to present a philosophy about subjectivity as univocity; in 'Immanence: A life' 1995, he summarises his main ideas of life

⁵⁷⁶ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateau*, p. 11.

⁵⁷⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?* Trans Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 140 -160.

and work of particularity in univocity, that he exemplified in a story from literature, in Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, which explicates Univocity:

No one has related what *a* life is better than Dickens, by taking account of the indefinite article understood as the index of the transcendental. A good-for-nothing, universally scorned rogue is brought in dying, only for those caring for him to show a sort of ardent devotion and respect, an affection for the slightest signs of life in the dying man. Everyone is so anxious to save him that in the depths of his coma even the wretch himself feels something benign passing into him. But as he comes back to life his carers grow cold and all his coarseness and malevolence return. Between his life and death there is a moment which is now only that of *a* life playing with death (Dickens, 1953: 443). The life of the individual has given way to a life that is impersonal but singular nevertheless, and which releases a pure event freed from the accidents of inner and outer life; freed, in other words, from the subjectivity and objectivity of what happens: a “Homo Tantum” with which everyone sympathizes and which attains a sort of beatitude.⁵⁷⁸

The above story exemplifies a sense of particularity without individuality or personality occurring in the characters, they are in agreement to care for the old man who was sick, but when his personality returned, it sours their attempt to continue the good deed. This is a good example of univocity that Deleuze attempts to exemplify as a life without personality that unites for a good cause, but a voice with another, a particularity as uniqueness of each, that has the same concerns for a wider and higher ethical intentions. Once Emin or Chengyao's faceless bodies are exhibited, their work has a life of its own, they stand by their work but always rooted as a parent, hence when *My Bed* 1998 returned to the Tate, Emin was called upon to remake her bed, or Chengyao's work is reproduced in films or photography, which continues her performativity. Being in the ‘plane of immanence’ reminds us of the particularity of life in pure presence without the personality of a person that Deleuze calls a ‘transcendental field’ but it is not a Kantian transcendental with God above, but ‘a pure a-subjective current of consciousness,

⁵⁷⁸ Gilles Deleuze, ‘Immanence: une vie...’ *Philosophie* 47, Sept. 1995, pp. 3–7. Translated by Nick Millet, ‘Immanence: A Life...’ *Theory, Culture, Society*, vol. 14 (2), 1997, pp. 3–7.

an impersonal pre-reflexive consciousness, a qualitative duration of consciousness without self.⁵⁷⁹ While Deleuze claims a-subjective, it is important to note that Emin and Chengyao's work reflects the first and second aspect of their subjectivity, performativity and visibility, apart from this third aspect, which is non subjectivity or where subjectivity is bracketed for the purpose of another, they become non self in order to gain empathy for another person or animal or ecology or a wider concern such as lack of female subjectivity.

This third aspect of aesthetic subjectivity is univocity that constitutes a particularity and inclusivity that not only in their desire but it is in their artwork, where self and artwork is exhibited. Deleuze derives the idea of plane of immanence from a number of sources, that includes his own concepts. His foundation comes from the works of Scotus, Spinoza, Leibniz, Hume, Kant, Nietzsche, and Bergson, which he has written books about, but for Univocity, John Dun Scotus takes precedent. Deleuze is a monist and as such developed an immanent account of the flux within the becoming of something from his admiration for Spinoza's non-dualism, and how there is only one reality with two attributes (extension/body and time/mind) or one substance with two aspects, Space and Time. Deleuze also follows Nietzsche's affirmation of life, and Bergson's work on time, the virtual and actual as becoming, and the vital forces that influences our environment.⁵⁸⁰ While these thinkers are very different, he proclaims connected concepts in his philosophy. What is crucial in the present context is that, Deleuze's notion of the creation and the sustaining of concepts are also a way to instigating, developing, formulating, assimilating, addressing, and solving problems.⁵⁸¹ Here and Now is a concept that counts and how there is no transcendence to a God above, the term 'transcendental field' for him means the 'plane of immanence,' the reality of life is self and object transcend each other, as it is with virtual and actual that transcend one another.

What Deleuze wants from this idea is to highlight the importance of life itself but life on the plane of immanence, as an event in the present. The idea shows us that the only thing we can be certain of is not doubt and not even consciousness, but life as event lived in the present – 'Immanence'. This is against Descartes' doubt theory but agrees with Spinoza's idea of affection, and ethics. Moreover, this idea accounts for the particularity of life in univocity. Each of us is a unique person, and yet each of us participates in Being and so we are both particular, unique to ourselves, and Being with a sense of existence with another. This inclusiveness of being as well as his insistence of difference when the universal is limited,

⁵⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 3.

⁵⁸⁰ Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics*, pp. 545-549.

⁵⁸¹ Ibid, p. 574.

which is particular and unique to each, is the plane of immanence, which means life as we know it now. This means, he is making sense of his world through a plane of immanence.⁵⁸² What is important here, are Emin and Chengyao's faceless bodies without a face or a head or a body in their exhibitions, corresponding to Deleuze's Bodies Without Organs in the space or plane of immanence; and Emin and Chengyao's work illustrate this from their third aspect of subjectivity 1. their work is similar to Bodies Without Organs, 2. their work is exhibited in galleries around the world in this era, here and now in the plane of immanence, and 3. they transcend themselves through artwork – in their ontological identification relationship, and not through to a God above. Deleuze's Immanence a life on this plateau, earth, is subjectivity that is particularity and consciousness without a self-centered body, without dualism, but with consciousness of another in mind, an empathy for another in one voice, is the univocity of the third aspect of their subjectivity. As Deleuze claims, the 'transcendental field' is pure immanence: a consciousness that is particular but not individual.⁵⁸³ This absolute subjectivity devoid of personality means we are connected to another, in a field of consciousness.⁵⁸⁴ It is not the person as such, who is a man or woman from a particular class, who does a particular job, or has certain likes and dislikes, but a pure subjectivity prior to social conditioning and gender differentiation, that provides a being of oneself. This is the univocity of being that Deleuze emphasises in his last work; each instance of particularity, each specific being. And Emin or Chengyao embody this third aspect of their subjectivity, without which they would not be thinking about another.

To discuss Emin or Chengyao in terms of the third aspect of subjectivity, *univocity*, that derives from Deleuze, can be seen in the concrete instances of their work. Alice Jardine thought that the Deleuzian paradigm of de-subjectification was a threat to the hard-won reclamation of subjectivity by women through feminist struggle,⁵⁸⁵ parallel to Lois McNay's critique of Foucault. Jardine argues that Deleuze/Guattari's position, is that people are desiring machines and that men and women are *agencements machiniques*. In contrast to the desiring machines, Deleuze/Guattari, as we have seen, posit bodies without organs, 'what remains when everything has been removed.'⁵⁸⁶ Irigaray critiques the Deleuze/Guattari idea, briefly, in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, on the grounds that it takes away the space in which women's desire could grow and be expressed. The Bodies Without Organs (BWO) comes to occupy the space

⁵⁸² Ibid, 543-560

⁵⁸³ Ibid, p. 3-10.

⁵⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁸⁵ Alice Jardine, 'Woman in Limbo: Deleuze and His Br(others),' *SubStance* vol. 13 (3/4), 1984, pp. 46-60.

⁵⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 6, quoting *Anti-Oedipus*, p. 329.

of woman who is thereby excluded from majority discourse, because the body without organs, in contrast to the desiring machine, is a minoritarian discourse. Jardine approvingly cites Irigaray on this, thus, her critique of Deleuze/Guattari is twofold. Firstly, supporting Irigaray, the BWO entails a denuding of women's place in culture and society because it denies them 'organs' through which pleasure is experienced (and perhaps also as a necessary condition for experience more generally). Women have never had such a relationship to experience and the BWO takes away the potential for women to be part of mainstream discourse. On the surface we read BWO as deconstructing women, but looking at it deeply I discovered it is the opposite, it attempts to highlight something about our system that looks at women without Brains or Organs of power, they are highlighting the lack of subjectivity in women, and how women feel in their society. Deleuze/Guattari speak about 'becoming woman' as process in which everyone needs to participate as critique of modernity. Becoming a woman is a state of critique through become a minority, a minoritarian discourse, but this involves in the end becoming imperceptible. Becoming a woman, observes Jardine, has very little to do with actual women. Women in the Deleuze/Guattari model have to disappear to become a BWO: 'There would then remain only her simulacrum: a female figure caught in a whirling sea of male configurations. A silent, mutable, head-less, desire-less, spatial surface necessary only for His metamorphosis?'⁵⁸⁷ Jardine is critical of this move. Women's place in discourse and the assertion of subjectivity has been hard won and, as Goulimari observes, for Jardine the Deleuze/Guattari model is incompatible with feminism. Deleuze/Guattari block the future for feminism with a model that is irrelevant to contemporary political struggles.⁵⁸⁸ Goulimari, by contrast, argues that because of the minoritarian discourse, Deleuze/Guattari has relevance to feminism.⁵⁸⁹ But this does not need to be a resolution between Deleuzian figures of thought and feminism.

Bodies Without Organs constitutes virtual and actual as the same and collapse into one, without a face or a head means in the space of the virtual, but becoming actual, with subjectivity is the first two aspects, but particular is the third aspect – univocity. While, on the one hand, there is force to Jardine's critique, that the BWO excludes women from discourse, on the other, the BWO articulates an important idea that circumvents a narcissistic or egoistic discourse centred on patriarchy, a discourse highly relevant to feminism. As Jardine points out, for

⁵⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 54.

⁵⁸⁸ Pelagia Goulimari, 'A Minoritarian Feminism? Things to Do with Deleuze and Guattari,' *Hypatia: Journal of Feminist Philosophy*, vol. 14, 2, 1999, pp. 97–120.

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 105.

Deleuze/Guattari 'becoming' (*devenir*) is a process and this process is what I have attempt to highlight as a condition of becoming, as the flow of subjectivity that interacts with artist's material. This is crucial, even if Jardine's critique that the BWO deflects from political struggle is correct, the BWO is relevant for its ability to highlight the aesthetic realm as the place of critique as well as appreciation of artwork for its own sake. Undoubtedly, the BWO as the plane of immanence is relevant to the discussion of Emin and Chengyao's work, especially because Deleuze identifies it with particularity and univocity, that I have identified as a third aspect of their subjectivity that we see reflected and manifested in Emin and Chengyao's artwork, which their images will show below.

Why do Emin and Chengyao draw our attention to the eradication of their faces or bodies, apart from unwelcome remarks such as, Emin cannot draw, or Chengyao is not an artist, and the critiques mount to doubts about their art praxis, both in China and Britain? Perhaps the answer is hidden is their subjectivity/desire/intersubjectivity, to be artists, to be acknowledged, to be born, to be among others. Chengyao recalls *Opening The Great Wall* 2001:

After I did it, there was a lot of opposition. Most of it was in relation to the female body, so the piece was criticised from that aspect. It is related to the discrimination, oppression and suppression of women in traditional culture. The idea is that women shouldn't be nude! Even if you're half naked, then it is seen as being totally naked.⁹⁰

As with many of Emin or Chengyao's artworks, they cannot be viewed solely with one aspect; if we do, it loses the other two aspects of their subjectivity. Faceless bodies are non-identifiable and anonymised but with particularity in univocity that exhibits the third aspect of subjectivity, when their artwork is exhibited to reach a wider audience and attempts to be in one voice with feminism. It is also about ethics, arguably because of human predisposition to pro-sociality. The faceless bodies are implicitly inclusive through an ethical stance; if human beings are fundamentally social creatures, as Evolutionary Anthropologists and Social Neuroscientists posit,⁹¹ then through this third aspect of subjectivity, univocity, Emin or

⁹⁰ He Chengyao, Interview with Monica Merlin, Beijing, 2013.

⁹¹ This pro-sociality is rooted in our evolutionary past. See Agustin Fuentes, *The Creative Spark: How Imagination Made Humans Exceptional* (New York: Dutton, 2017). Fuentes' argument is that human evolution develops along the trajectory of both genetic and cultural change and that sociality has been fundamental to human development. Such pro-sociality is linked to an increase in brain size and the requirement of cooperation for survival. To my

Chengyao are linked to this human predisposition to pro-sociality, this is not socialism; but rather as sociable human beings, we need others to survive as they need us to survive, as their work draws out attention to when exhibited publicly.

Chengyao continues to risk her freedom for her art. In the 2010s her work became less naked, but still critical with naked self-portraits in the new nude reading regardless of clothes, with performativity that includes univocity,⁵⁹² similar to Emin who also became less naked, as the work *Breathing* 2015 in Germany and *Breathe* 2016 in China exhibits. She covered her face with tissues, then sprayed it with water; this exhibits the two crucial things we need in life: breath and water. The tissues suggested a barrier that the breath and water can easily break through. There is a sense of a process of living; she breathed forcefully, gasping for air in the image *Breathing* 2015 – and in image *Breathe* 2016 the force of the breath creates a breach in the material, highlighting the force of breathing. We all breathe and often take it for granted. What this illustrated here suggests a primal state of the self before personality, a sense of becoming, and interconnecting, with the outgoing breath, breaking out of restriction. Since breathing is crucial in all life, these works attempt to suggest solidarity in univocity, during and after the exhibition.⁵⁹³ Chengyao's face is covered, revealing an ambiguity over being visible/invisible, articulate/inarticulate, and voiced/voiceless in her performativity. The univocity aspect of this work constitutes the other two aspects, performativity and visibility, univocity inclusively emphasises another, creating interconnectivity constituting performativity and visibility. This performs a faceless body with particularity of Chengyao while attempts to connect with audience; it is not about her childhood, her mother, or familial history but about *Breath* in all of us. Hence non subjectivity in this aspect of univocity.

Here Chengyao is fully clothed in both images, which is parallel to Emin's metaphorical naked self-portraits. These works involve Chengyao's body, a timeline with six images to show she is going through a process of suffocation and breathing when inhaling, it is naked because herself is performing the work with a sense of openness and communicating a concern. Here metaphorically she strips down to bare life, the breath of life, that is the process of subjectivity unique to Chengyao's body and yet inclusive of another.

knowledge, this is fairly undisputed in the evolutionary sciences. See also Michael Tomasello, *Why We Cooperate* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2009).

⁵⁹² He Chengyao, interview with Kwankiu Leung, Beijing March, 2016, also in 2013. Also, He Chengyao interview with Monica Merlin 2013.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

In this work, I'm actually using meditation (Chán Xiū – 禅修) and taboo (Jìn Zhì – 禁制) to find a path. I'm trying to use art to find the marks left behind in my pursuit for the truth...I'm, trying to materialise the process I undertook in my search. Because of my identity as an artist, I came up with using this simple method to portray [the truth], as well as to remove anything else that is unnecessary. Actually, I believe things like facts and truths are actually very simple – humans are the ones that complicate them.⁵⁹⁴

Breathe 2015, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

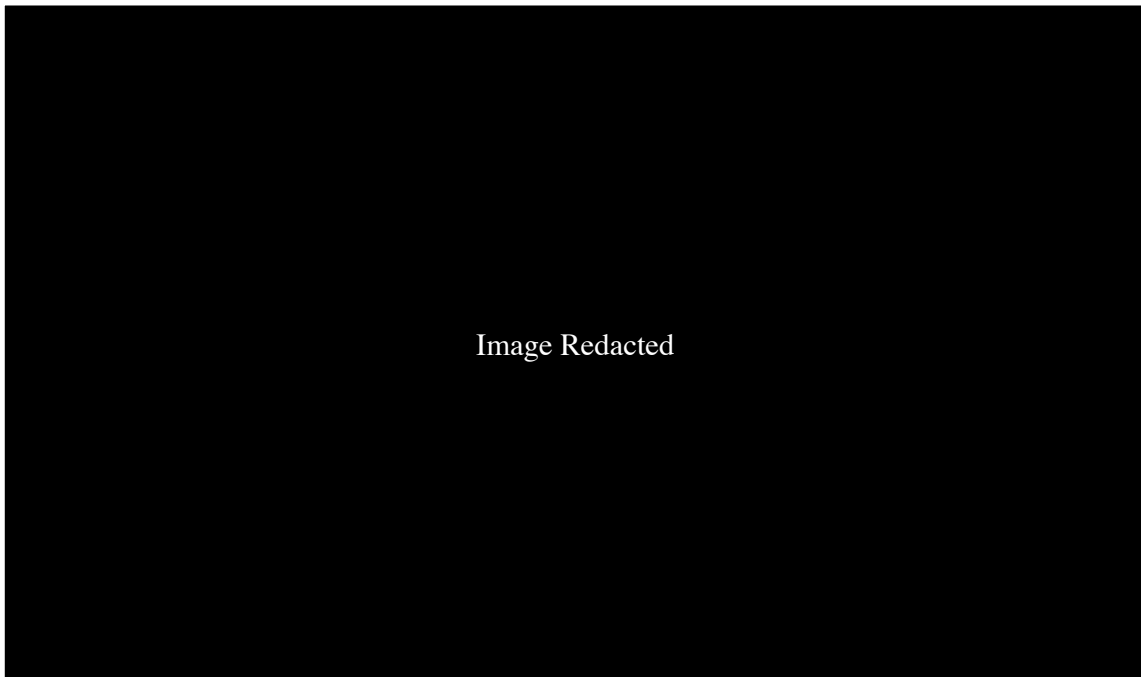


Fig. 4.2: He Changyao, *Breathing 2015*. Performance Photograph 1. Interval 7, Marita Bullmann, Germany.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

⁵⁹⁴ He Chengyao Interview With Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

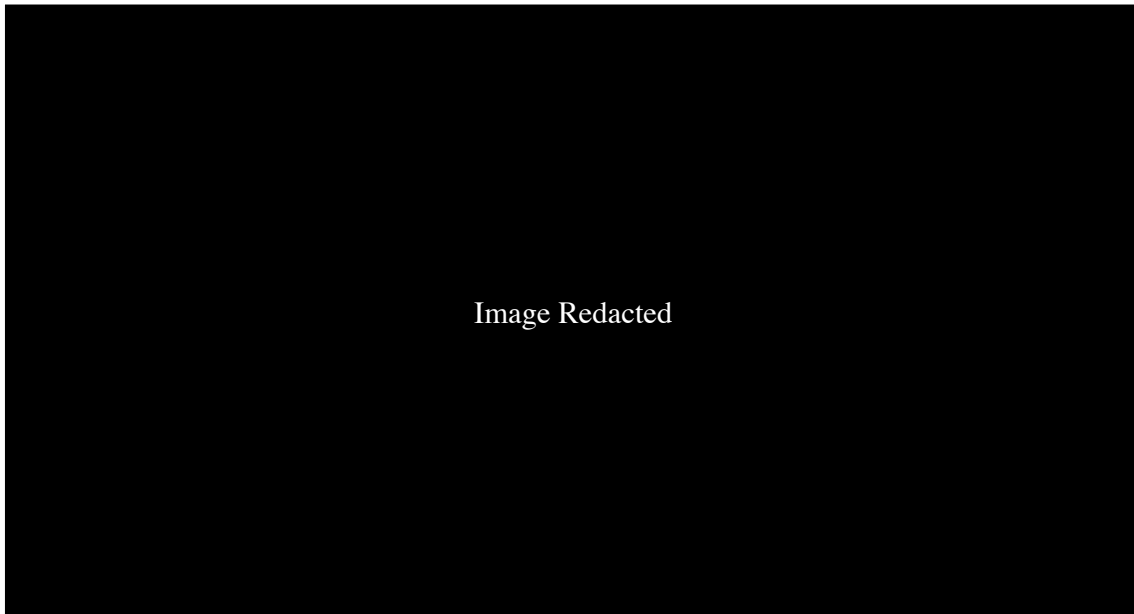


Fig. 4.3: He Changyao, *Breathing* 2015. Performance Photograph 2. Interval 7, Marita Bullmann, Germany.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

