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Identifying touchpoints between British and Chinese women's art in the twenty-first century

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Identifying Touchpoints between British and Chinese Women's Art in the Twenty-First Century

By

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Contents

List of Illustrations

Tables

Figures

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I have been sitting in front of the screen for a while, looking back at the past three or more years of undertaking this PhD. It has been the most exciting and precious time in my life so far, and there are many people I have to thank.

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Declaration of Previous Publications

Some parts of this thesis from Chapter 4, The Female Body, have been previously published in the following:

Yang, V. Y. (2020) 'Identifying Touchpoints in British and Chinese Women's Art in the Twenty-First Century'. in *Feminist Art Activisms and Artivisms*. ed. by Deepwell, K. Amsterdam: Valiz, 190-201.

A draft version of this publication is included in this thesis as Appendix 5.

Abstract

Studies of women's art in the current century are redressing past invisibilities by involving diverse groups of women. However, new questions have been raised; how do we appreciate women's artworks across cultural boundaries? How do we undermine the gender binary that has caused an imbalance in culture and in the art world? This thesis is concerned with these questions and studies eight installation works produced by eight women artists from Britain and China, with analysis that opens up more possibilities in a transcultural context. To achieve that, I provide a semiotic analysis to the selected artworks that is guided by a phenomenological feminist standpoint theory. These artworks are categorised into three principal themes: the female body, domesticity, and reproduction for a systematic interpretation. The analysis is enriched by semi-structured interviews with each artist as well as exhibition catalogues, art reviews, and scholarly publications. Throughout the analysis, the concept of entanglement also comes into play – I seek the common grounds while reserving the differences between the selected artworks. The result is termed 'touchpoints'. I identify six touchpoints in this study that bridge the selected artworks to reach across the themes and also enable greater understanding of the dialogue between sociocultural differences. This thesis thus provides one way of reading the selected artworks and challenges the current sociocultural binaries inherent in gender/power relations through the production of transcultural knowledge.

Chapter 1   Introduction

My research journey started when I studied my MA in Graphic Design, and later an MRes in Visual Arts at Coventry University. I had always been curious about contemporary art – art of the present day and relatively recent past, particularly in the form of installation. Installation art is complex and sophisticated because of its dynamic combination of material, concepts, and method. The need to understand installation art further motivated my enrolment for a PhD. As it was too ambitious to look into all types of installation art produced by all artists in a three-year PhD programme, I chose object-based installations as a starting point because the materiality of its form and the way it engages with the viewer has always fascinated me. In addition, in comparison to the abundant history of painting or sculpture, object-based installation is considered as a new art form, yet it shows great potential to interact with theories and disciplines. For example, new meanings are given to the taken-for-granted things when interpreting object-based installation for a new materialist perspective.

Furthermore, as a Chinese feminist living and studying in the UK, I suggest that there is a need in the twenty-first century to generate a study into contemporary women's art with the aim of enriching transcultural research. Scholars who have explored

similar themes to myself have endeavoured to investigate women's art of Atlantic West and China including Zhang Shibin (2009) and Cui Shuqin (2016). This literature will be introduced in Chapter 2. Working as a female artist remains a gendered issue, as the art world is gendered, with multiple layers of intentional and unintentional inequality (Acker 1990). The picture of gender imbalance in the contemporary art world is dispiriting in both the UK and China. According to a 2017 report in *The Guardian*, the majority of solo exhibitions in the UK were still by male artists (Ellis-Petersen 2017). The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) also points out that male buyers at auctions are a driving force in the art market, and they are more likely to think that women's art is inferior (Shaw 2017). Similarly, in China, which is now the third largest art market in the world, women account for only ten percent of successful artists born after the 1980s. In group exhibitions, the proportion of women artists is even less because (mostly male) gatekeepers tend to choose male artists to participate in exhibitions, often promoting their male friends first (Movius 2016).

However, a shift may be occurring, driven by women who have taken the helm at some of the major art institutions in both the UK and China. Although the signs of this imbalance changing are painfully slow, there is now considerable momentum behind contemporary female artists in the twenty-first century (Shaw 2017). In addition, the cultural dynamics of globalisation have presented new opportunities and challenges for communication between women artists. Women artists from different

contexts, to a great extent, are no longer restricted under the patriarchal system and have started to work across cultural and discipline boundaries since the end of the Second World War (1945) and the founding of the People's Republic of China (1949), but how we can understand and bridge their artworks in order to facilitate the contemporary recalibration process? This is an ongoing task in the current century.

In response to this challenge, this thesis aims to enrich transcultural research and to recalibrate women's art in contemporary art history through studying British and Chinese women's art. My situated, transcultural position, guided by a phenomenological feminist standpoint theory, explores representative installation works by British and Chinese women artists in the twenty-first century. Choosing women's art of Britain and China is not an attempt to essentialise the differences between them, rather, this study considers the diversity of British and Chinese women's art that is emerged from the result of their historical, political, and sociocultural background. In addition, during this research, I am aware of the complexity of defining nation and ethnicity, i.e., Britain/British and China/Chinese. Such questions around the diversity of the selected artists' national and ethnic identities include: should this research involve British artists who identify as White British, Black British, British Arabs, or British Chinese? Chinese artists from mainland China, Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, or ethnic minorities in China? Although the selected British artists are White British and Chinese artists come from

mainland China, they are not influenced by only one culture. For example, British

artist Rowena Harris has lived and worked in London, Rome, Linz, and Rupert;

Chinese artist Lin Jingjing lives and works in both Beijing and New York.

Considering of the small scale of this research, it is difficult to bring all possibilities

into the content, however, the complexity of the multiple influences shows the

cultural entanglement and constitutes a transcultural study as such.

In selecting the artists, I have also considered the fluidity of defining gender, thus, the

artists selected are cis female, meaning their gender identity corresponds with their

birth sex. The selected artists were born from the 1960s to 1980s, they constitute the

mainstream of contemporary art world and have been participating in art practise for a

considerable time. These artists work across a variety of media, including

installations. Correspondingly, in selecting their artworks, I paid particular attention

to their object-based installations that produced in the period from 2000 to 2019.

Through a thematic selection of the initial data, I chose a small sample of eight

installation works. These artworks are: Rowena Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame*;

Helen Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*; Jemima Brown's *Our Lady of

Perpetual Distraction*; Lana Locke's *Untitled*; Lin Jingjing's *Dress*; Tao Aimin's

Women's River; Gao Rong's *Guangzhou Station: Things in the Bag*; and Jiang Jie's

They Know Who They Are.

It was my aim to identify what I have termed 'touchpoints' that sought the common grounds while reserving the differences between British and Chinese women's art, meaning the entanglement of similarities and differences, and to bring to light the value of these touchpoints from the perspective of transcultural knowledge. I then examined these touchpoints and revealed strategies employed by these women artists to destabilise traditional binaries, such as male/female, nature/culture, and subject/object, that are implicit in gender/power relations governing cultures and the art world. In the following sections, I will introduce each chapter, sketch out the touchpoints, and note how they are identified within this research.

In 'Entangling Feminism and Women's Art' (Chapter 2), I introduce the need and rationale of studying women's art and its importance in both Britain and China. Looking back at women's movements in Britain after the Second World War and in modern China (since the establishment of People's Republic of China) in relation to women's art, I argue that it is difficult to define what feminism and feminist art is; as it is not clear whether the 'feminist identity' is located in the artwork itself, in the artists, or in the feminist character of the work. According to Pollock (2012:5), the feminist character of an artwork 'is not related to the gender of the artists, nor their political identity but in its effect upon the beholder'. As there is no universal definition of feminism and feminist art, any attribution of them consequently rests on claims rather than facts (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:146). Therefore, it is not the

central point of this thesis to identify feminism or feminist art. Rather, I focus on the 'art' part; that is, to make meaning of artworks by women artists from my situated position as a self-identified feminist and a Chinese woman who has lived in the UK for an extended period, and to provide my contribution to knowledge that is one step further on the existing scholarships of women's art studies. In Chapter 2, I briefly look back at the history of women's movements in the Atlantic West and China and review existing cross/transcultural art studies. After which, I explain the concept of touchpoints and identify the scope of this thesis in order to provide a small-scale qualitative study focussing on women's artworks.