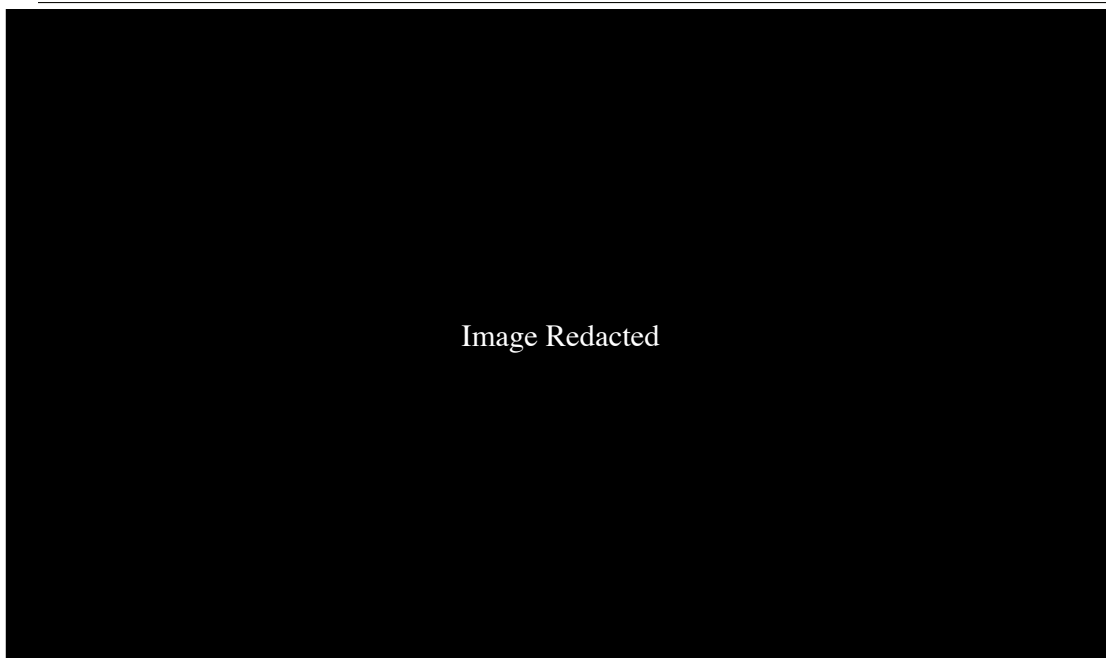


Fig. 4.4: He Changyao, *Breathing* 2015. Performance Photograph 3. Interval 7, Marita Bullmann, Germany.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

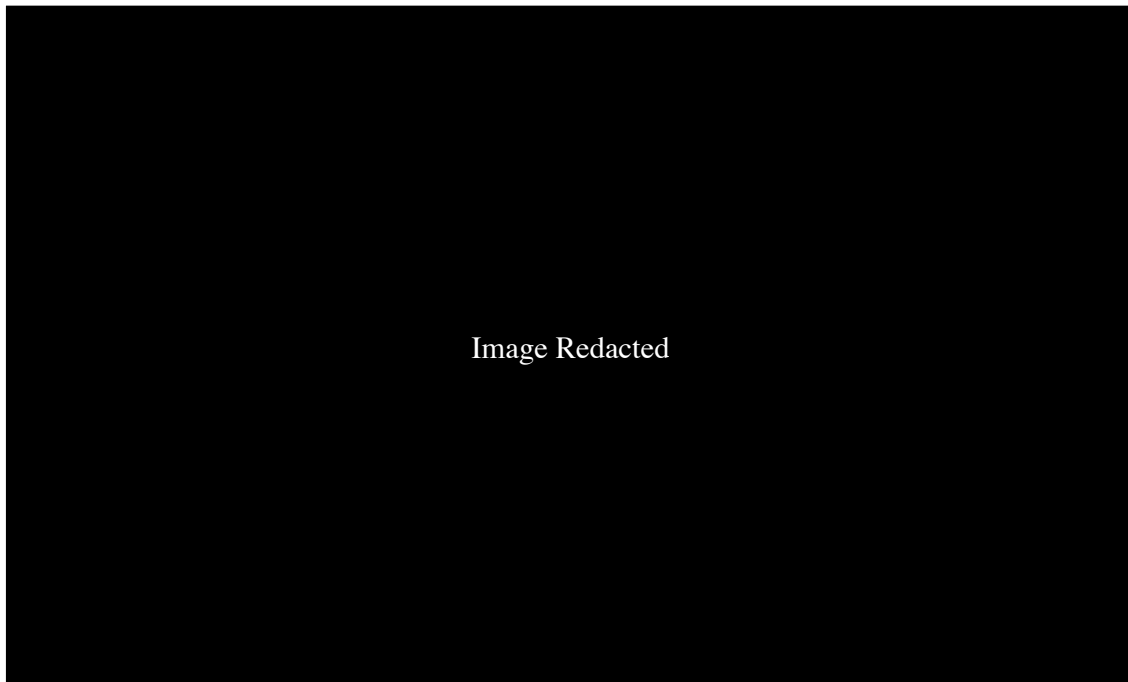


Fig. 4.5: He Changyao, *Breathing* 2015. Performance Photograph 4. Interval 7, Marita Bullmann, Germany.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

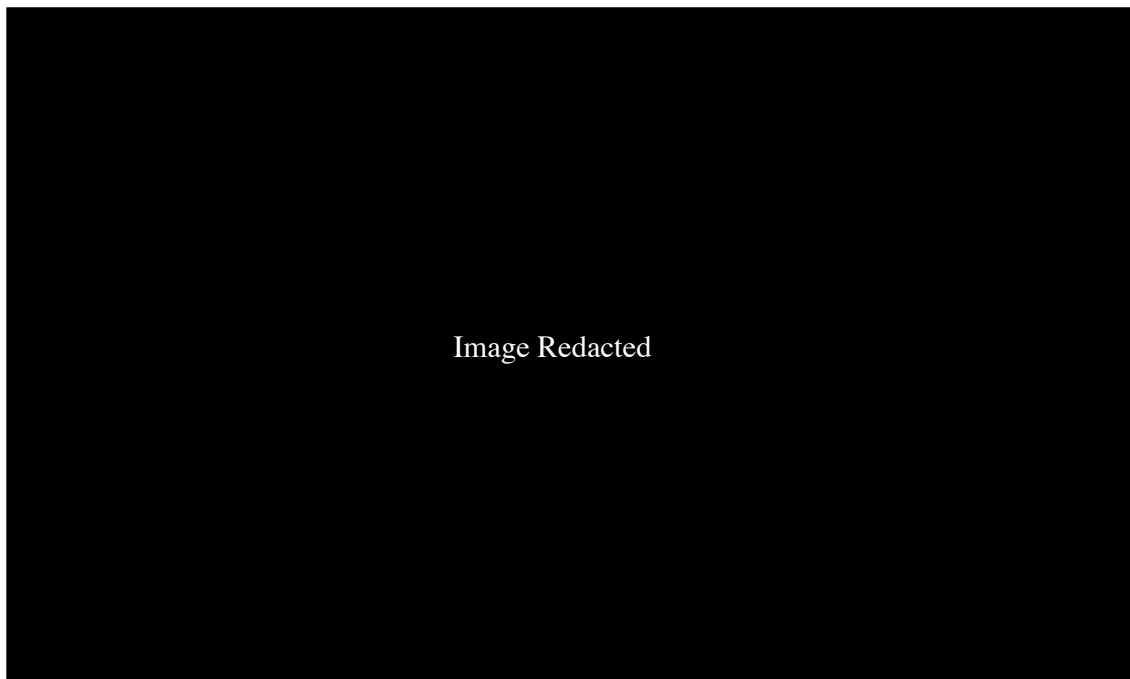


Fig. 4.6: He Changyao, *Breathing* 2015. Performance Photograph 5. Interval 7, Marita Bullmann, Germany.
[Image redacted due to copyright]



Image Redacted

Fig. 4.7: He Changyao, *Breathing* 2015. Performance Photograph 6. Interval 7, Marita Bullmann, Germany.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Once Chengyao removes the tissues that seemed to have turned into a mask, as if a sense of release occurs when the Mask is no longer covering her face. She takes the tissues off and breathes again during the performance. There is a sense of empathy for those who might be suffocating by their society, or in the process of breathing again, both in China or abroad since this work was performed in China and Germany with univocity in mind. Through this aspect of aesthetic subjectivity, univocity is reflected along with performativity and visibility. There is a sense of freedom in breathing itself, with nothing else around her except the red bottle water spray and tissues on the table, her body sitting on a chair against the black background, she does not drink the water, which is also a basic need that constitutes actualisation of subjectivity. The same is with *Breathe* 2016, but this time she is standing up with no table or a box of tissues, but only one piece of tissue ready for the water spray on the floor, in front of the audience and journalist filming and taking photographs. These works show particularity of Chengyao, with herself performing her subjectivity, interconnecting with bare life in front of an audience, breathing with them, and living alongside them. *Breathing and Breathe* is existence of being, oneself with another beyond words, beyond gesture, beyond meaning, or relations, but we all have to breathe to survive. Chengyao inherits her Chinese

cultural background and the idea of *breath* also means subtle energy or *qi* adds to the equation. As Jullien argues, *breath* is a reservoir of energy, and that this is the fundamental understanding of the term *qi*,⁵⁹⁵ and this work give us that connotation behind Chengyao, it is meditative, and her shaved head also gives away her meditative tendencies, as a Buddhist, her hair is one of the first things to forsake.

Irigaray has thematised the breath as a force that speaks univocally, the first autonomous gesture of a living human being.⁵⁹⁶ Breathing is equivalent to living, something that Western culture has neglected, thinks Irigaray, but that is a key component to who human beings are. We are engendered by male and female, although it is woman who shared her breath through the uterus initially, a material breath, and then through teaching the child, which is a spiritual breath and, for her, the true meaning of Mary's virginity.⁵⁹⁷ She addresses the idea of breath as the source of our living being, the primal force that gives life and the common denominator of human beings, even though we are 'sexuated' into distinct genders. Breath is the giver of life and if we can identify breath with being, with being here and now, then breath is the articulation of subjectivity, stripped of cultural accretion and gendered expectations.

Irigaray calls this 'becoming oneself.' She writes: 'Becoming oneself means winning this unique being that we are, but of which our culture and the milieu in which we live constantly deprive us'.⁵⁹⁸ Irigaray thematises breath and breathing repeatedly through her work in the three philosophical periods that can be identified: 1. A radical critique of Western philosophy, through deconstruction and using mimesis to establish the idea of female subjectivity; 2. Establishing the conditions of the field of female subjectivity, especially focusing on sexual difference; and 3. Establishing a framework for ethical relationships between two subjects and the dialectics of a relationship that embodies sexual difference, thus a new ethics of the future and an ethics of breath. At the heart of the matter, for Irigaray, is the desire to go back to a basic sense of life that is the true nature of the subject and the true nature of the response to Socrates' injunction 'know yourself'. Articulating this desire, she writes, 'Knowing oneself can occur only through one's work and the return to oneself as the place where life is preserved and from which it can still germinate. This needs a being with oneself,

⁵⁹⁵ François Jullien, *Vital Nourishment: Departing from Happiness* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

⁵⁹⁶ Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: From Singularity to Community*. Trans. Stephen Pluhacek (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), p. 73. 'The Age of Breath,' *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 165-70.

⁵⁹⁷ Irigaray, *Between East and West*, p. 75. Also, Luce Irigaray, *Il Mistero di Maria* (Rome: Pauline Edizione, 2010).

⁵⁹⁸ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 41-2. Also see Luce Irigaray, 'The Age of Breath,' *Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 165-70.

free from representation or knowledge already determined – a repose in oneself of breath, of energy, without any intention or plan; that is an attempt to go back to the source of our living being, in order to perceive it and let it be and spring up, instead of drying up through our existence.’⁵⁹⁹ While Irigaray raises a crucial female subjectivity point, it is nevertheless missing the idea of different aspects of subjectivity, to deconstruct and reconstruct subjectivity which gains a kind of going back, of retrieval of a basic contact with life through breath, an awakening of humanity, that Chengyao attempts to draw our attention to through *Breathing* and *Breathe*, but more than this, recognising that the breath is about more than biological need it is about freedom to reconstruct with her third aspect of subjectivity. For Irigaray, this idea of the breath is linked to a kind of ethics that highlight connectivity and the importance of the other,⁶⁰⁰ a theme that others have also expanded such as Skof who wishes to develop an ethics of otherness based on the breath, a kind of pragmatism that goes against Kantian ethics in emphasising the embodied nature of ethics exemplified in the breath.⁶⁰¹ Chengyao’s *Breathe* and *Breathing* is within this spirit and hence articulates a univocity with particularity. Deleuze’s concept captures this aspect of subjectivity that can be linked to breath as the most basic pulse of life and Chengyao and Emin, have drawn our attention to this fundamental sense of being in univocity.

These works not only capture the most basic principle of life but express freedom from incarceration. In this sense their work resonates with so many other cultural forms that use breath as a mode of freedom: one thinks of yoga, poetry, singing, and even sport. All voice is predicated upon the breath. Irigaray’s idea of authentic subjectivity is where she emphasises coming into contact with a sense of being deeper than culture which is manifested in the breath. Apart from her critique, Chengyao’s *Breathing* 2015, *Breathe* 2016 (Fig: 4.2-7, 4.8-4.9) and Emin’s *With You I Breathe* 2010 (Fig: 4.10) demonstrates the same idea. Breathing reveals life and being alive that resonates with Irigaray’s idea of ‘I breathe therefore I am,’⁶⁰² which is deeply within ourselves to be aware of our subjectivity as a ‘foundation,’ in existence, and of who we all are. The breath extends as voice and breathing in and out creates the necessary condition for speech and expression of a human univocity of being, a particularity of humanity

⁵⁹⁹ Luce Irigaray, *To Be Born* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), p. 41.

⁶⁰⁰ Irigaray, ‘The Age of Breath’; Luce Irigaray, *Between East and West: from singularity to community*, trans Stephen Pluháček (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

⁶⁰¹ Lenart Skof, *Breath of Proximity: Intersubjectivity, Ethics, and Peace* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015). Also, Lenart Skof, ‘Ethics of Breath: Towards New Ethical Spaces of Intersubjectivity,’ in Sigrid Hackenberg y Almansa and Lenart Skof (eds.), *Bodily Proximity* (Ljubiana: Poligrafi, 2012), pp. 199-208.

⁶⁰² Luce Irigaray, *The forgetting of air in Martin Heidegger*, tr. Mary Beth Mader (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), p. 163.

in connectivity with another. With a Chinese breath she exhibits a solidarity with feminists abroad, their struggle even to breathe, highlighting restrictions, but suggests breath can break through to freedom, this draws longing to end struggles for both women and men.⁶³ This has a double articulation, ‘combining personal experience with social inclusion.’⁶⁴ There is transition in Chengyao’s life, from exploring Buddhism 2014 with hair, to becoming a Buddhist 2016 without, to becoming a nun in 2017 in a monastery. She shaved off her hair for *Breathe* 2016 revealing Buddhism is about being neutral, which includes women and men in univocity. Butler has highlighted the reconstruction of self through performativity, and limits to the importance of agency in understanding performativity and self-conscious awareness from self actualisation.

⁶³ Madeleine O’Dea, *The Phoenix Years: Art, Resistance And The Making Of Modern China* (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2016).

⁶⁴ I have taken this phrase from Wu Hung, who is referring to Zhang Huan’s *12 Square Meters*, but which is applicable to He Chengyao. Wu Hung, *Transcience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 107. An earlier work by the artist Song Dong is a two-part project called ‘Breathing’ (1995). Part one was in Tiananmen Square in which the artist laid on the ground breathing for about 40 minutes in minus 9 degree conditions, producing ice on the cement surface of the square. Part two involved breathing onto ice on a frozen pond in Beijing for forty minutes. There was no change, the ice simply remained ice, his breathing had no affect on the ice or China. Wu Hung, *Transcience*, p. 59.