Chapter 3, 'Research Process', introduces the methodologies and methods of interpreting the women's artworks employed in this research. Phenomenology and standpoint feminism mutually inform and enrich each other in this study of transcultural women's art. A phenomenological standpoint feminism encourages close attention to the entanglement of taken-for-granted things in our everyday life and gender/power relations of the production of knowledge. This methodology also guides and shapes the research process in collecting and analysing data. I then explain the criteria of selecting the artists and artworks paying particular attention to object-based installations.

This selection process included two steps. In the first step, I collected a large number of artworks within the scope of this research through organising all the object-based installations produced in the twenty-first century by the selected artists. The second step included a thematic refining of the objects in the artworks that appeared frequently from the extensive initial data collected in the first step. As a result, eight artworks were chosen in this thesis. In the selected artworks, three themes emerged which showed a relevant and close link with women artists' lived experiences. They are: the female body, domesticity, and reproduction. While avoiding the essentialist pitfall of suggesting that women artists can *only* produce artworks on these three themes, I have used this classification as a way of organising all the works examined here systematically rather than attempting to generalise or limit women's art.

A semiotic method was utilised in making meaning of the selected artworks under these three themes. It involved a three-step method of description, reduction, and interpretation, in order to deal with the visual and tactile data as signs (Lanigan 1982; Merleau-Ponty 1945). This semiotic method provided a direct and informative classification of the selected artworks and helped to locate the touchpoints within them. My interpretation of the artworks has also been enriched by semi-structured interviews with each artist as well as exhibition catalogues, art books and art reviews of the artists/artworks.

Chapter 4, 'The Female Body', focuses on the theme of the 'invisible' female body through an analysis of three artworks: *At the Edge of the Frame*, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and *Dress*. Themes around the female body have been at the centre of feminist thinking and movements. It is one of the most significant themes that is reflected in the selected eight artworks and links them together. The three artworks discussed in this chapter provide an entrance to the profound interpretation of the female body in women's art. In Chapter 4 I identified three touchpoints reflected in these works. First, the artists use the body fragmentations and bodily absence to represent the existence of body wholeness. The fragments and absence of the body might lose their original function when detached from the whole, yet they can also act as a ghosting presence that develops into new meanings and significances. Second, there is fetish for body parts, calling to light the masculine gaze, which is driven by gender/power relations. In the three artworks discussed in the chapter, the artists use masculine fetishes to destabilise the objectification of the female body. Finally, these artworks challenge the fantasy of 'being the perfect women'. The artists use the presentation of the incomplete female body to suggest the struggles that many women meet and experience in their lives. Imperfection is recognised as evidence of existence and marks of recovery.

In Chapter 5, 'Domesticity', I look into three works of art: *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, *Women's River*, and *Guangzhou Station: Things in the Bag*, locating

three touchpoints in the analyses of them. First, the everyday domestic objects in these artworks are vibrant things: they co-constitute human subjectivity and actively engage with human. Second, these artworks reveal an underlying temporal gender inequity. This is closely connected with domestic spaces where women's experience of time is different from men's due to gender divisions and unequal responsibilities. In this reading, these artworks present a pattern of specialisation on the basis of gender in domesticity and suggest the concept of time emerges as a gap between genders.

The final theme, 'Reproduction', is discussed in Chapter 6, which analyses two artworks: *They Know Who They Are* and *Untitled*. In both, the artists use the figure of a (human and non-human animal) foetus/infant to represent pregnancy and maternity. Two touchpoints were identified through this discussion. First, the entanglement of organisms – between humans and non-human animals and between the corporeal body – is central to both works. In this reading, human lived experience is not made up of isolated encounters with the world; rather, the world in its entangled intra-action is generative of human lived experience (Barad 2003). Furthermore, this entanglement also breaks binary between self/others, mind/body, and human/non-human. It opens up more possibility for all matter's being-in-the-world to intra-act. A second touchpoint is the politics of reproduction centred on women's bodies. The 'invisible' maternal body in these two artworks becomes a site of political action as

both British and Chinese governments make decisions concerning women's bodily rights in different ways.