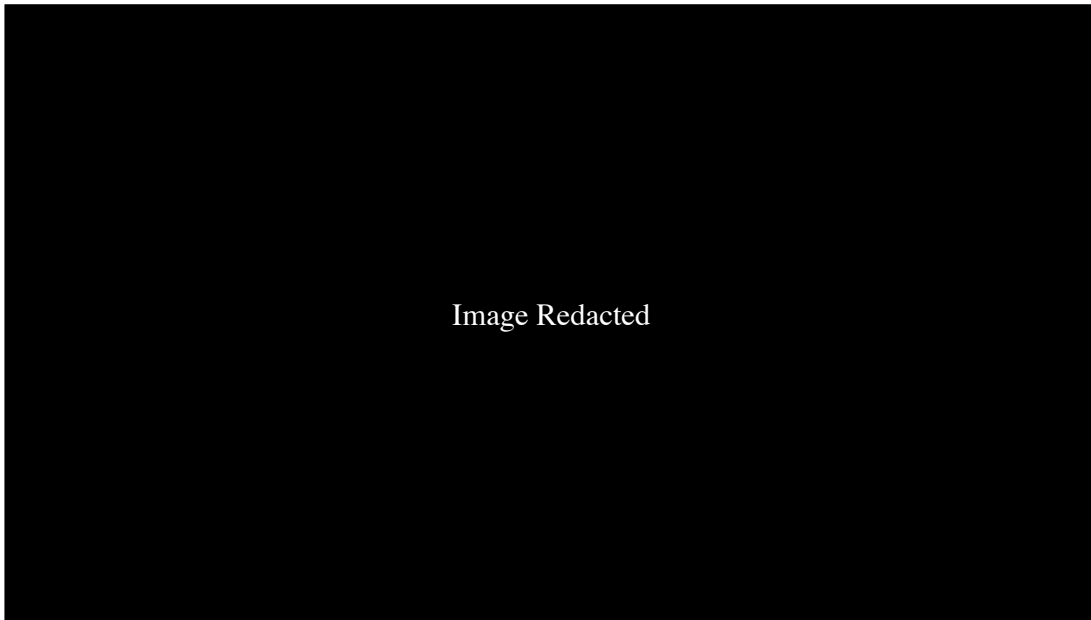
Breathe 2016

Fig. 4.8: He Chengyao *Breathe 2016* Performance, Photograph 1, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

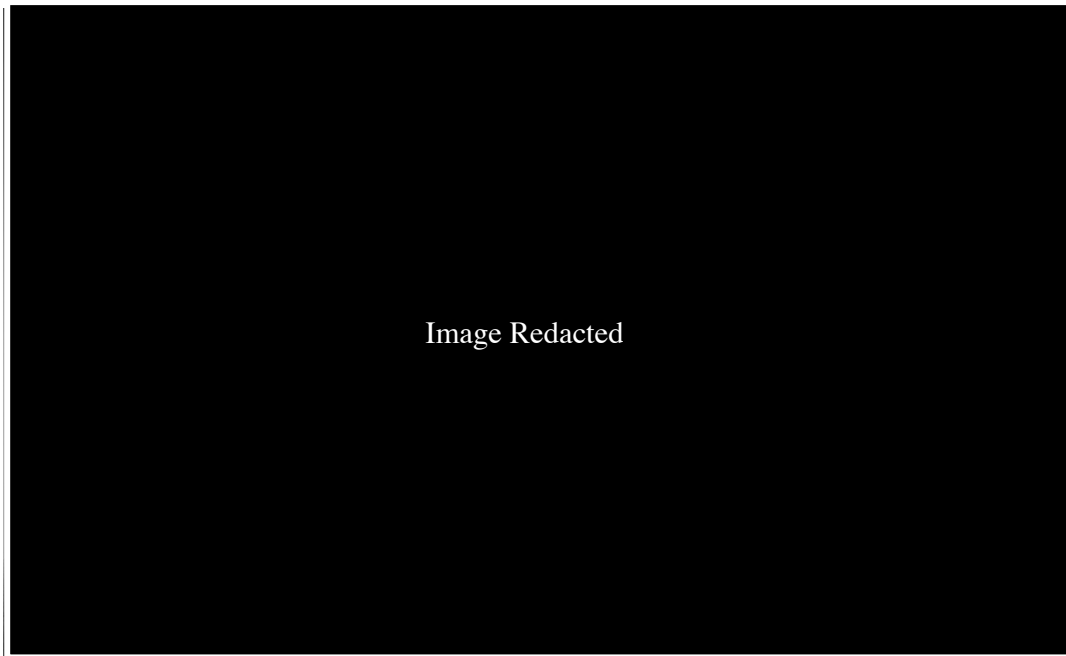


Fig. 4.9: He Chengyao, *Breathe 2*, 2016, Photograph 2, Performance Beijing.
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With You I Breathe 2010

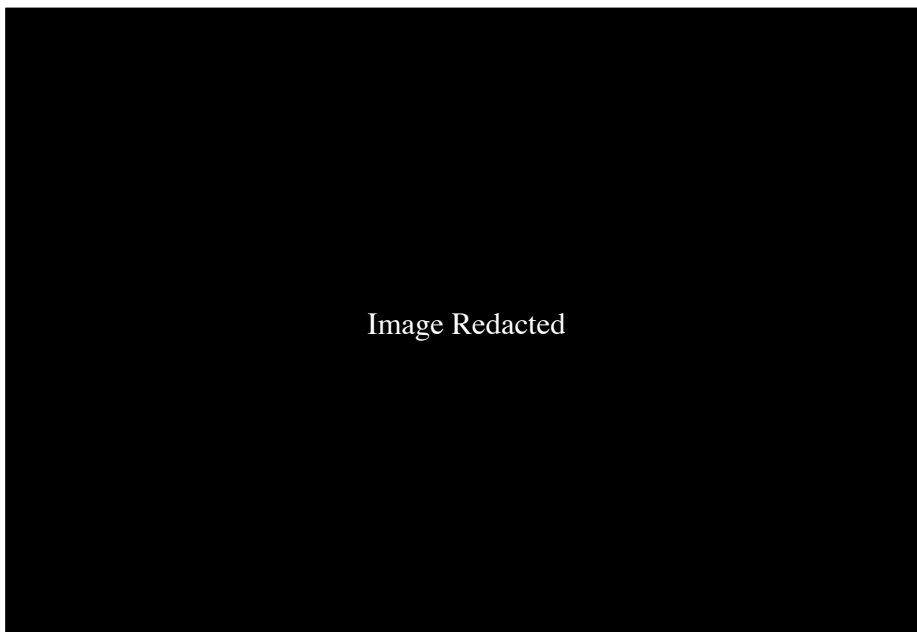


Fig. 4.10: Tracey Emin, *With You I Breathe* 2010
Neon. 30 x 180 cm. Tracey Emin Studio.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

The Last Adventure Is You 2014

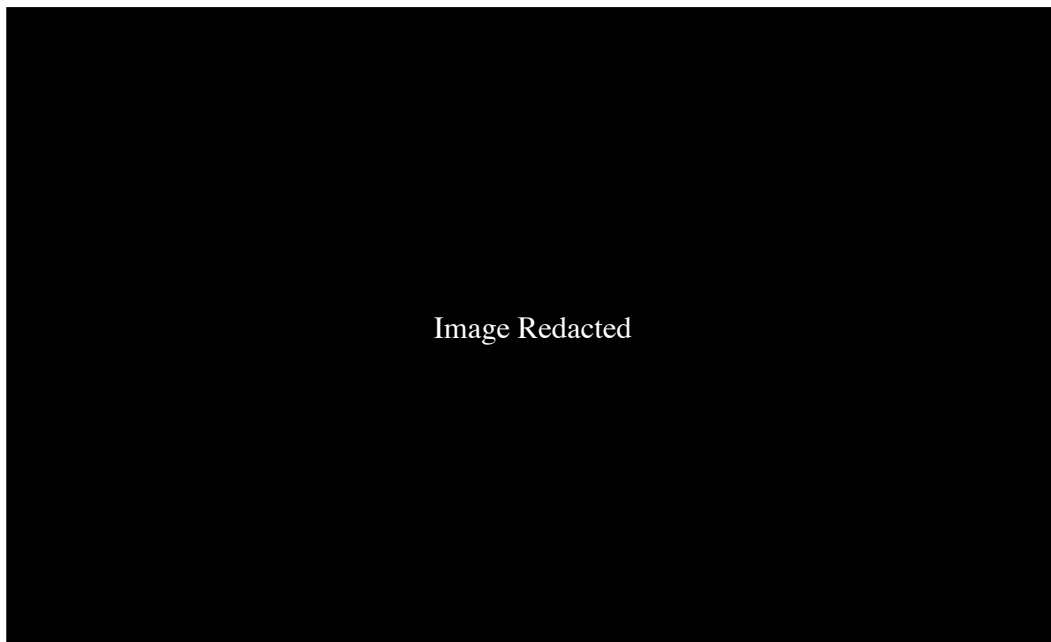


Fig. 4.11: *The Last Great Adventure is You* 2014. Entrance Hall, White Cube, London.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

I Want My Time With You 2018

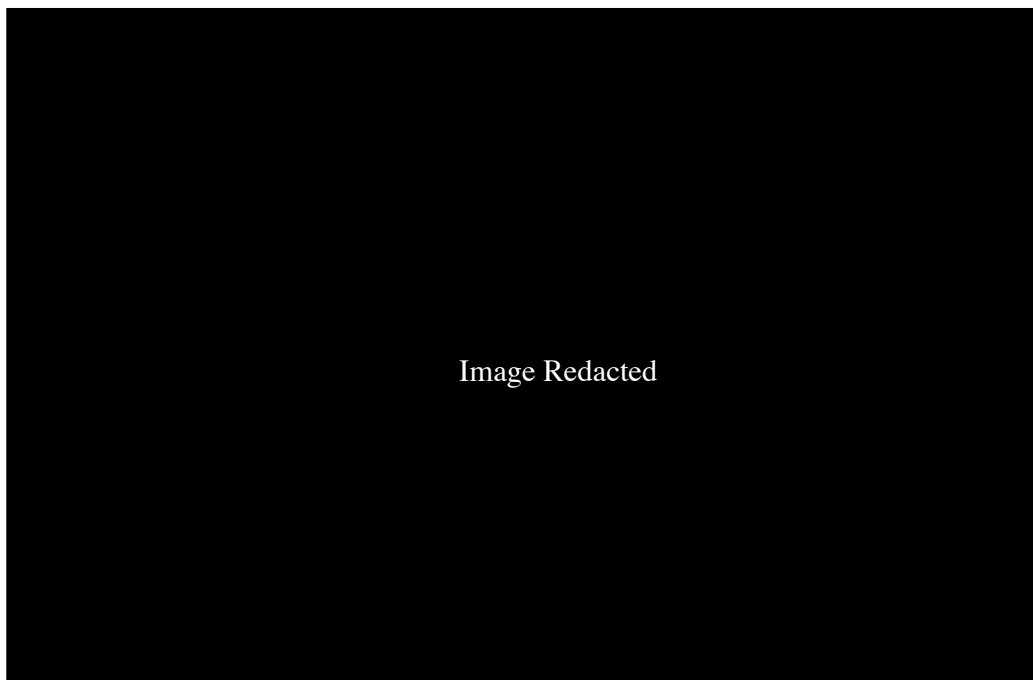


Fig. 4.12: Tracey Emin, *I Want My Time With You* 2018
St Pancras Train Station. Site Specific Public art.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

While *Breathing* is pre-linguistic, it articulates a univocity that is similar to Tracey Emin's inclusivity. Emin's latest work in London St Pancras train station, *I Want My Time With You* 2018 (Fig: 4.12) in pink neon words, communicates a message to the travelers that she wants to spend her time with them in response to the Brexit Vote to leave the European Union 2016, this parallels *With You I Breathe* 2010 (Fig: 4.10) in blue and white neon words also suggesting time with someone, with the audience who see it, or someone she loves, suggesting she is inclusive with another in mind. This evokes univocity in her third aspect of subjectivity when she created these works. Similar to Chengyao's works above with all the connotations that generates with an ethical stance; is very much in one voice, univocity, with Chengyao's *Breathing* or *Breathe*.

In the exhibition *The Last Great Adventure is You* 2014 (Fig: 4.11) in bright yellow neon lights written across the entrance hall wall in the White Cube Gallery, audience view it as they arrived. Emin was thinking about an adventure with the audience, and how they too can generate their last adventure with themselves. The show is filled with Emin's new nude figures across the walls. There are new bronzes, embroideries, neons, paintings, and drawings. The new bronze sculptures show Emin exploring her skills with a new medium. Her new nudes were in every room, pervading the walls of the White Cube, London owned by Jay Jopling since championed and hosted shows for the YBAs in their early days, including Emin's first *My Retrospective*. Now there are White Cube galleries worldwide including Hong Kong. One work that caught my eye in the London exhibition 2014 was *Up Straight 1 and Straight Up 2*, 2014, which is an image that conveys a different mode of being compared to some of the melancholic works. *Up Straight* is a naked self-portrait, in blue Gouache on paper as a sketch, then later transferred onto embroidery on calico, framed and hung on the white wall. The mirrored images narrate a female naked figure: dignified, overt, alone, even happy to be alone, as if in celebration of the female form, the very opposite of a reclining nude created by male artists, whereas this is created by Emin herself, she is the model and the artist, sitting straight up and looking proud to be on the walls of the White Cube Gallery.⁶⁵ But what is crucial here is the faceless body in Emin's third aspect of being: an univocity of being, when I viewed it, I felt it could be I, sitting up naked, and being visible, if it had the face of Emin then I would see Emin and not myself. This again is seen in *Waiting for Morning* 2015 (Fig: 4.15), and *I Want You So Much*, 2015 (Fig: 4.16) from the Hong Kong exhibition, *I Cried Because I Love You* 2016, which exhibited similar works to London White Cube in 2014.

⁶⁵ Tracey Emin, *The Last Great Adventure Is You*, White Cube, London, 2014.

Up Straight Straight Up 2014

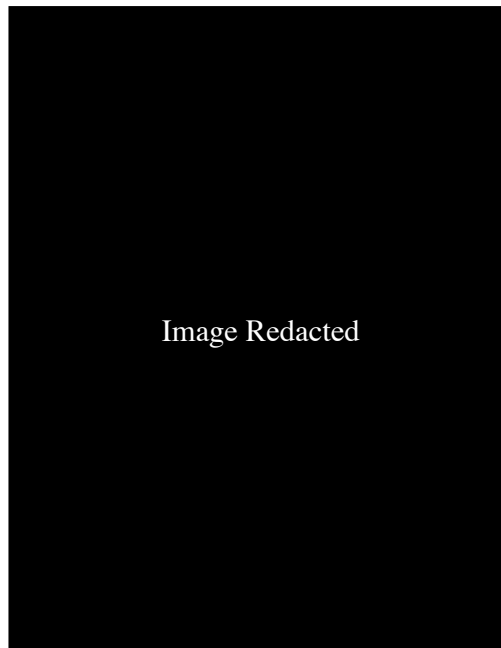


Fig. 4.13: Tracey Emin *Up Straight Straight Up*, ink on Paper
Embroidery on calico (right) 218 x 160 cm White Cube, London 2014.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

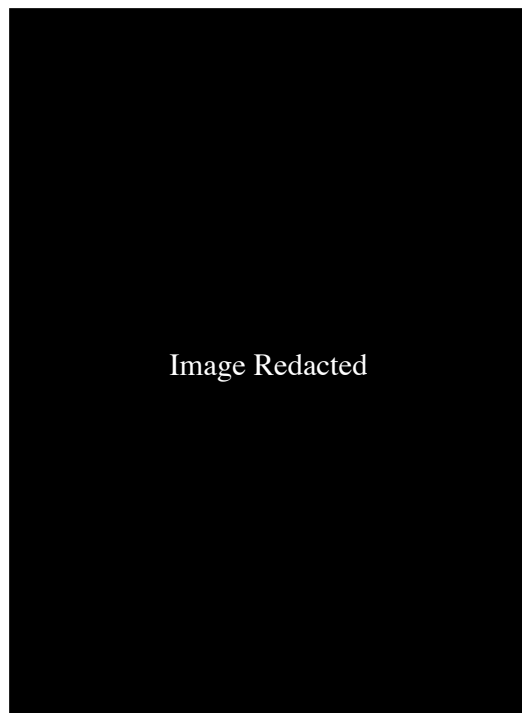


Fig. 4.14: Tracey Emin *Up Straight Straight Up*, ink on Paper
Embroidery on calico (above) 218 x 160 cm White Cube, London 2014.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Waiting for Morning 2015 and I Want You So Much 2015

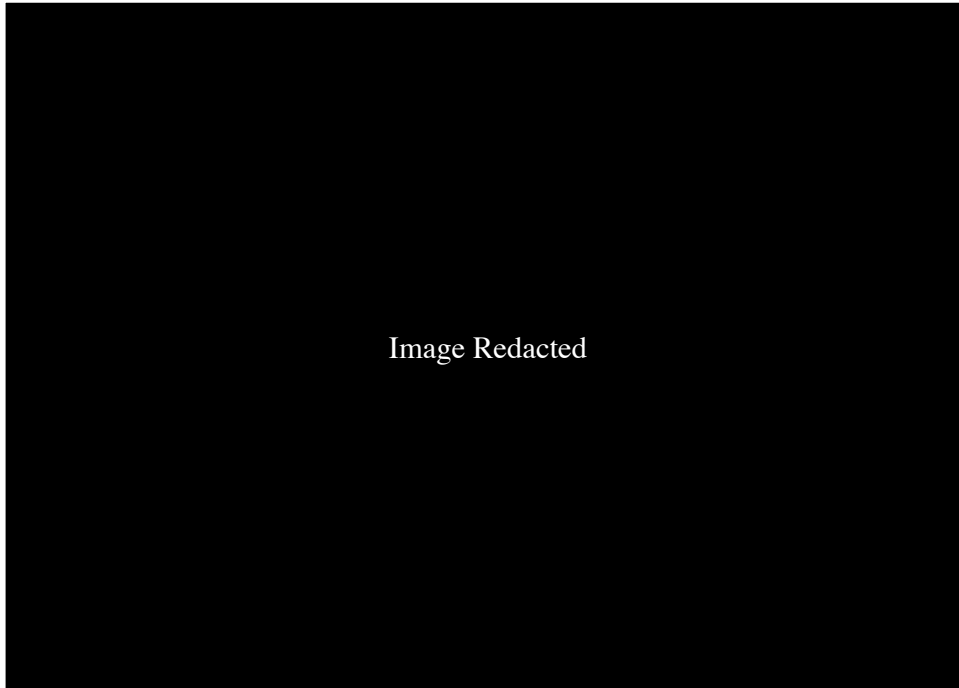


Fig. 4.15: Tracey Emin, *Waiting for Morning* 2015,
Embroidered on Calico (209 x 252.5cm), White Cube, Hong Kong 2016.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

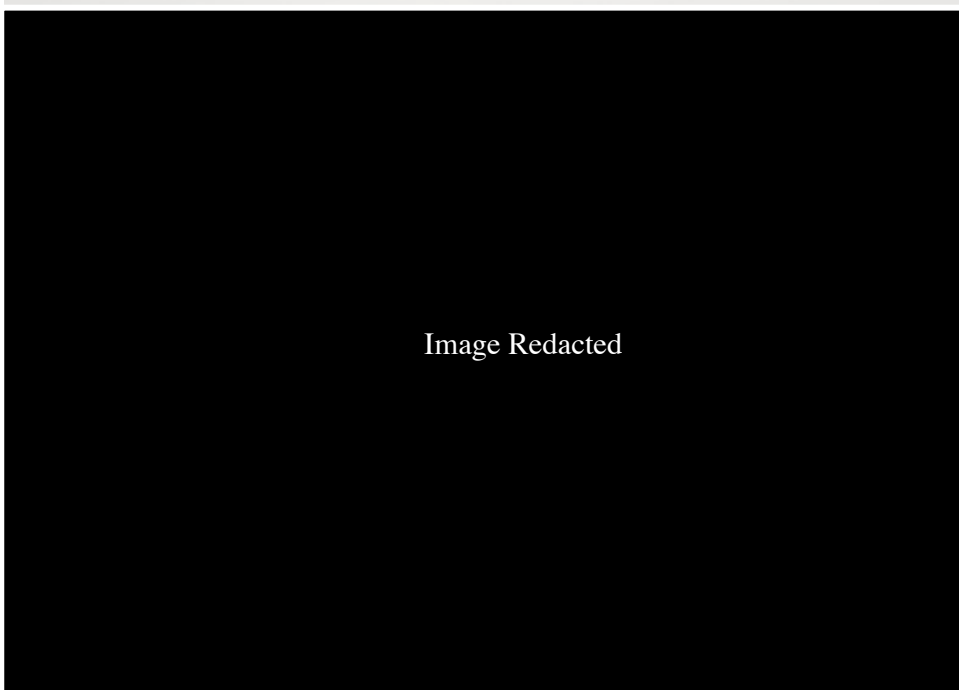


Fig. 4.16: Tracey Emin *I Want You So Much* 2015,
Embroidered calico (162 x 220cm), White Cube, Hong Kong 2016.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

These two works (Fig: 4.15, 16) indicate self consciousness that simultaneously reacts against the traditional nude. She is appropriating her female figure as naked self-portrait, but without a face draws our attention to her third aspect of subjectivity. *Borrowed Light* in Venice Biennale 2007, Tony Forward see this exhibition as representing humanity as a whole, as well as pointing out an ambiguity in Western culture in attitudes towards sexuality. On the one hand, sex is approved of and cultural representations promote it heavily, in advertising, for example; and on the other, there is the idea of sex as ambiguous and blurred in the image of the Virgin Mary, who is both virgin and mother. Forward claims that Emin ‘recognises that there is need for a sexuality of holiness and a holiness of sexuality.’⁶⁰⁶ Through even the worst experiences, Emin manages to create works that give hope and draws us to the fundamental experience such as sex and breathe, that ‘transcendent loveliness’ in its capacity to transform terrible human experiences – abuse, neglect, bullying, and terror into artworks, in her exhibition.⁶⁰⁷ In the Hong Kong White Cube, the works *I Cried Because I Love You* exhibition gives density of emotion of the new nude with sexuality; Emin is not painting a pretty woman, she says, ‘I am painting the inside and expressing it on the outside.’⁶⁰⁸ When the face is obliterated, paintings emerge through a self-reflective process, ‘a bit like dreams.’⁶⁰⁹ She aims for a particularity feeling, herself, but also longs for univocity with another, a sense of being with, but not exclusive but inclusive. After years of struggle, she claims she has finally embraced the fact that she is without a life partner, and has devoted herself to her true passion, art, and art is always inclusive of another.

The work below, *Every Part Of Me Feels You* 2014 is another faceless new nude, exhibited in the White Cube gallery, London 2014 and Leopold Museum in Vienna 2017, juxtaposed with the works of Emin’s twentieth century hero Egon Schiele; it articulates their subjectivity, but also refracts particularity of emotions deeper than individuality, again, with faceless bodies such as this bronze sculpture below, suggesting a woman’s body is broken, but however broken, it is still beautiful.⁶¹⁰ What resonates with Emin’s work is Schiele’s immediacy and expressive emotion and his work being exhibited alongside hers, creates a dialogue of similar temperament and an aesthetic that resonates across the years from Schiele to Emin. Exhibiting alongside Schiele says a number of things, apart from Emin’s implicit claim that he

⁶⁰⁶ Tony Forward, ‘Naked and Unashamed’ in Tracey Emin, *Borrowed Light* (London: British Council), p. 112.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Interview with Griselda Murray Brown, Commissioning Editor, *Financial Times*. ‘Tracey Emin on Ambition and Ageing’ *FT Life*, 30 March 2016.

⁶⁰⁹ Emin, *I Cried Because I Love You*, p. 13.

⁶¹⁰ Tracey Emin, *Where I Want To Go* 2017, Solo Exhibition, (Vienna, Leopold Museum catalogue, 2017).

is her idol and master, that sensuality is a legitimate theme for art along with the exploration of desire that is nevertheless coloured by a sense of desperation in the figures, this also reflects Bacon's faceless bodies. This Bronze figure of Emin's body, her body broken, and the exhibition attempts to draw our attention to female aesthetic subjectivity uncompromisingly.

The faceless naked self-portrait theme (Fig: 4.17, 18) continues in 2017 as exhibited in Xavier Hufkens Gallery, Belgium, titled *The Memory Of Your Touch*, inspired by D.H. Lawrence novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* that Emin had been reading at the time of her ontological identification relationship process.⁶¹¹ This bronze figure again exhibits a sense of Emin's incomplete figure, like her drawings, the body is rugged, a body without organs emerging from the bronze, without face, but attached to the legs of the figure there is what seems to be a rugged rock, narrating she constitutes nature. This could be anyone, the mode of inclusivity is in Emin's ontological identification relationship creative process when faces or bodies without organs are created, and in parallel spirit not only to Schiele but also indirectly to Deleuze.

⁶¹¹ Tracey Emin, Jonathan Jones, *The Memory of Your Touch* (Belgium, Xavier Hufkens Gallery Catalogue 2017).

Every Part Of Me Feels You, 2014

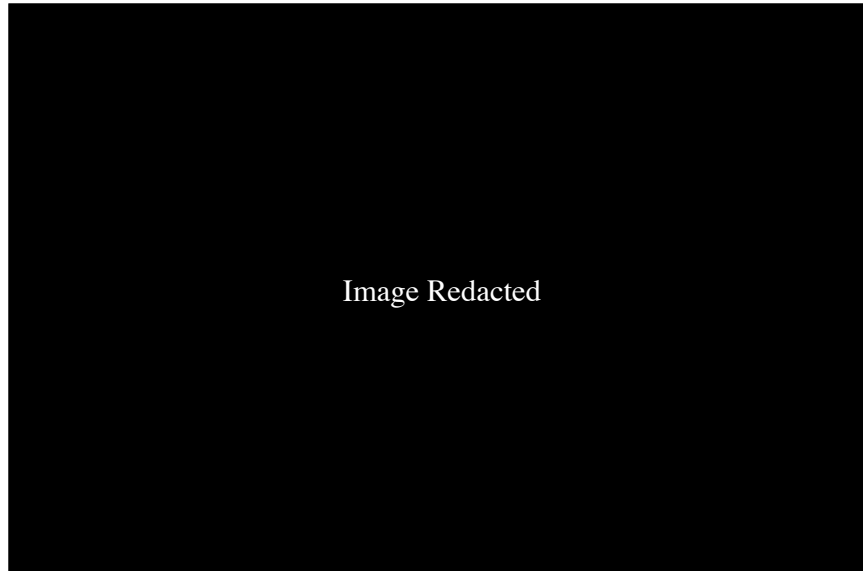


Fig. 4.17: Tracey Emin *Every Part Of Me Feels You*, 2014 Bronze 27.9 × 43.2 × 91.4 cm
The Last Adventure Is You, White Cube, London 2014, and Leopold Museum *Where I Want to Go* 2017.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

All I Want Is You 2016

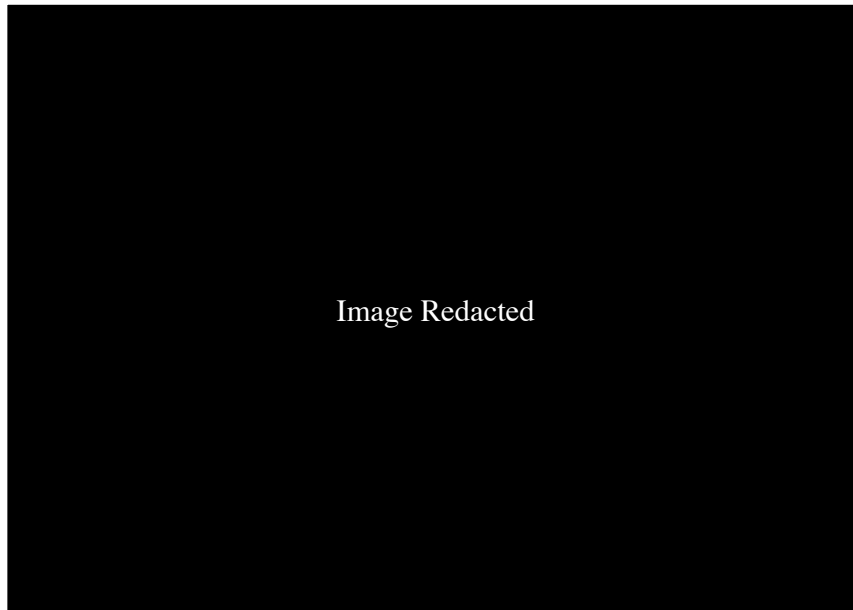


Fig. 4.18: Tracey Emin *All I Want Is You* 2016 bronze (edition of 3 + 2 AP)
231,1 × 230 × 224,1 cm. *The Memory of Your Touch*, Xavier Hufkens, Belgium 2017.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

In China, Chengyao created *Moving* 2012 (Fig. 4.19-26), these photographs exhibited Chengyao stepping into a wooden box/coffin, she disappeared into it, which was then locked in a warehouse for storage, as if never to be seen again. She is actually moving to a new house and studio in 2012 and took the opportunity to create this performance. But what seems to be disturbing is the fact that she is locked inside in darkness, she entered the storage box fully clothed in a white shirt and green skirt, the lid on top was then nailed down by the assistants in the images, as if she is buried alive, suggesting death. An image of death is what everyone will face one day sooner or later, creating a connotation of univocity, virtual and actual disappears, visible and invisible are not possible. Death means extinction of life. Chengyao is actually moving house and studio along with her possessions, in a removal truck to the new premises in Beijing that took a day. This exhibited not only a faceless body but no body similar to *Two Rolls Of Tape* 2016 (Fig. 3.8, 3.9) where her body is completely concealed, as if never to be seen again, locked up and the key thrown away. Again, this draws our attention to restrictions of the body in a confined space, not six feet under but spaces everywhere, a disturbing image about being buried alive, reflecting upon death of the past, death of her mother, and death of her subjectivity, and extends this to highlight not only her invisibility but the lives of others, past, present, and future.

This metaphor symbolises the way women in general are boxed in and out of sight; which narrated the memory of her experience of restriction and confinement, but most crucially she is an artist who is a feminist in this work, and with the solidarity of feminist thinking, she also highlights a collective, and this means she is raising issues with univocity, in one voice with feminism; concerning the lack of female subjectivity with faceless, bodiless bodies. Again, this is parallel to Deleuze's idea of BWO, that emphasises univocity, and the idealism of immanence a life. Chengyao, as is Emin, are critiquing their society with their bodies, in order to narrate issues of female subjectivity/body. Being moved and then set free is symbolic, an aspiration for freedom, to start anew from the old, like the death mask of Emin. For Chengyao in China it is more complex with the regimes of her government, which means liberating herself is more difficult when oppressed. From birth to death – death to birth in a box as a metaphor of death of life, she wishes to disappear is what it also suggests here, in an attempt to voice the lack of female subjectivity, where female subjectivity is often seen as insignificant and ignored despite civilisation of the twenty-first century. Indeed, it is also about impermanence, relocation, exploitation of women commercially, consumption of the feminine, sex trafficking, and emigration. The box being stored away with other boxes narrates the

personal anonymity and aspiration to engage in a process of realising subjectivity beyond the personal that is also simultaneously the awareness of being, and with another; she is the artist communicating this work, hence a metaphor of a particularity that is unique yet transcends death in the sense that the particularity of being is not unique to her, although uniquely expressed by her. This bears resemblance to Emin's work and her thinking behind her ontological identification relationship; not only because of the displaced female body, but also the sense of being out of sight and out of mind narratives, hence non self, non subjectivity, death of subjectivity, death of author, death of body, is obviously how Chengyao feels at the time of this creation. However, both artists narrate their performances of self, caught in the hiatus between visibility and invisibility; in both Emin and Chengyao's work, the absence of the body is a sign of its presence and these works play on the ambiguity of presence/absence, visible/invisible, singularity/univocity, and performed/unperformed in space and time.

Moving 2012, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7.

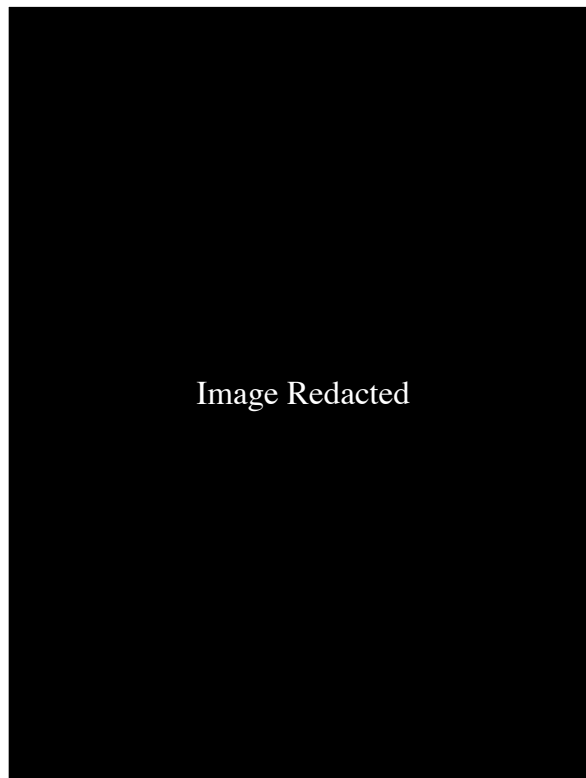


Fig. 4.19: He Chengyao, *Moving 2012*, Home to Storage Space 1, Beijing.

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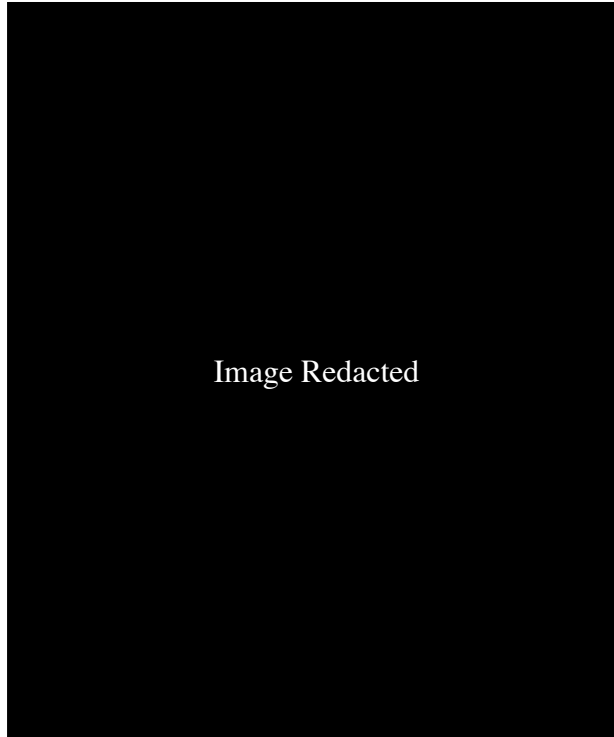


Fig. 4.20: He Chengyao, *Moving* 2012, Home to Storage Space 2, Beijing.
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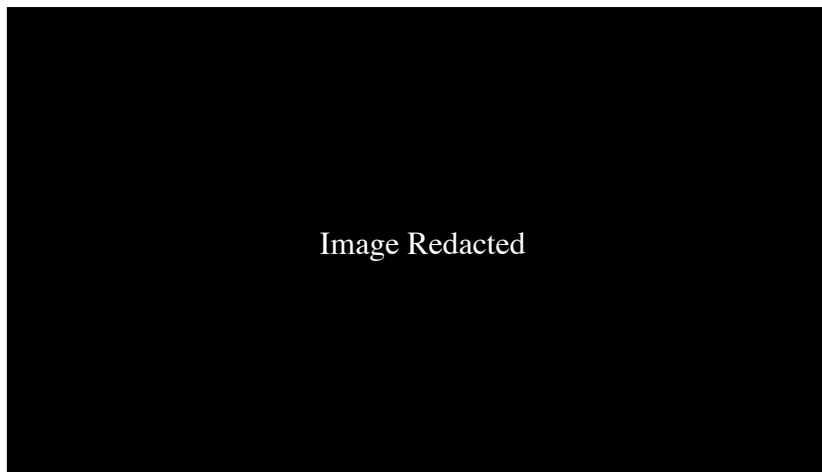


Fig. 4.21: He Chengyao, *Moving* 2012, Home to Storage Space 3, Beijing.
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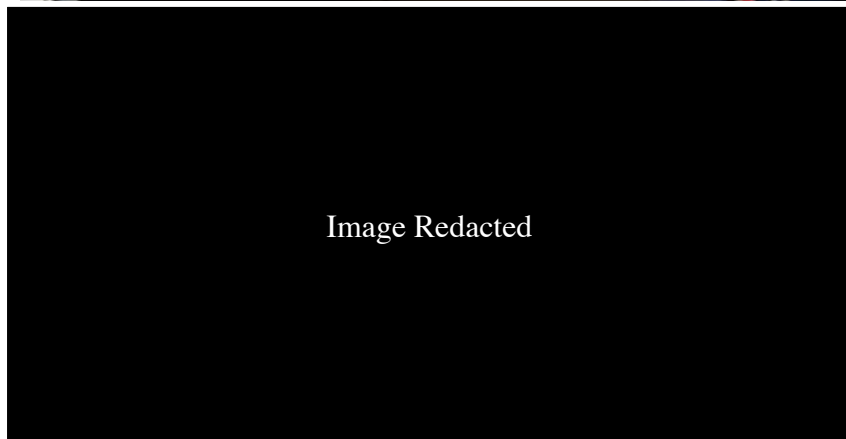


Fig. 4.22: He Chengyao, *Moving* 2012, Home to Storage Space 4, Beijing.
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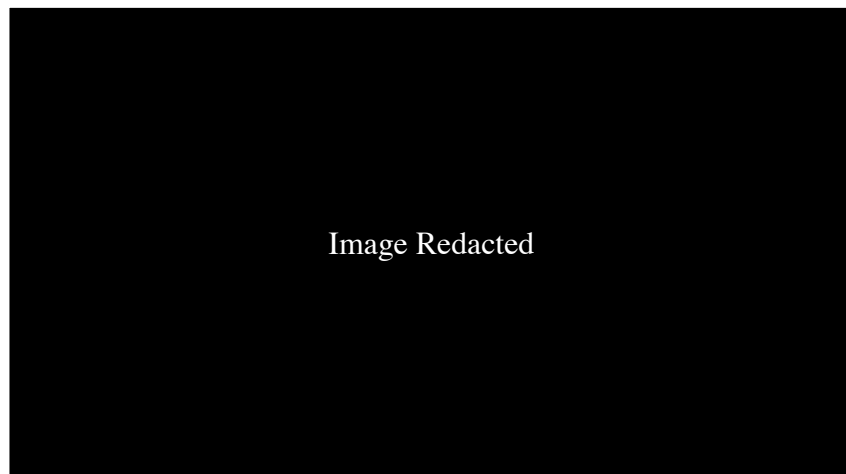