Finally, in the 'Conclusion' (Chapter 7), I draw together the main arguments of this thesis and connect the touchpoints with the eight installation works discussed herein. These touchpoints that emerged from my situated position and situated knowledge are the outcome of the analysis and reach across all the selected artworks. This chapter reaffirms the academic contribution of the thesis: it provides an original interpretation of the selected British and Chinese women's artworks, destabilises the 'traditional' binaries inherent in gender/power relations, and demonstrates the intra-active entanglement between things, such as concepts, theories, matters, and human beings. Furthermore, this research endeavours to generate a mutual respect towards women artists from different contexts and to encourage transcultural communications and collaborations between women artists in the future.

To sum up, this thesis addresses a gap in the current literatures around feminism and women's art in a transcultural context by studying specific examples of contemporary British and Chinese women artists and their installation works. The dynamic between British and Chinese women's art in the light of phenomenological standpoint feminism will provide a new way to understand the touchpoints between them, thus

contributing to the broader project of understanding women's art in the twenty-first

century.

Chapter 2 Entangling Feminism and Women's Art

2.1 Introduction

In the following chapter I provide a review of the existing research on feminism and women's art in a transcultural context in order to offer a general picture of how these studies have investigated about the position of women in society and in the art world. I then introduce my motivation in this thesis that aims to locate the subtleties between women's art in the British and Chinese context in the twenty-first century. To achieve that, I first briefly introduce the history of feminism and women's art in Britain and China and consider the complexity of feminism and women's art. I pay specific attention to several key texts about the feminist movement(s), significant artistic practices, and scholarly reviews of women's art rather than attempting a survey of the wide-ranging literatures and studies in this field. Subsequently, I outline the limitations of the existing studies with regard to cross/transcultural and comparative investigations on women's art which form the basis of exploring the potential developments taken up in this study. Finally, I elaborate the concept of touchpoints of women's art that is used throughout this thesis. I conclude by outlining the scope of this thesis.

2.2 Complicating feminism

The word 'feminism' was initially used in political debates in the late nineteenth century in the Atlantic West. It can be described as a desire of individual women and social movements to challenge gender inequalities. Depending on its historical moments and cultural and social contexts, however, feminism has had different meanings and goals, both within the Atlantic West and outside of it. For Hannam (2012:7), feminism is 'a recognition of an imbalance of power between the sexes with women in a subordinate role to men' and a belief that women's condition is 'socially constructed and can therefore be changed'. As Walby states (2011:3), there is the 'self-definition of individuals, groups or projects as feminist', with the goal of 'reduc[ing] gender inequality' as well as 'promoting the interests of women' as equivalent to men. According to Li (2003:45), 'nvxing zhuyi de lilun qiantouwanxu, guigendaodi jiushi yijuhua: zai quanshijie shixian nannv pingdeng 女性主义的理论千头万绪，归根到底就是一句话：在全世界实现男女平等' (theories of feminism are numerous, but share an end goal of achieving equality between men and women worldwide).

Beyond this broad consensus, however, feminism is complex and hard to define because it takes different forms and positions in different contexts, with diverse priorities and strategies. The history of feminist scholarship is marked by a variety of definitions and re-definitions of what feminism is and what feminism can be (Walby

2011; Kokoli 2008). The development of feminist movements in the Atlantic West and China has had very different routes and strategies at various periods. However, looking back at the history, there are points of contact between them, which I turn to below.