Fig. 4.23: He Chengyao, *Moving* 2012, Home to Storage Space 5, Beijing.
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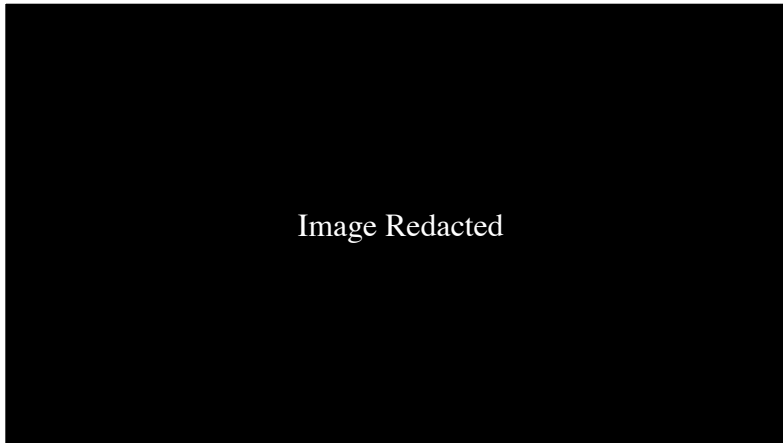


Fig. 4.24: He Chengyao, *Moving* 2012, Home to Storage Space 6, Beijing.
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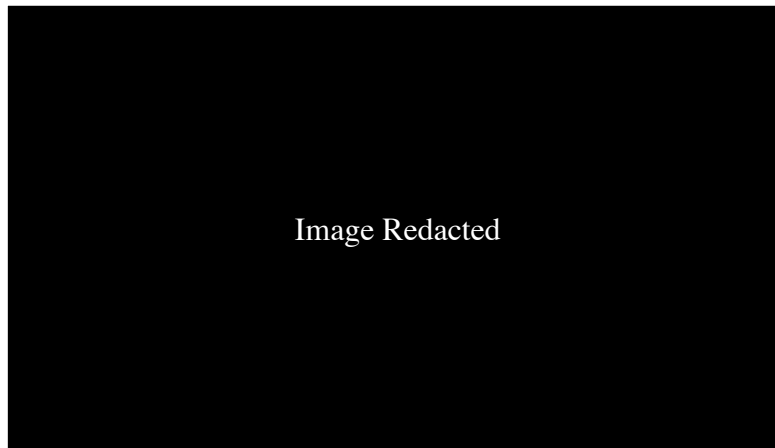


Fig. 4.25: He Chengyao, *Moving* 2012, Home to Storage Space 7, Beijing.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

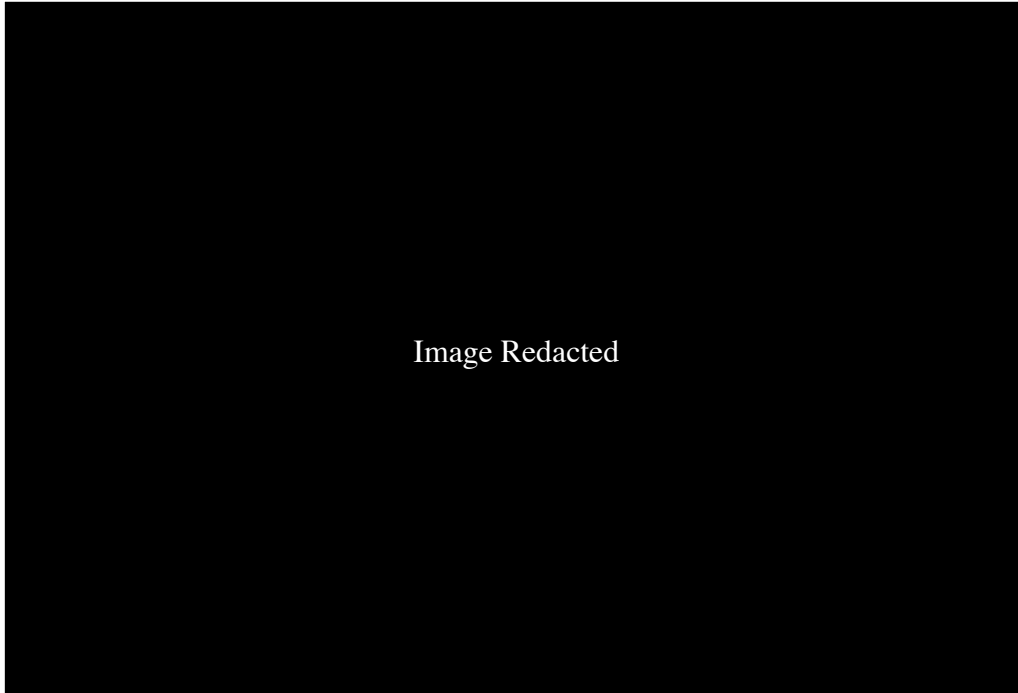
Part II – Abstract Visual Ethics*Of Other Spaces 2017*

Fig. 4.26: He Chengyao *Of Other Spaces 2017*
Cooper Gallery, Dundee Scotland.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

The work *Of Other Spaces 2017* was one of Chengyao's last exhibition before she became a nun, she performed it in Scotland (Fig: 4.26); this comprised holding several reels of yellow tape in her arm, the same kind of package tape used in *Two Rolls Of Tape 2016* (Fig. 3.8), and moving in a circular motion while the tape forms increasingly wide concentric circles at her feet. The performance took approximately four hours while audiences arrived or returned to watch the performance.

Chengyao brings into the actual what had existed only as virtual. Although this work can also be discussed under the aspect of performativity and visibility, it includes the aspect of univocity it attempts to enact; a moment of actualising particular subjectivity that is inclusive of women's subjectivity under feminism. The particularity of the event is unrepeatable as Chengyao performs in the realm of action, creating an actuality of event that before its

occurrence was purely virtual. Her movement in the context of art performance actualised a virtual event, making it actual, as it passes into the past, and so back into the virtual once more. A critical analysis of the work in terms of the virtual, real, and possible could see it as an actualisation of the virtual in the actual, the enactment of an event in ‘other spaces’, as the particularity of becoming. The concentric circles of tape also convey a sense of becoming, the aim that is never reached and so the piece enacts a human condition of movement through time while simultaneously going around in circles and never reaching a destination, for Chengyao here is lack of freedom. Circling the yellow tape in real time enacts the becoming of an event and its disappearance back into the virtual. There is a constant oscillation between the virtual and the actual, akin to a vicious circle of being in a confined space.

The ontology of the work therefore lies in the force of its constant becoming that constitutes a long journey towards freedom within a limited space; however, with a feminist reading, it is a confined space for Chengyao’s body (again she is bald and clothed in black this time); circling round and round, in a vicious circle of not reaching the telos, the feminist telos of emancipation is at stake. She is performing this work in front of an old photograph of other feminists, hence in solidarity with their slogans ‘Unite For Women’s Emancipation’.⁶¹² What Chengyao is also narrating is, ‘Women’ are still confined to small spaces in her time and history, but in univocity and solidarity with global feminist discourse in contemporary art. The same is occurring in Emin’s work with the personal refracted as political in solidarity with a sense of global feminism. Univocity reveals an ethical dimension, by empathy with other women in the same telos, confined with limited subjectivity, which means the actualisation of this work in the particularity of actual space/time articulates Chengyao’s sense of entrapment and desire for freedom that simultaneously exhibits an ethical discourse, perhaps especially so for Chinese women who have to compromise far more than Western women in this particular era.⁶¹³ Furthermore, performing in Scotland, Germany, Britain, America, Asia, suggests a global art practice among feminist artists. Her performativity is uncompromising in energy, in performativity, in visibility, and in univocity, in one step at a time in a circular movement in the exhibition *Of Other Spaces* that resonates Foucault’s text ‘Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias’ 1984.⁶¹⁴

⁶¹² Alex Hetherington, ‘Of Other Spaces: Where does gesture become event? Chapter One’. *This is tomorrow, Contemporary Art Magazine*, March 2017. Also see, *Of Other Spaces: Where Does Gesture Become Event? Chapter Two*, Copper Gallery, Dundee, March 2017.

⁶¹³ Liao Wen, interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, 2016.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Chengyao's performativity in *Life Every Second* 2014 (Fig: 4.27) compares the brevity of human life with cosmic time and the cycle of the seasons of ascending and descending circulation, like the cycle of reincarnation. She compares each second in the vastness of time to a drop of water in the vastness of the ocean, or a grain of sand in the desert. Time itself seems to be invisible, and yet it is precisely its intangible endurance that captures the vast world. Time, she says, is precious, and everyone can be encouraged through art to cherish their own lives.⁶⁵ Again this is the ontological identification relationship with subjectivity that involves art as life but with univocity in her third aspect of subjectivity.

Life Every Second, 2014

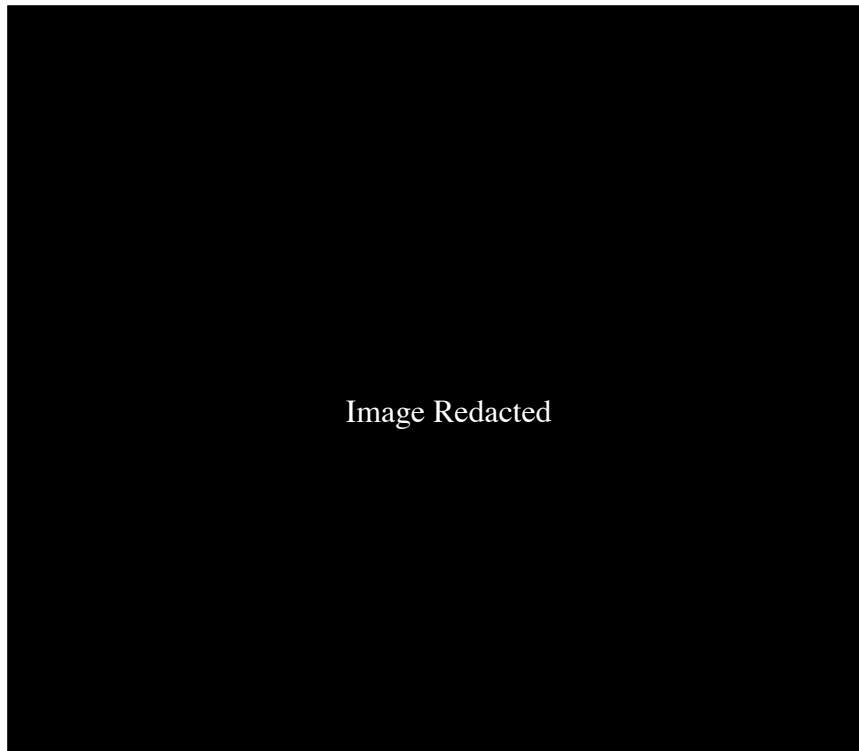


Fig. 4.27: He Chengyao working on *Life Every Second*, 2014
Drawing Performance, Studio, Beijing
[Image redacted due to copyright]

⁶⁵ Ibid.

The subject/object turns into subject/artist's material, this is the $X+Y=XY$ relationship, Chengyao's ontological identification relationship creative process, what is crucial here is Chengyao articulates a global self and global art in univocity.⁶¹⁶ Similar to Emin, there are contradictions, the hours of this work were sold to collectors, which suggests commercialism in artwork, negativity associated with selling artworks, although this is nuanced and complex. Why does selling artwork become less about creativity? This parallels and questions gender expectation, her time and herself have been labelled as linked to selling herself, similar question have been raised by Emin in *I've Got It All* 2000 (Fig: 2.19), but such forces of subjectivity are against global market forces of capitalism – thus it is not easy to interpret it as commercialism – but rather she is driven by her desire for social justice and social balance by her belief in solidarity with a global culture; when female artists attempt to sell their work it is cast as selling their body, and their artwork is never sold or recognised the same as artworks by male artists. If the new nude embodies a univocity, then it also embodies ethics. What kind of ethics is this? It is both a visual ethics and an abstract ethics: visual in the sense that these are artworks within the visual field, in public spaces; abstract in the sense that the ethics are generated at an abstract level with another in univocity to highlight justice. Emin or Chengyao's aesthetic ethics constitute univocity, their third aspect of subjectivity.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁶ Rachel Ng observes that 'it is progressively more difficult to critique and assess contemporary art as it is practiced in the twenty first century. Globalization, the technology revolution, and capitalist expansion drive the positioning of artists and artistic practices on international platforms and disrupt traditional art historical categorization with respect to the local and the particular.' Rachel Ng, 'Lee Minwei: Relating to Art and Artists in the Twenty First Century,' *Yishu*, Jan/Feb 2017, vol. 16, no 1, p. 6.

⁶¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988), p. 96.

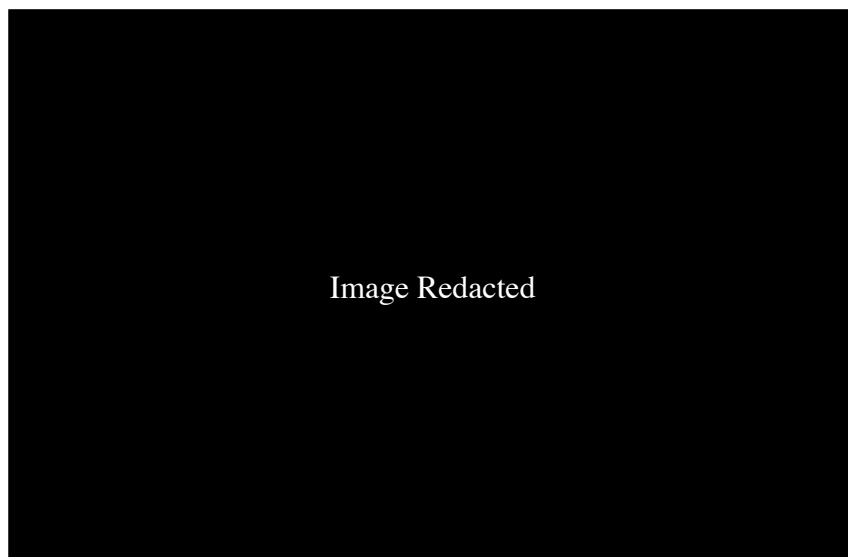
Breakfast at the Grotto 2012

Fig. 4.28: Tracy Emin, *Breakfast at the Grotto* 2012
 Gouache on paper 55.5 x 74.5 cm, *She Lay Down Beneath the Sea* exhibition
 Turner Contemporary, Margate, 26th May–23rd September 2012.
 [Image redacted due to copyright]

Line drawings, again Emin's well known blue gouache on paper figure works; this less well known piece caught my eye, *Breakfast At The Grotto* 2012 is a minimalist thin line drawing of a table, two chairs, with two figures suggesting an intimate moment with another person, a meeting for a cause, coffee with someone or a lover, a time of being in the unique particularity of a moment between two beings; a meeting for breakfast is an intimate event, it could be with someone we love, a friend, a family, or an acquaintance, the Grotto is not as glamorous as *Breakfast At Tiffany's* with the late Audrey Hepburn, but perhaps the Grotto might even be a better space for breakfast. This enactment of actuality comes from the realm of the virtual, in which relation between people is a force that comes to actuality.⁶⁸ The relationality between beings implies a solidarity, an actualisation of ethics, a visibility of expression through an aesthetic metaphor.

If we compare both artists, they express a particularity of event – they offer solidarity with another, an image of interconnectivity with exhibition events, and of feminism. Both works narrate actualisation of subjectivity emerging from the virtual with another for a cause in a mode of univocity.

⁶⁸ Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester (London: Bloomsbury, 2004 [1990]), p. 208.

A meeting in the Grotto relates to Deleuze's 'plane of immanence', here and now, for a moment's meeting with another. This is an ethical relationship that declares particularity, the uniqueness of the event of actualisation with another in mind during Emin's ontological identification relationship process, with another in univocity as the third aspect of her subjectivity. The ethics of art is a large topic, from the pre-Socratics to Spinoza to Deleuze, but for this thesis, a feminist focus on the lack of female subjectivity is the ethical stance of Emin or Chengyao that emerges from a network of relations, from the in-between of social, political, and artistic encounters, throwing light onto their work. In this third aspect of subjectivity we see how univocity occurs in works, that are not simply focused on the self but are inclusive, an inclusivity enabled through exhibiting their work combined with the intentionality of the artist.

The ethics of sexual difference, Irigaray claims, along with Butler's social construction of gender, is therefore an ethics of plurality and multiplicity that we see in Emin and Chengyao's three aspects of subjectivity. This is compatible with Deleuze's univocity, in that the multiple particulars are united in a single voice of being with a same cause, whether it be two friends, or a small or large group, or thousands, or the whole world, we see univocity occurring in Emin and Chengyao's artworks when exhibited globally.⁶¹⁹

For Deleuze, particularity is without isolation and without losing a sense of being emerging into actuality from the virtual.⁶²⁰ The actualisation of the feminine and masculine within a body, might perhaps been stressed in Chinese culture through the yin and yang ideal, where the strong, masculine force of yang is balanced by the weak, feminine force of yin within the same body of being.⁶²¹ But one must awaken their Yin or Yang within themselves to counter-balance what subjects them. Chengyao's understanding of a multicultural society reveals the complexity of being a female artist that falls into the global trajectory of a new social construction of an ancient idea of yin and yang. This idea that pervades her thinking is evident when she became a Buddhist nun in 2017; being a nun or a monk requires one to take a new name, be bald, dress the same, eat the same, and practice the same as everyone in the order. Her re-conception of ancient yin and yang as non-binary in *Breathe* and *Breathing* parallels

⁶¹⁹ Deleuze, 'Immanence: A Life'.

⁶²⁰ Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, p. 208.

⁶²¹ Michael and Christine Gross-Loh, *The Path: What Chinese Philosophers Can Teach Us about the Good Life* (London: Penguin, 2016), p. 144.

Butler's claim of social construction of gender, where the masculine lives with the feminine in a non-binary space,⁶² or indeed in Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of being in BWO.⁶³

Chengyao and Emin draw our attention to not only how female subjectivity is the crucial change in the art history of female artists with performativity and visibility, but also that they are inclusive in their art practice, and this includes men and nature in univocity. Furthermore, the biographies of Chengyao and Emin indicate a proximity to nature and desire to go beyond themselves, Emin turns to nature for a spiritual life, Chengyao turns to Buddhism for a monastic life. This is a glimpse of spirituality in them both. A visual ethics is contained in ontological identification relationship.

⁶² *Gender Trouble*, p. 19: '(T)he insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of "women" are constructed.' See also *Gender Trouble*, p. 214.

⁶³ Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 178–9.

Tracey Emin and He Chengyao

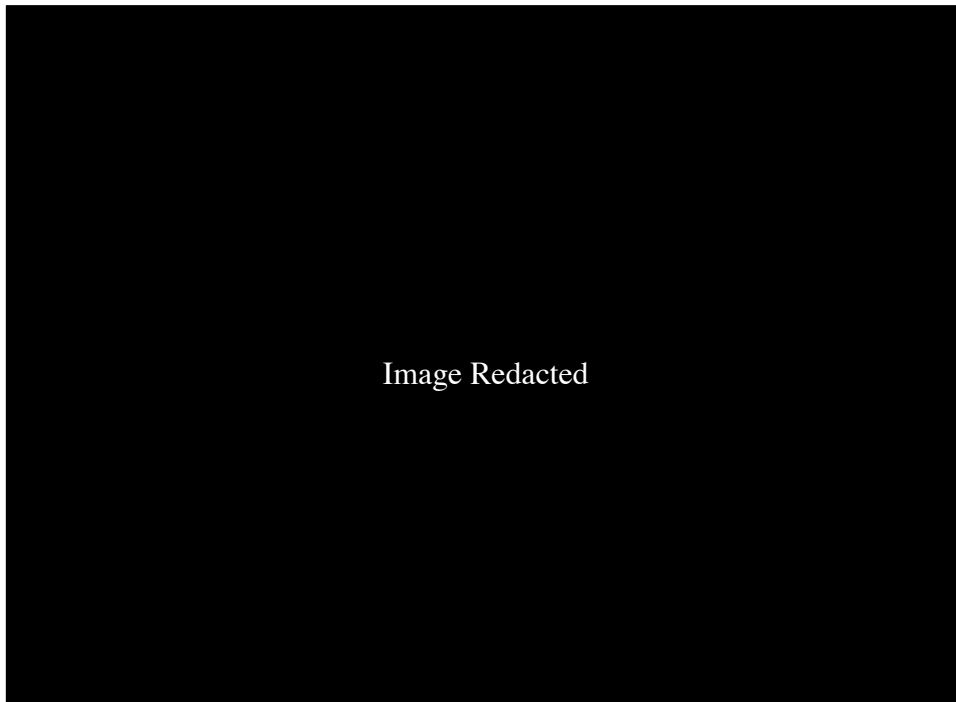


Fig. 4.29: Trace Emin *Purple Virgin* 2004
[Image redacted due to copyright]

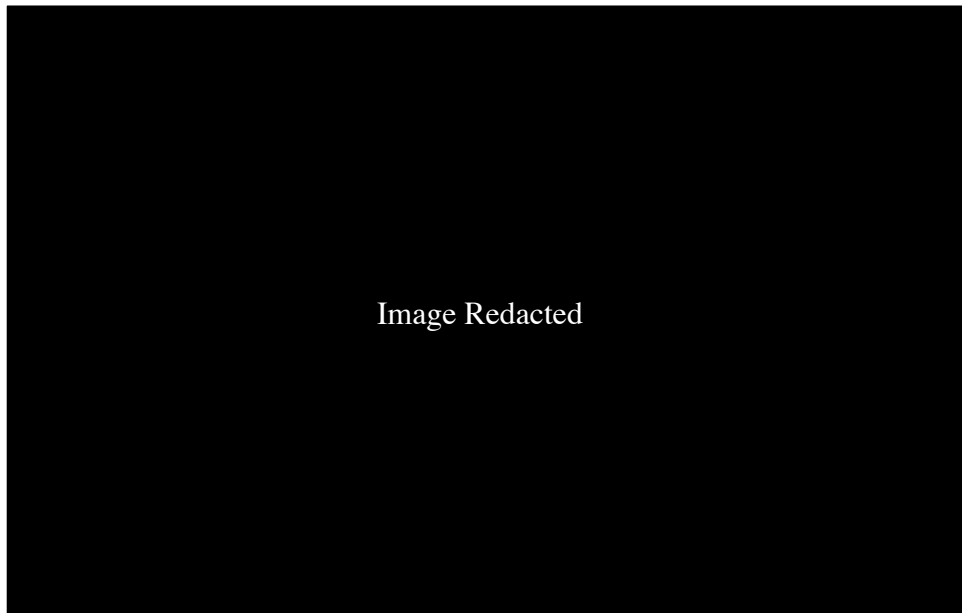


Fig. 4.30: He Chengyao *Extension* [sic] of *Limbs* 2007.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

when they exhibited their faceless bodies, even the works such as *Purple Virgin* and *Extension of Limbs*; void of usual identity markers of the face and half of the torso, they reveal a figure from Chengyao and Emin's own body that is half eradicated; this again exposes and plays on the paradox of the personal and the anonymous figure similar to their past heroes and masters in art history, Duchamp, Schiele, or Bacon. This not only suggests faceless bodies but a violent body performativity to suggest women are not seen, or heard without the head, that has been carved in half with merely female legs showing, open and exposed, exhibiting the female body that it is usually private. This brings our attention to not only sexuality or the vicissitudes of the bottom half of womanhood, that is fundamental,⁶²⁴ but ethically it is bodies without organs that Deleuze and Guattari highlights in BWO, that attempts to unite in univocity.

These two works, again faceless bodies, expose a question that crosses sexual difference and promotes an alternative paradigm for understanding women's subjectivity or 'the lack of' in the twenty-first century. For example, Emin and Chengyao reveal complex relations in their work while avoiding subordinating themselves to an inferior role through actualising their own subjectivity in the ontological identification relationship for performativity and visibility in exhibitions, which connects, thereby contributing to the wider spectrum of another in this third aspect of subjectivity – univocity.

Part III – The Concept of Freedom

We are concerned not merely with the technical problem of securing and maintaining peace, but also with the important task of education and enlightenment. Without such freedom, there would have been no Shakespeare, no Goethe, no Newton, no Faraday, no Pasteur, and no Lister.⁶²⁵

Albert Einstein

Then, upon entering her flat to find her screaming, shouting, angry, and shaking her fist, [...] I just remember thinking: this woman's free. But the irony was that even though this woman was being emotionally free,

⁶²⁴ Tracey Emin Interview with Melvin Bragg 2001, Stephen Sackur 2012, and Laurie Taylor 2011.

⁶²⁵ Albert Einstein Speech, 1920s. Original clips of film, 'Film Archives' (New York City 2013).

she was making reference to the emotional entrapment of her life ... I now know I am free. Free to leave this world with no sentimental trail.⁶²⁶

Tracey Emin

Emin discussed Bourgeois after they met for the collaboration project *Do Not Abandon Me* 2008-2010 (Fig: 4.1), it substantiated a moment of freedom for them as female artists. This third aspect of subjectivity in Emin and Chengyao's work, univocity, draws our attention to the idea of emancipation for women, by highlighting the lack of female subjectivity, but with a particularity their work narrates. Their life is particular to them but inclusive of another in this third aspect of subjectivity. A sense of an ethical dimension in emphasising the being with another in solidarity necessitates the idea of freedom of subjectivity, which is needed and crucial for female artists such as Emin or Chengyao.

Comparing the West to China we see a political struggle for freedom from oppression, but we have a glimpse of Emin and Chengyao's work attempting to narrate to us with their uncompromising subjectivity from their lives, because their experiences are often extreme, such as rape, abortion, miscarriage, sexual abuse, love, heartbreak, depression, mental illness, and they attempted to turn these into beautiful works. Uncompromising in their process of becoming, Emin and Chengyao refuse to be silenced in their actualisation of themselves in their ontological identification relationship – $X+Y=XY$. This entails an ethical process towards freedom, for which an aesthetic ethics is necessary; this combines with reflecting on the idea of inclusivity in their artwork, through a relationship with their materials of desire to seek freedom from the female lack, doubt, oppression, and poverty, which necessitates an 'actualisation of subjectivity that includes freedom of others', and can be analysed as having three levels.

⁶²⁶ Anna McNay, 'Louise Bourgeois, Tracey Emin: Do Not Abandon Me' *Studio International*, New York, February 21st 2011.

Three levels of freedom are:

1. A basic level of freedom. To breathe, desire to live, eat, shelter, clothing, human contact, family, self actualisation, and to survive.
2. A second level of freedom is desire for meaning, ambition, purpose, and the question of the right to be oneself, to fulfill one's dream.
3. A third level of freedom that is a desire to search for a wider emancipation with others, an exploration of world that is inclusive, and the desire to interconnect with another in univocity.

These levels of freedom are inspired by Emin and Chengyao, Butler, Irigaray, and their desire for female emancipation. The third level of freedom discussed here relates to their first and second level that has been discussed throughout the chapters, for example, self actualisation, breathing, double refraction, to question the right to be oneself, and to fulfill one's dream in performativity, visibility, and invisibility, which Emin and Chengyao both have attempted to do despite living in a patriarchal society. The actualisation of subjectivity through the process of desire, 'I desire x', is facilitated through cultural and social practices. Personal desire for freedom is I desire x, which is desire for freedom in itself and for itself in Butler's terms drawing from Hegel. The temporal ecosystem of subjectivity restraints freedom within society, for example when Chengyao was a child, her freedom was restricted not only to what her parents were capable of in raising her, but also what she herself is capable of while growing up in her environment. Similarly, in Emin's environment when she was a child, she was experiencing the abrasion of her subjectivity, her rape for example, within her environment, her freedom became restricted. In different families and societies, liberty depends on different levels of safety and different levels of freedom, depending on the temporality of subjectivity, age, time, environment, or space that prevents or permits.

Striving for freedom is apparent in a bronze work from Emin's White Cube exhibition, *You Saved Me* 2014 (Fig: 4.31). She emphasised that 'my creativity is more to do with an emotional resource, it has more to do with what I am, not where I am.'⁶²⁷ Emin's creativity relates to her desire x, the liberty to express her abilities, and the space to create her work. By redefining the traditional nude Emin has questioned, who the female body belongs to by highlighting her own body as a female artist. *You Saved Me* 2012 was also exhibited in Rome

⁶²⁷ Tracey Emin, *The Last Great Adventure is You* 2014, Catalogue, (London: White Cube, 2014).

at the Galleria Lorcan O'Neill, 2012, and at the White Cube, London in the *The Last Great Adventure is You* 2014. *You Saved Me*, a bronze sculpture that has Emin's fingerprints all over it, narrates a naked body hugging a bird as if it is about to take flight; here Emin's relationship with nature is conveyed. Emin said what birds mean to her:

From a personal point of view, when I've been lonely I watch birds and I feel them and it's been comforting. And of course, symbolically their flying is freedom. When I was little I used to have very strong dreams of flying and I remember the flying as it were a true experience. So now when I watch birds fly, it's me that's flying.⁶²⁸

***You Saved Me* 2014**

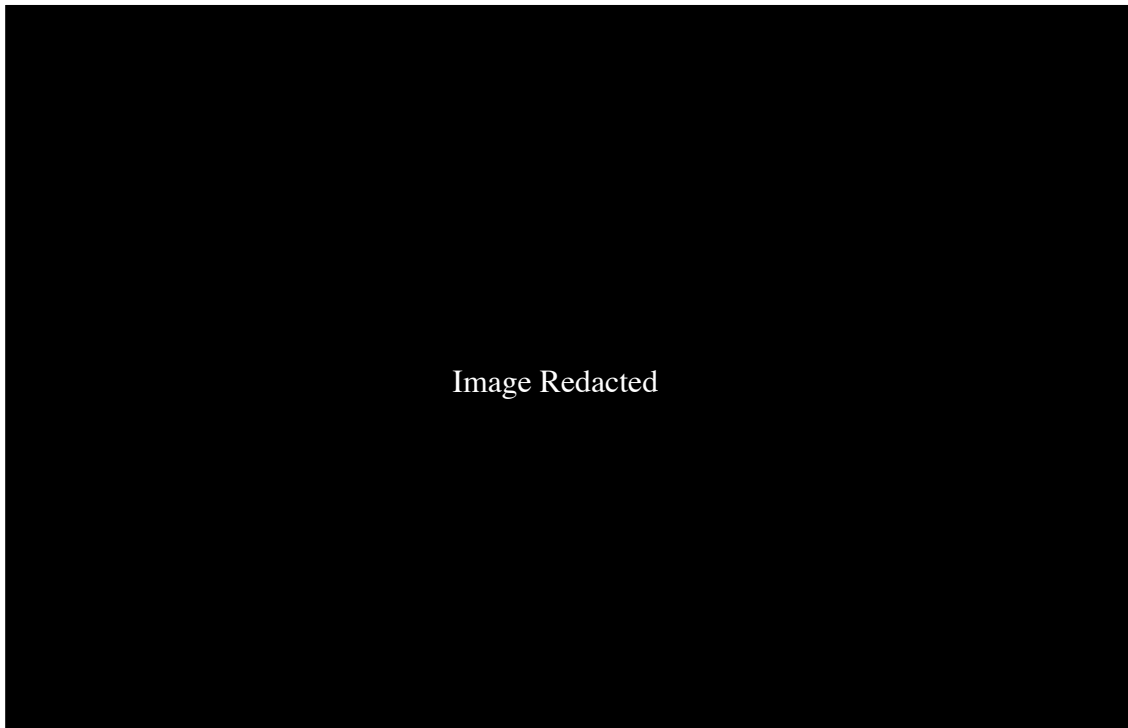


Fig: 4.31: Tracey Emin, *You Saved Me* 2012
Bronze, 27.3 x 49.5 x 31cm, White Cube, London, 2014.

[Image redacted due to copyright]

⁶²⁸ Neal Brown, *Tracey Emin* (London: Tate Publisher, 2006), p. 30-31.

Teaching Young Monks in Tibet 2013

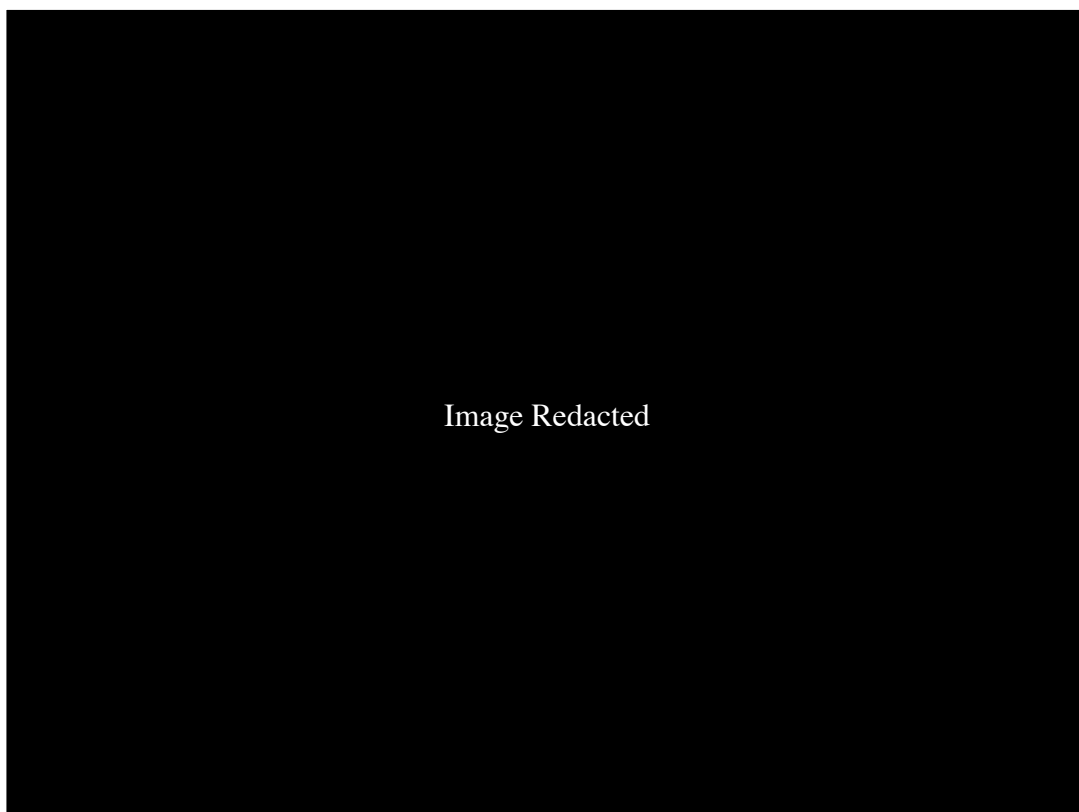


Fig. 4.32: He Chengyao Teaching Young Monks in Tibet 2013
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Tracey Emin Married Nature 2016

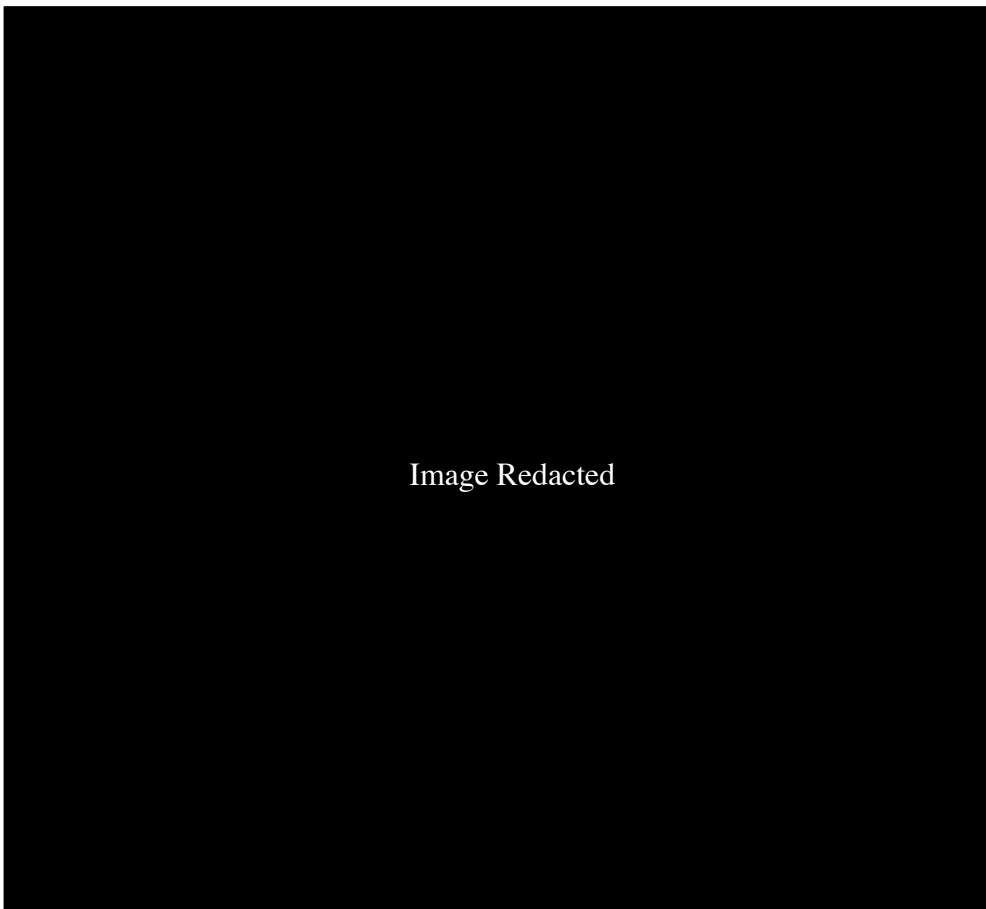


Fig. 4.33: Tracey Emin and the Rock she married in France 2016.
[Image redacted due to copyright]

Emin is being, connecting, creating, and communicating with nature. For Emin, she constitutes nature and attempts to free herself from the vicissitudes of life through her ontological identification relationship process that includes birds, similar to the old Chinese masters who depict repeatedly animals of all kind such as birds, fish, but mostly nature with text – calligraphy.⁶²⁹ The image of Emin flying away with her bird is also free from the suffering of the world. This indicates Emin’s desire for freedom within nature and not only indicates the process of subjectivity: the bird and naked self-portrait of Emin on its back are flying together conveying a sense of being on the way to somewhere else, a becoming.⁶³⁰ Again here, the figure is faceless so it could be anyone, casted in bronze, a new-found skill for Emin, very similar to the work of Louise Bourgeois, in the tradition of multimedia, readymades, fabrics, words, bronze, and so on; and in every bronze work. Emin attempts to communicate a univocity by exhibiting her bronze bird sculptures to slow down the city of Sydney and London for example.⁶³¹

I care, and others care about the emotional resonance in my work. My last exhibition that took place at White Cube this Autumn was titled “The Last Great Adventure Is You”. Nearly all of the work was about loss. Loss of heart, loss of life, of youth, of being beautiful. Being 52, not 25. Other people identified with this and art should not be difficult, art should give you something, there should be a dialogue. 45,000 people went to see my exhibition in 5 weeks in a commercial gallery. The majority of them were people between the age of 15 and 20.⁶³²

The above quote narrates how Emin has influenced the young to view her work. What kind of impact will she have on the young since Emin’s younger self? Will the fifteen to twenty years old view sex differently to Emin’s younger days? Emin often claimed in her many interviews, sex was great when she was young, yet it was erosion of her subjectivity.⁶³³ She

⁶²⁹ Amy McNeilage, ‘Artist Tracey Emin sends in the bronze birds to slow Sydney down’, *The Guardian*, 16th March 2018. Also see Craig Clunas, *Art In China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp. 135-141.