Tensions within feminisms

A significant feminist movement in the mid-twentieth century in the Atlantic West presented a detailed analysis of women's oppression, constructing a foundational tract of contemporary feminism. Simone de Beauvoir was one of the most well-known representative figures. Her book *The Second Sex* is widely regarded as the major work of feminist philosophy. *The Second Sex* consists of two volumes. The first volume analyses the situation of women from the perspectives of biology, psychoanalysis, history and female mythology in literatures; the second volume, based on the philosophical theory and existentialism, examines various stages of women from their birth, to adolescence, relationships, marriage, fertility and senescence. It also considers the situation of women from different hierarchies among peasant women, women workers, prostitutes, celebrities and intellectuals, exploring possible ways that women can gain independence. De Beauvoir raises the necessity of women's economic independence and emphasises that only when women have fundamentally changed their own consciousness is it possible to truly achieve equality between men and women. In the conclusion, de Beauvoir looks forward to a future when women

and men are equal, something the Soviet revolution promised but did not ever deliver. De Beauvoir (1953) believes that among other things, men and women should go beyond their natural differentiation and unequivocally affirm their brotherhood to carry off this victory.

The significance of the book lies in de Beauvoir's success in placing three crucial questions on the intellectual agenda: the nature of relations between the sexes, namely the problem of the origin of sexual difference; the nature and the elaboration of sexual inequality and difference; and the issue of how men and women should live. These issues still dominate feminist discussions and form an important part of debates in various academic disciplines. However, Mary Evans (1985) considers de Beauvoir could nurture and develop *The Second Sex* precisely because she did not share the responsibilities of the majority of women. Evans (1985) argues that de Beauvoir lived a childless and unmarried life, which kept her free from domestic concerns and commitments. On de Beauvoir's (1976:199) views on being a woman before writing *The Second Sex*, she says:

> Far from suffering from my femininity, I have, on the contrary, from the age of twenty on, accumulated the advantages of both sexes; after *She Came to Stay*, those around me treated me both as a writer, their peer in the masculine world, and as a woman; this was particularly noticeable in America: at the parties I went

to, the wives all got together and talked to each other while I talked to the men, who nevertheless behaved toward me with greater courtesy than they did toward the members if their own sex.

Having experienced no disadvantages or difficulties in her own life that she could relate to her own sex, and having received a considerable amount of help and support from men in her chosen vocation, de Beauvoir's attitude to women suggests a lack of engagement with a distain towards femininity – an attitude that has led critics to see her as an anti-feminist or misogynist throughout *The Second Sex* and in her subsequent books and novels (Evans 1985). It is sometimes difficult to gauge the precise extent of de Beauvoir's sympathy with women from different classes and ethnicities. In spite of these criticisms and comments, de Beauvoir's intellectual integrity and her personal courage is generally praised and has become a source of inspiration for the later feminist movements worldwide.

Alongside these tensions, there has also been a lack of visibility in the feminism of the mid-twentieth century Atlantic West of representing the lives and experiences of women of colour, or women of lower socioeconomic status. Similarly, the development of feminism in China in the early to mid-twentieth century has also shown tensions and divisions within feminist community, which I discuss below.

The birth of Chinese feminism was 'an event of global proportions' at the turn of the twentieth century (Liu, Karl and Ko 2013:4). Feminism was introduced to China through Japan during the May Fourth Movement in the early twentieth century, which was a political, social and cultural revolution in which the women's movement took part (Yu 2015:6). The Chinese women's movement at this stage was an integrated part of anti-imperial and anti-feudal revolution. Therefore, feminism was translated into 'nv quan zhu yi 女权主义'(women's rights-ism/power-ism), which was adopted from the Japanese translation to reflect the political desires of women's liberation (Yu 2015; Min 2005; Xu 2009). However, this movement was shaped by and affected only a small number of urban and elite women. The vast majority of women who lived in the countryside were only minimally impacted. This women's liberation movement was also part of the Enlightenment and Nationalist movements that focused on men; it was thus described as 'male feminism' (Li 2015). Moreover, with the development of the anti-imperialist and anti-colonial national independence movement, thoughts of the women's liberation were quickly incorporated into nationalist thoughts. Women should stand together with men to oppose the feudal social system and women's liberation therefore had to be set aside.