⁶³⁰ Exhibition *I need art like I need God*, South London Gallery, 16th April–18th May, 1997. Gallery-1997-PR-LOW.pdf. Interview with Carl Freedman in *Tracey Emin Works 1963-2006* (Rizzoli, 2006), p. 77-95. Also McNeilage, ‘Artist Tracey Emin sends in the bronze birds to slow Sydney down’ *The Telegraph*.

⁶³¹ Tracey Emin, *The Last Great Adventure is You*, White Cube Gallery Catalogue 2014. Also McNeilage, ‘Artist Tracey Emin sends in the bronze birds to slow Sydney down’ *The Telegraph*.

⁶³² Tracey Emin Interview with Alain Elkann, London, 2004.

⁶³³ Tracey Emin, interview with Melvin Bragg 2001, Stephen Sackur 2012, Laurie Taylor 2013.

attempted to send the youngsters a message with a video called *Top Spot 2004* (*Top Spot* was the name of a disco in Margate that Emin used to dance in) but controversy protested against *Top Spot* as a teenage film, hence it was rated certificate x 18 film, to prevent teenagers from seeing it.⁶³⁴ In the film Emin is a kind of mentor or mother, she interviews six teenage girls, attempting to talk to the girls about their problems, even sexual ones, to narrate how teenagers need someone to discuss problems with, before sex or even suicide which mirrored Emin's own experience.⁶³⁵ It was an attempt to draw our attention to not only her problems but that of another teenager, attempt to prevent or avoid rape, pregnancy, sexual diseases, or even heart break, as she illustrates in *Strangeland 2005*.⁶³⁶ This is not only about Emin herself but attempts to protect teenagers from the vicissitudes of life before it is too late, as it was too late for Emin to avoid being raped. Emin often escapes to nature when stressed calls.

You Saved Me 2012 or *Top Spot 2004* in different media also suggest that if anyone is feeling alone or in despair, as Emin said about birds, when she watches them: 'it's me that's flying', we too can have our own bird or a helicopter in *Top Spot*, that can fly us away to a liberating place: an image of freedom from chaos, abjection, and abuse.⁶³⁷ Emin and Chengyao have drawn our attention to female agency and subjectivity and the lack of female subjectivity since childhood, as it has been denied to women in history. As such, Emin and Chengyao have contributed to the debates of emancipation with their aesthetic subjectivity uncompromisingly which is inclusive of another.

According Pierre Hadot, agency and freedom are at the heart of subjectivity since Greek thinkers practiced ontology in their lifetime.⁶³⁸ Butler has a Hegelian idea of freedom, in which freedom is connected with overcoming alienation and struggle. Subjectivity asserts its freedom through confronting the other and 'as the self estrangement implicit in the experience of desire.'⁶³⁹ This means subjectivity/desire begins to process in inclusivity of another, creating a unity of univocity. As for Irigaray, she argues for the freedom of sexuation between men and women, 'to respect sexual choices' within a legal framework,⁶⁴⁰ for women's emancipation, however, freedom also includes construction and reconstruction of the genders as Butler would suggest in *Gender Trouble 1990*.⁶⁴¹ If feminism highlights marginalised women, then Emin and

⁶³⁴ Neil Smith, 'Top Spot 2004' BBC Home, Movies, November 2004.

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

⁶³⁶ Emin, *Strangeland*, pp. 147-149. 'The Proper Steps for Dealing with an Unwanted Pregnancy'.

⁶³⁷ Neil Smith, 'Top Spot 2004' BBC Home Page, Movies, November 2004.

⁶³⁸ Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Arnold Davidson (Oxford: Blackwell, 1995), pp. 59, 86, 135.

⁶³⁹ Butler, *Subject of Desire*, pp. 49-62.

⁶⁴⁰ Irigaray, *Je, Tu, Nous*, pp. 74-86.

⁶⁴¹ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, pp. 9-19.

Chengyao's work is in solidarity with the feminist cause. This suggests ethics rests in the third aspect of their subjectivity, where they desire to articulate a single voice of being resulting in univocity. According to Deleuze and Guattari freedom is complex but articulated through 'Axioms for the young, for the old, for women, etc. A very general pole of the State, "social democracy," can be defined by this tendency to add, invent axioms in relation to spheres of investment and sources of profit: the question is not that of freedom and constraint, nor of centralism and decentralization, but of the manner in which one masters the flows.'⁶⁴² This is not dissimilar to the ideas of Lao Tzu in the *Tao Te Ching*, where freedom is adapting to the flow of life,⁶⁴³ which Emin and Chengyao attempt to achieve through their ontological identification relationship.

In the concept of freedom, there is also a personal freedom, in recent years, Tracey Emin reveals how she constitutes nature as mentioned in chapter three.⁶⁴⁴ She also exhibits a spirituality that suggests a performativity in an ontology of being. In 2016 Emin married a rock spontaneously. She found a gift from her aunt and opened it to find a ring; she tried it on her marriage finger but turned into a panic when she believed that once she puts a ring on her wedding-ring finger, she must marry, to avoid a bad omen, hence, she married a rock in response since no human was around!⁶⁴⁵ Her desire x, was to engage with nature and spirituality; she believed in the afterlife. Perhaps being a nun is far from Emin's mind in a semi secular society, but the desire to be free, spiritual, and inclusive of others is evident.

Emin turning to nature and marrying a Rock or Chengyao entering a Buddhist monastery to become a Buddhist nun,⁶⁴⁶ informs us of an ethical desire as a quest for freedom, and not only for themselves; but this is a desire for something even they themselves are in the process of understanding, 'to make sense of things'. This indicates their particularity and univocity that also implies a personal ethics, which in turn entails the concept of freedom. The fact that Chengyao became a Buddhist nun is a transition of becoming, and can be interpreted as a need for solace. Chengyao was inspired by the year that she spent teaching young monks in Tibet in 2012 (Fig: 0.2, 4.32).⁶⁴⁷ To become a nun invites further speculation, but in time she

⁶⁴² Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 462.

⁶⁴³ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English.

⁶⁴⁴ Tracey Emin, Interview with Tim Marlow, Hong Kong, March 2016. Conversation with Jonathan Jones, *Tate Talk*, 2017.

⁶⁴⁵ Tracey Emin, Interview with Brown, Hong Kong, March 2016.

⁶⁴⁶ Leung Kwankiu in Conversation with Tong Pui Yin who knew He Chengyao well 2017.

⁶⁴⁷ He Chengyao Interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016.

will no doubt communicate and explicate her experience. This is another good example of the virtual and actual or invisibility and visibility in the concept of freedom.

This last chapter revealed how and why Emin and Chengyao's complex new nudes include faceless bodies and bodiless bodies, that draws our attention to their female subjectivity in univocity, ethics, and freedom, which relates to Deleuze and Guattari's 'bodies without organs'. Emin and Chengyao's ontological identification relationship reflects univocity as their third aspect of subjectivity that explicates how and why their works are similar with different cultural formations in multimedia, that exhibit particularity while at the same time embodying inclusivity in search of freedom. This brings me to the conclusion which will summarise this thesis

Conclusion: Making Sense of Uncompromising Aesthetic Subjectivity In The Work Of Tracey Emin and He Chengyao

One who conquers others is forceful,
one who conquers the 'self' is strong.

Lao Tzu⁶⁴⁸

This thesis has argued that by comparing Tracey Emin and He Chengyao's work evinced an ontological identification relationship, which reflects three aspects of their subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity. Their uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity shown in their new nude draws our attention to self actualisation, the stream of subjectivity intersects with the stream of the artist's material to produce artworks, which not only narrates their memories but confronts the lack of female subjectivity. This has shown us a new nude of Emin and Chengyao that demonstrated not only their personal is political, but that the ontological becomes political as refracted critique, it is an ontological relationship that identifies with art practice and work to make sense of things rather than a confessional state of being. Their subjectivity is affected by outside forces such as cultural formations, society, politics, war, and economy, not only locally but also globally.

In formulaic terms, this ontological identification relationship between subjectivity and artwork means that subjectivity – X identifies with artist's material – Y to create artwork XY embodying a relationship in their art practice. By juxtaposing their work this thesis has shown the ways in which the Duchampian trajectory of Dadaism with readymades still affects and influences Emin and Chengyao's art practice, and the performance artists of 60s and 70s; they have exhibited similar concerns in solidarity with global female art practices, which contributed to and questioned feminist discourse. Chengyao and Emin's new nudes have been exceptional examples of Chinese and Western contemporary art praxis in the late twentieth and twenty-first century, actualising uncompromising female aesthetic subjectivity. Through the creative process of their ontological identification relationship, they make sense of the three aspects of their subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity. In terms of this research my investigation has been concerned with setting in motion numerous elements into an assembly of encounters, in order to show how a number of vectors intersect in Emin and

⁶⁴⁸ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, Trans by A.S. Kline (Yale University Art Gallery, 2003) p. 39.

Chengyao's ontological identification relationship, which reveals not only their artworks but how and why they create their work. This means, an interdisciplinary perspective has been adopted in an attempt to show a consistent reading of the assembled evidence. This has been illustrated and analysed through philosophical, historical, feminist, and empirical methods and context, which includes critical analysis, visual analysis, and empirical interviews, which underpinned my interpretations of their artworks.

This thesis has argued for an ontological interpretation of Emin and Chengyao's work that has discovered their subjectivity is at the heart of an ontological identification relationship, which reflects three aspects of their subjectivity in the new nudes. Butler's 'I desire x' has aided the understanding of Emin and Chengyao's actualisation of subjectivity. And through this lens their subjectivity is self construction, or in Irigaray's terms, giving birth to one self with the breath. They draw us in to their discoveries about themselves in their memories and the tragedies of their lives which they attempt to make good and beautiful from their uncompromising aesthetic corporeal art practice. Furthermore, in Moore's terms, they are making sense of who they are as female artists in this era. Their work constitutes becoming in performativity mode, which constitutes visibility and univocity. Their reflection and introspection is actualisation of subjectivity/desire, which is a basic need in life, their thoughts, their memories, and their concepts are actualised and explored in their ontological identification relationship with the three aspects of their subjectivity. This is specific to Emin and Chengyao in this research thus far, although it may also be a reference to a wider culture or history, but that will be another study after this thesis.

Emin and Chengyao's work with memory relives their experience, although with less intensity, engaging the wider public. Their works are edited truths that shows their work is not about confession. Henry Moore once said that artists should not speak, the artwork speaks for itself.⁶⁹ Although this might be true to a certain extent, female artists have endured enough silence: many, such as Emin and Chengyao, want to speak as well as exhibiting their work, but on an abstract level, their work 'speaks', hence it narrates every word they think during and after the creative XY process. Their words constitute their practice, just as Henry Moore did when he spoke his words, he himself enunciated a mode of subjectivity, his thoughts and ideas were open and expressed. This thesis is not a defense of Tracey Emin or Chengyao, for they do not need anyone to defend them; they do that rather well on their own terms. Rather, their work emphasises aesthetic subjectivity in female artists in global art history, Emin and

⁶⁹ Henry Moore, 'The Sculptor Speaks,' *The Listener*, 18 August 1937, pp. 338–40.

Chengyao are at the heart of this paradigm. With the freedom of multimedia this comparison shows not only their artwork but how they identify themselves with artist's materials within the ontological identification relationship.

In this thesis I have traversed a range of themes and raised issues relevant to the comparative context. The artists function within an aesthetic realm that is only indirectly political critique, but their uncompromising subjectivity reveals a strong ethical sensibility articulated in the aesthetic realm. Both Emin and Chengyao are dealing with ethical issues through their own subjective interaction in art practice. Chengyao's concern for her family is palpable as is Emin's concern for hers. Through articulating their subjectivity in the aesthetic realm, they inevitably articulate a concern for ethics and the univocity of their work also speaks for another. This concern for uncompromising subjectivity that entails an ethic, articulated in the aesthetic realm, cuts across cultural difference. The distinction between East and West, although not insignificant in terms of culture and politics, is shown to be ontologically insignificant because both artists share the same concerns about manifesting experience and giving voice to subjectivity that entails giving voice to the other.

Focusing on the uncompromising, aesthetic subjectivity of Emin and Chengyao as female artists exemplifies subjects of becoming, along with all the complex ways of exhibiting the vicissitudes of a female artist in a global sphere. Interpreting their work through a historical and ontological lens has not only disclosed a possibility to reflect upon complexities of understanding their history of bodily exposure, but also the actualisation of female aesthetic subjectivity in the aesthetic realm that involves performativity in visibility with univocity in a global and global culture. To attempt to define both their appeal and their detractors has involved entering into the cross currents of post contemporary art. Emin and Chengyao are female artists from opposite ends of the world revealing the flaws of life, but then this is also close to the real, virtual (memory) becoming actual (reality) hence their art exhibits expressions of past trauma that are unique to each, yet to which audiences can relate. In Deleuzian terms, what is virtual is as real as the actual.

The double abstract refraction, which on the one hand articulates the personal and critiques systemic patriarchy, is central in the understanding of Emin or Chengyao's naked-self-portraits, which articulates the lack of female subjectivity across disciplines that is simultaneously a symbol of a resistance to being subjected by exposing the devices contained in subjection, such as patriarchal power structures. But what is crucial here is their ontology of being, being in their ontological identification relationship, it is a love affair between artist and

the artist's material of desire. To expose subjectivity is to exhibit the edge of such a difference in the visibility and invisibility divide, the virtual and the actual interact. Not only they draw our attention to lack of subjectivity, but their experience of subjection narrates how Emin's life was pervaded with a dysfunctional family and society in Britain and Chengyao similarly, narrates how her life was pervaded with tragedies, in a dysfunctional family and society in China. The artists not only risk the vulnerability and the payoff of visibility with performativity, but also place within the light states of abjection that have fractured the self in ways that invariably have led to being understood as victims; narrating the personal, also attracted critics that claim their work as confessional, when they are in actuality making sense of things ontologically with edited truth in their artworks, and thus cease to be confessional, which means confessional art was a misleading concept. The exposure of subjective experience and the exposure of the body are not the same, but they touch upon the different ways in which identity at one level is constructed and expressed.

The modern history of patriarchal subjectivity has not only failed to include female aesthetic subjectivity while they struggle to be visible, but also attempts to abrade their subjectivity consciously or unconsciously, with claims of moving away from a study of subjectivity, which denies authorship and subjectivity, which women have just actualised since 1918 with women's vote in Britain and two years later in America. China had to struggle with wars and a cultural revolution, in which feminism was delayed. I have used the term the 'lack of female aesthetic subjectivity', to include the erosion of female subjectivity, which has been worn down by patriarchy through a range of historical processes including religion – social, cultural, and political – that feminist thinkers such as Butler and Irigaray have drawn attention to, hence parallels with Emin and Chengyao's work in this era.

The body is the primary medium for the exploration of personal experience that is central to subjectivity; the stories that Emin and Chengyao reflect and reveal are 'related to the socio-cultural predicaments that Chinese and Western women of the past have faced and continue to face in the present', without being directly political.⁶⁰ The body thus asserts a subjectivity that has been denied to female artists and women in general, as well as their mothers and themselves, due to their experience within a patriarchal society, China, perhaps at present is more occlusive of women than Britain on the visible sphere.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Gao, 'The Great Wall in Contemporary Chinese Art', p. 113.

⁶¹ Maria Miles, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour* (New York: Zed Books, 2014).

They create work that is uncompromising from their aesthetic subjectivity, and focus on naked self-portraiture that I have called ‘the new nude’, in contrast to the traditional nude that, broadly speaking, uses female models as an object of desire and adoration, passive models, as a muse, without words or actualization of their subjectivity, usually ending up in bed with their male artist master or on a canvas being mute, and usually laying down demurely for the male gaze and pleasure.⁶⁵² These female self-portraits are distinct from naked male self-portraits (as Lucian Freud for example) and distinct from traditional nudes: there is a sense of vital forces at work within history, and the arrival of female artists are the ‘vital forces’, to use Bergson’s terms, at work. But their vital forces are not out of guilt as confessional art implies, but out of necessity to fight for freedom as the suffragettes fought in the 1910s. While some continue to argue for confessional art,⁶⁵³ the evidence of edited truths shows rather the necessity of an ontological reading. Emin and Chengyao are continuing to build onto the work of global feminists, while there are still doubts of female art practice. Being a female artist, no matter how many awards Emin has won, or how many performances worldwide He has performed, doubts will continue, but female artists will continue to question and challenge. Perhaps Chengyao will return from the Buddhist monastery one day and begin again. Chengyao suggests ‘we need to cultivate a sort of self-awareness among women in China,’ and about women’s rights, ‘it is something you fight for yourself.’⁶⁵⁴

The traditional nude is now a classic genre but still a female mute, from the Sandro Botticelli’s beautiful *Birth of Venus* 1480s to Freud’s *Benefit Supervisor Sleeping* 1995, the same year Emin created *Everyone I Have Ever Slept With* 1963-1995, 1995, will remind us, the female body has been subjected to patriarchy, but changing. This contrast, is a telltale sign of our times. Emin was part of the YBAs group, and her thoughts of intimacy were divergent to that of Lucian Freud’s nudes. Emin in Britain or Chengyao in China are the naked models and the artists for their work in exhibitions; they narrated their thoughts, performing visibly, voiced their ideas, with uncompromisingly naked images, but from a female artist’s perspective and not from a male gaze.