Dramatic changes had taken place after the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949 that strongly impacted on millions of Chinese people (Li, Y. 2000). In contemporary Chinese history, Chinese feminism was a 'state policy' to 'mobilise rural and urban

women into the public sphere' since the establishment of the People's Republic of China (Barlow 2001:1288). The new government of the People's Republic made a firm commitment to guarantee equality between women and men. The famous quotation 'Women hold up half the sky' by Mao Zedong reflected the government's determination by the government to raise women's status. The All-China Democratic Women's Foundation was set up at this time and acted as the official leader of the women's movement in China. It was responsible for promoting government policies on women and protecting women's rights within the government. The feminist movement during this time was thus described as 'state feminism' – the government took over the role of speaking for and on behalf of women, rather than letting women themselves speak and make demands for themselves. Moreover, this feminist ideology is still influencing Chinese women in the twenty-first century, for example, independent women's movements are prohibited by the government.

The women's liberation movement in Mao's era (1949–1976) advocated equality between men and women. Women had the same political and social rights as men and were given the right to vote. Prostitution and female infanticide were prohibited, and to a large extent abolished in practice.[1] The new marriage law gave women their rights to property, inheritance and free choice in marriage, divorce and custody of children (Curtin 1975). However, the term 'feminism' was considered as a Western

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[1] I am aware that these actions might potentially be more dangerous for women, where prostitution and female infanticide are pushed underground so that more exploitative practices are able to proliferate.

bourgeois ideology and was criticised and banned during that time period. As a socialist country, the Chinese government believed that the root of women's oppression was private ownership, which was therefore part of class oppression. Consequently, women's participation in socialist and communist revolutions was the only and correct way to achieve complete liberation (Wang 1997). As a state-led ideology, the women's liberation movement in China started from the government agencies to involve civilians, promoted women to become active in social life, enjoyed the same legal rights as men and established institutional conditions and social space for equality between men and women. However, the equal rights of men and women in the public sphere during this period did not develop further into the private sphere, such as in demotic space, women were undertaken a double burden. In other words, the patriarchal system in domestic/family relations was never shaken. Thus, this women's liberation movement ignored the differences in gender roles as well as the differences between individuals.

Different forms of feminism

The feminist movement in the early 1960s in the Atlantic West aimed to increase equality for women by gaining more than enfranchisement alone. During that time, several feminist perspectives were identified, including liberal, radical, psychoanalytic, socialist and Marxist feminisms (Gimenez 2000; Tong 1989). According to these labels, liberal feminists required, first, to 'make the rules of the

game fair' and, second, to 'make certain that none of the runners in the race for society's goods and services is systematically disadvantaged' (Tong 1989:2). However, socialist and Marxist feminists would consider it impossible for anyone, especially women, to obtain equal opportunities in a class society where the wealth produced by the powerless majority ends up in the hands of the powerful minority (Tong 1989). Radical feminists, on the other hand, believed that neither the liberal nor Marxist feminists had gone far enough. They argued that the patriarchal system itself oppressed women; moreover, its social and cultural institutions should also be overturned. Psychoanalytic feminists found the origin of women's oppression embedded deep in the psyche; asserting that 'men have an inherent psychological need to subjugate women' (Wolff 2009:687). The root of men's compulsion to dominate women and women's minimal resistance to subjugation therefore lies deep within the human psyche. Psychoanalytic feminists believed this pattern of oppression was also integrated into society, creating and sustaining patriarchy. As stated above, feminism has taken different forms, perspectives, and developments in different context with various priorities and goals. The thoughts of different schools of feminism might overlap, are opposed, or influence each other, all of which contribute to the complexities of feminism.

However, some perspectives within feminism have been criticised for treating the concept of 'woman' as a stable and universal category. One of the major challenges to

the essentialist idea of 'woman' has been presented by queer theory, which considers

gender identity to be performatively created. In *Gender Trouble*, the American

feminist theorist Judith Butler overturned the assumptions about the binary

categorisation of sex and gender, according to which sex is biological while gender is

culturally constructed. She argues that sexed bodies cannot signify without gender,

and the apparent existence of sex prior to discourse and cultural imposition is only an

effect of the functioning of gender (Butler 1999). Sex and gender therefore are both

constructed. Butler (1999) suggests that the coherence of the categories of sex, gender

and sexuality – the natural-seeming coherence – was culturally constructed through

the repetition of stylised acts in time. The idea of identity as free and flexible and

gender as a performance and not an essence, is one of the foundations of queer theory.