⁶⁵² Frances Borzello, *The Naked Nude*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 2012); Sally O’Reilly, *The Body in Contemporary Art* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009); Richard Leppert, *The Nude: The Cultural Rhetoric of the Body in the Art of Western Modernity* (Colorado: Westview Press, 2007).

⁶⁵³ David W. Galenson ‘Portraits of the Artist: Personal Visual Art in the Twentieth Century,’ *National Bureau of Economic Research* working paper 13939 <<http://www.nber.org/papers/w13939>>. Galenson relates the rise of confessional art to confessional poetry. Also see J. Welchman, *Narcissism: Artists Reflect themselves* (California Centre for the Arts Museum 1996); S. Redmond ‘The Star and the Celebrity Confessional,’ *Social Semiotics* 18:2 (2008), 109–114. Among the first to use the term ‘confessional art’ is Outi Remes, in *The Role of Confession in Late Twentieth Century British Art* (Unpublished PhD. University of Reading, 2005).

⁶⁵⁴ He Chengyao, interview with Leung Kwankiu, Beijing, March 2016, Appendix p. 304.

What is at stake in this is a mode of exposure, which includes the literal body, and even the absent literal body (as in Emin's *My Bed*); their body as artist and model, is a double reflex of exposure. Their notion of stable identities was replaced with the idea of becoming; a process of becoming-female in the face of normative restrictive codes is in question. This involves not only a testing of limit experience, but within this, boundary definitions.

In Chapter One I examined a key term of the thesis, what is meant by ontological identification relationship and how Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity becomes articulated as artwork through $X+Y=XY$ to make sense of their art practice rather than through a confessional stance, and how the ontological of art practice became political through revealing the female lack, and how this history has been misled by the label confessional art. In Chapter Two I argued how Chengyao and Emin's performative practices express an ontological identification relationship between subjectivity and work with performativity; this reflects the first aspect of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity that articulates exploration of female subjectivity, the lack of female subjectivity, and how the personal refracts as political. This is discussed in relation to Butler's performativity, and Barthes, Foucault, and Derrida's idea of 'death of the author', who is the author, and 'death of man' that has been foreshadowed in the visual arts by the Duchampian trajectory in Dadaism since the 1910s. When conditions allowed for female artists' subjectivity to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s, their art practice worked alongside male artists, historians, and philosophers. Most male interdisciplinary discourse did not acknowledge the female desire to actualise their subjectivity, they were not interested in women's *métiers*, let alone their subjectivity or artworks, thus their discourse also threatened female artist's subjectivity and visibility. While their work had an ethical dimension to favour the reader it failed to include female subjectivity. However, the Duchampian trajectory that attempted to disown artists' authorship in favour of readymades was the precursor of death of the author. The contingency of this history affects Emin and Chengyao's art practice explicitly and implicitly, despite their work being inspired by Dadaism, their work refracts as feminist critique of the traditional nude when they actualise their subjectivity and authorship with their uncompromising naked self-portraits, which becomes the new nude.

Chapter Three explored Emin and Chengyao's visibility and how they faced the vicissitudes of visibility in the second aspect of their subjectivity. Since 1989 they witnessed world events from the tragedy of June 4th to the collapse of the Berlin wall. These events indirectly influenced their ontological identification relationship in global art practice with multimedia that revealed a journey from invisibility to visibility as female artists in a

patriarchal society. Visibility highlighted a complex invisibility of Emin and Chengyao as female artists; on the one hand it is self actualising that discovers subjectivity in the aesthetic realm, but on the other, they have the empathy to be inclusive of the wider society.

Chapter Four develops the third aspect of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity, univocity; the one voice of being suggests their work is inclusive of another, male or female, employing empathy for another. Butler, Irigaray, and Deleuze have been crucial in the development of this thesis to aid my analysis of how Emin and Chengyao's work reflects the actualisation of their subjectivity. Their faceless body work is univocity, which resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's idea of bodies without organs BWO, and immanence, in search of freedom for themselves with others. Freedom and subjectivity are linked in the emancipation of the self, the many examples of their work contain poignant reference to women's freedom through their self-actuation of subjectivity in univocity as their third aspect of subjectivity.

I have established Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity to identify themselves with their art practice through the ontological identification relationship, which reflects three aspects of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity, and have identified a structure within their art practice as process and making sense of things in Moore's terms. My comparison of Emin and Chengyao sees a connection between them as an alliance against endemic patriarchy, which means univocity in solidarity. They have created work that exhibits an edited truth, which expresses their memories of childhood experience constituting the human condition, which refutes essentialising of the work and singular readings. Their self creation, as female artists, is akin to that of Butler's construction of the self, but they also desire a spiritual belonging with nature and something unknown, that is similar to Irigaray's argument for nature and sexuation in feminism, and something that is beyond the materiality of this world as they reveal in their own words and in their artworks. What is evident here is a traumatic life, it is not surprising they yearn for a spiritual dimension to balance the next stage of their art practice and exploration of life, in multiplicity. It is only in this sense that Emin has any spiritual orientation. She claims she enjoys spending time with her Rock husband in nature in her home in France, and in China Chengyao has become a Buddhist nun to fulfill an aspiration of a spiritual life, to renew a painful journey of the past and the uncompromising political situation of her own country or to escape for a little while; neither we nor she knows when she will emerge again: it would be another chapter in the uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity of Chengyao. The absence of clarity of faces creates a dynamic and demonstrates how both artists are changing and becoming in their ontological identification relationship, and why they have exhibited

uncompromising aesthetic subjectivity that exhibits corporeal intimacy with their newfound nudes, reflecting three aspects of Emin and Chengyao's subjectivity, performativity, visibility, and univocity. This brings my thesis to an end.

Appendix

Interview Transcript

Leung Kwankiu interviewing He Chengyao

March 2016

KK: Leung Kwankiu

HCY: He Chengyao

HCY: This work, I'm actually using meditation (禪修) and taboo (禁制) to find a path. I'm trying to use art to find the marks left behind in my pursuit for the truth.

HCY: I'm, trying to materialise the process I undertook in my search. Because of my identity as an artist, I came up with using this simple method to portray [the truth], as well as to remove anything else that is unnecessary. Actually, I believe things like facts and truths are actually very simple – humans are the ones that complicate them.

HCY: This was done using an oil-based pen, from the center, at the rate of one dot every second. This is the pen. When I run out of ink I'll just change to another pen, and when that runs out I'll change again. It's kind of like a circle of life.

HCY: This below here, I recorded the amount of time I took to create this, and it took me 185, 221 seconds, which is equivalent to 51 hours, 27 minutes and 1 second.

KK: Has your work changed from before to now? Is the direction of your work going to change?

HCY: Because previously I, on the fifth of this month, I'm going to do a live performance called 'Breathe', and that was why I cut my hair. I shaved it all off. I didn't want it to get in the way of my performance. I want my identity and gender both to be neutral. I want to portray a side of me that is neutral, with zero interference. I can show you my pictures later – I can send them to you afterwards, if you need it.

HCY: Here, for 'Breathe'. It was performed on the fifth of March. I used my mouth to exhale, like, 'ha, ha', with the intention of trying to tear apart/breathe through this piece of paper.

KK: Is it still going to be about yourself? Self-portraiture?

HCY: This is not just about my self. See, here, it's torn apart. This is about, I think, the feelings I have to this world as a person. And that is the reason why I wanted to perform this with a neutral identity. Because this isn't just about females.

KK: Why is the body important?

HCY: Because I want this body to be released from old traditions, to break people's existing conceptions as to what a female body should look like. Therefore I needed to portray myself in a different way.

A: Is this related to gender?

HCY: Partially, but... My inclination is towards... A person, male or female, has no control over their biological sex, but how we choose to dress and adorn ourselves, that we have control over.

KK: Is the family important to your work?

HCY: Yes, in the early times. Because I was – as I was growing up, I was definitely influenced by my family.

KK: Is your family an extension of yourself?

HCY: I actually think that I'm attempting to find myself through my work.

HCY: We were speaking of 'Breathe' just now, and I feel that it actually contains this... metaphor.

HCY: I'll like to explain a little bit as to why I dislike to have interviews. I had an experience once with an interviewer from London. This person left me a message on my Weibo, and said that he/she wanted to investigate about female gender and sexualities, something like that. But, it's you (KK) so it's ok! I don't want to do any interviews, because these days I feel that anything that comes out of my mouth is wrong. I feel that I'm always contradicting the things I say immediately after I first say them. I don't want to keep doing that.

HCY: I feel that you will be able to understand where I'm coming from. People like us are always trying to push boundaries, and because I myself, I'm searching for truth. But everyday, I take a step forward, but at the same time, I also take a step backward. This step backwards isn't necessarily contradiction, because it's like eating a meal. Maybe we're full from a meal after eating three dishes, but obviously that won't happen if we only eat the second dish, or only eat the third dish. We need to eat all three dishes in order to properly sate our stomachs.

KK: I hope, I can do a good job!

KK: Have you found the truth?

HCY: Nope. But I'm still on my journey, on my way there.

KK: Will it cause you trouble if I write about you?

HCY: If you write about... Oh, no! I don't think there will be a problem at all. She's writing from her own perspective, so... No problem.

KK: Will you continue to do body performances in the future?

HCY: Yes, definitely. I think if I'm going to do lives, then I'll definitely make use of my body, so. No matter which part of my body. For example, even if I only use my mouth, the rest of my body is also in motion, as well.

KK: Is the environment around you part of yourself? Is it part of your inner self?

HCY: Yes, you can put it that way. From the philosophy of Buddhism, everything that I see with my eyes manifests itself with relation to my own being/mind.

KK: Is the self very important to you?

HCY: Hmm... I hope that I can, through... I hope to be able to find a way that can merge my inner self – that is, everything I just mentioned – as well as the outside environment, together into one. This way, I will be able to feel a natural oneness, with the world.

HCY: But I've never felt- I've never had this sort of experience yet. I really hope that I can find some way to experience this. So... I feel that this will be a very long journey, and I might not even see the end of it. But I'm trying very hard to attain it.

KK: Are you a Buddhist at heart?

HCY: Yes, yes, I am.

KK: For a long time?

HCY: No, but since 2012, when I went to a school in Tibet to teach Mandarin to the monks, I became a Buddhist then.

KK: Does you consider your work as self-portraiture? How does she feel about nudes, and globalisation?

HCY: I feel that for humans, from the moment we are born till the moment we die, our bodies are being restrained on many fronts – from our culture, our society, even our morals... These things place a lot of restrictions on our bodies. I myself would like my body to become, how should I say it... One that has no such restrictions. I want my body to have freedom. That is not to say that a nude body is a free body. It's more than that. This kind of freedom, it's from the exterior to the interior, from surface appearance to one's internal, state of mind.

HCY: Also in Chinese culture, the perception of the body is that the body is ugly, perverted, and obscene. But I firmly believe that the body, like money, is neutral, neither of them are evil. But culture, and people's thoughts, find them vile – it's a projection of human thoughts onto things that are inherently neutral.

KK: What do you think about the globalisation of your work at the moment?

HCY: I think... There is around 7 billion people in the world, and I think each and every individual here is unique. And precisely because everyone is unique, that the world is so rich.

KK: Will you travel more in the future?

HCY: Last year I've been to 4 countries and 8 cities, not just to Germany.

HCY: I might go if other countries were to invite me. But I must look at the conditions first. Because if the organisation, say if they can cover the cost of my flight, back and forth, as well as for accommodation, then I might go. In China, performance artists like me have no right to apply for funding [to travel].

KK: Are you concerned about the women's rights in China?

HCY: I think that we need to cultivate a sort of self-awareness among women in China.

HCY: I think rights, is not something that someone bestows upon you. It's something that you fight for yourself.

KK: How accessible is that?

A: Are there people fighting for these rights, as of right now?

HCY: I feel that, as you know, in China... Because of the way Chinese government policies are, there is no way that any sort of organisation can obtain this sort of rights, for women. It's more... Instead this is something that will show up more often in daily life, where there are more specific problems that certain organisations will then fight for in a substantial manner.

KK: Do you stay away from the government?

HCY: That's impossible. As long as you're living on this piece of land, in Mainland, China, there's no way for you to avoid the government. Every aspect of our lives is tied closely to the government. We have to eat everyday, we have to pay tax... And all those problems, with our food's safety... It's just impossible.

KK: Have you had any problems with the government?

HCY: No, never. In a society such as this, you need to learn to adapt.

KK: What about the public's views to your work?

HCY: It's all different, and dependent on their background - be it in traditional art-making or contemporary art-making. But from my own perspective, I actually won't care too much about the public's reaction, or what they say. I know that I'm being honest, and that I'm following my truthful thoughts. I'm only concerned with transforming/translating these thoughts into something visual, and how accurately I can do so.

KK: How do you avoid conflict with the government, given the work that you've done so far?

HCY: I know some people will use certain confrontational methods that might be too direct. But I prefer going about with roundabout methods – and do not, directly throw eggs at them.

KK: A lot of people have gone spiritual. Do you think Chinese artists have turned to the self?

HCY: You're talking about something very broad. I feel that this question should be directed towards the curators, because they're the ones who've seen all the works. I think you'll get a better answer from their perspectives. Judging other's art works as an artist personally, my viewpoint isn't nearly broad/comprehensive enough, it's still very limited.

KK: People have said that your work is political. Did you feel there is a sense of political movement for you and women, before and now?

HCY: I think, in this era that we're currently living in, even just and as an observer... It's unavoidable that people look at things from a political perspective – in fact I think that's normal behavior. It's because we aren't able to escape from this era.

KK: I'm not sure if I'm allowed to ask you some personal things, about marriage, life, family and children?

HCY: I don't want to answer these questions.

KK: Ok, sorry. What are you planning to do in Shanghai?

HCY: Something to do with the concept of time. But maybe for a shorter time this time. They invited me to their closing, and the exhibition is about Dunhuang Buddhist Art. My work is going to be exhibited there as well because they feel that it's related to meditation. It's related to the exhibition because they want to show how the people these days are able to practice religion through art. In the past, people would do so by writing Buddhist texts, or depicting Buddha in their wall paintings or sculptures. But people these days no longer use such methods. They have other ways of practicing religion through art, and that's what they're trying to show in this exhibition – this inner touch with religion, that modern people have.

KK: Where does your inspiration come from?

HCY: That... I think you can find that online. There's a lot of information online.

KK: Are they true?

HCY: Some... Those that contain my own words, those are believable. The thing is, I don't want to talk about my past works these days. I feel... I want to treat them... How should I say this... I'll have to think up a lot just to recall them... It's like chewing gum. The flavor is all gone, but now you're asking me to continue to chew on it still, you know? I've already spat out that chewing gum!

HCY: Really, some times, it's quite tough to talk about these older works.

KK: Is that why it is important to get the truth?

HCY: This truth is relative. And the world is ever-changing. Nothing is ever purely black or white.

KK: Why is it comparative?

HCY: Time, too, is relative. I remember Einstein once said, if you sit beside a beautiful woman for an hour, you'll feel that time passes very quickly. But if you put your hand into the fire, you won't be able to stand it even for a few seconds.

KK: Are you in the process of discovering the truth?

HCY: Yes, I suppose... There's not much of truth or anything, anyway. I think it's just us humans attempting to understand this world in their own way. Therefore, I think rather than attempting to reach this answer/conclusion, it's more important to just open up one's mind.

KK: Do you mean being open with interpretation?

HCY: Yes. I think it'll be more meaningful this way. Whenever an artist completes a work, the work takes on a life of its own, and is no longer as closely related to the artist anymore.

KK: Does the meaning belong to you?

HCY: It belonged to me. But not in the present, anymore.

KK: Does the work still come from you?

HCY: For example, for me "He Chengyao" is a symbol. Just a symbol that my parents gave to me. I myself don't even know who I really am, or where I am destined to go.

Interviewing Chinese Audience

KK: What do you think about He Chengyao's work?

Woman: It's meditative, and it's about life.

Man: It's about practice. It's just like the Buddhist practice of counting beads.

KK: What do you see in her work now and before?

Audience 2: I think her work now represents her current state of mind. Compared with her past works, there's a very huge difference.

KK: Do you like He's self-portraits?

Audience 2: In the past it was about the body, the experiences and breakthrough with the body. But her works these days are more Chinese, and focus more on her way of expressing.

Man: Her past works were about life and death, about death. But this work is has gone beyond death.

KK: What do you think about her other works?

Audience 2: It's like this. Her previous performance art had several stages. For example, the one at the Great Wall, was about the body, taboo, and being restricted by tradition. But then, she's also done other things in the middle, for example, the one about acupuncture. That's more

Eastern. But more than that, it was also about a personal, physical experience. It also had to do with physiolog. But this one has more to do with her mental state, and its changes. In the past, there was this artist – Li Xianting, did an exhibition about brushstrokes. He had a series of strokes... You can find it through Baidu, for your reference. It's very Chinese, and it also places a lot of emphasis on religious practice.

KK interviewing an audience: How do you feel about He Chengyao's work?

Woman 2: About her work, is it? I think it's so-so. I think she only talks about the superficial phenomenon in China, it's rather artificial – her works, as well as this exhibition.

KK: Some artists are trying to raise awareness about women's issues but they don't want to be part of the feminism culture. Have you seen changes in women's awareness of the self?

Ou Yang Wen Dong: Of course there has been a lot of change... She [He CHengyao] is one of the really big changes, but it's not enough. We were talking about... Most of the Chinese society is still living in a traditional negative ways. We need more... Change. Greater aspects.

KK: You've had many rejections when you were working for the newspaper. How do people respond to you or your work now?

Woman: What newspaper?

KK: Hello, did you use to work for Meishu Bao, in the 80s? You and your friends were trying to fight for human right...

The Director of Meishu Bao: Yes yes... I'm still fighting now, actually. But I've been trying to make independent films. These days, art-making isn't difficult – making independent films is the most difficult.

KK: Why film?

The Director: Because these films cover two aspects. One has to do with the truth, about China, regarding some sensitive, dark social topics. The other has to do with experimentations of people's inner thoughts. And these topics are not things that mainstream films would care about. In China, film-making is an extremely sensitive endeavor. You are only allowed to film something after you've obtained permit for it. You can't do it privately.

End of Interview

March 2016

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Other interviews and conversations with artists and translators who also contributed to my

Research: Cheng Clara, Chen Shisen, Feng Wei Dong, Juan Juan, Liu Nanxi, Tong Pui Yin, Wang Dandan, Wang Ruobing, Wu Weihe, Yim Monique.

All consent for interviews and conversations were in video or voice recording.

If anyone should wish to question the ethical conduct of this research please do contact Kwan Kiu Leung

Images

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