These overlaps and contrasts between different ideas within feminism were also

evident in the Chinese context. In China, the 1980s had been characterised by the

metaphor of spring, with its associated terms of thawing and awakening (Min 2005).

With Deng Xiaoping's leadership focused on the 'Four Modernisations' of

agriculture, industry, science/technology and national defence, China saw itself as

having entered a new era of modernisation. During this period, the women's

movement was described as market feminism (Barlow 2004). The upsurge of

translation in the 1980s also brought with it the introduction of the Atlantic Western

feminist writings, such as De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and Eagleton's *Feminist*

Literary Theory. In addition, feminist/women's studies as a subject emerged in academic fields (Min 2005). With the spread of Western feminism in China, the previous translation of feminism as 'nvquan zhuyi 女权主义' (women's rights-ism/power-ism) became unsatisfactory as it implied a stereotype of a 'man-hating he-woman hungry for power' (Yu 2015:7). In the 1990s, a new translation of feminism as 'nvxing zhuyi 女性主义' (women's gender-ism/feminine-ism) replaced the previous one, which sounded 'less threatening' and 'more appropriate' in the Chinese context. Contemporary Chinese feminism is regarded as being 'sharp but not aggressive' and concerned with the 'harmonious development of both sexes' (Schaffer and Song 2007:17). These two Chinese terms for feminism imply a 'pluralist and complex feminism in China' (Spakowski 2011:47). Moreover, a Chinese woman who applied Western feminism and self-identified as a feminist would remain 'an individual linglei 另类(alternative) and peripheral' (Cui 2016:7). However, it is not a solution for Chinese women to simply keep a distance themselves from Western feminism or refuse a feminist identity. The profound question that challenges us, according to Cui (2016:7), is 'how to approach sexual difference in a non-Western culture new to the gender discourse and feminist assumptions rooted in Western intellectual history'.

The development of feminism in China from the 1980s to the 2000s has been marked by three related characteristics (Spakowski 2011): from the introduction of Western

feminism 'with gender as a core theory import'; to the articulation of the difficulties and problems this import of Western theory has caused; to searching for an identity for Chinese feminism in a global context. Differing from an earlier preoccupation with defining the feminism in relation to the Maoist approach to women's liberation, Chinese feminists and scholars influenced by Western theories turned to geographic definitions of Chinese feminism in relation to international feminism, adopting the notion of the 'local' to define their place in the world. As such, different voices have arisen when Chinese Feminism encountered Western and International Feminism.

In the mid 1980s, Chinese scholars Du Fangqin and Li Xiaojiang became influential in women's studies and gender research in Chinese academia (Spakowski 2011). However, Du and Li have different attitudes in their construction of the context and history of Chinese women's studies. In Du's (2001:142) view, 'promoting women and gender studies has become a trend of globalization'. To develop Chinese women and gender studies one needs 'a global perspective, regional comparison, and local action' (Du 2001:142). Du explicitly rejects the view that contemporary Chinese women's studies have strong local roots. She argues that, as part of an international feminism, Chinese women's studies needs to 'bentuhua 本土化' (localise) Western concepts, which were perceived as more advanced than those available in China (Du 2001). The concept of 'localisation' and the import of Western theories was later supported and

welcomed by Chinese scholars and researches such as Chen Fang, Min Dongchao and Feng Xu.

Li Xiaojiang, on the other hand, emphasises the uniqueness of China in the particular context, and historical origin of its emergence of China (Li and Zhang1994). Li considers the 1980s as the peak of the development of truly bentu 本土 (local). At the same time, non-governmental feminism in China, which expressed a new subjectivity for Chinese women. This positive development of a local, non-governmental feminism was however interrupted in 1993 with the increasing influence of Western feminism that had resulted from the preparations for the Fourth World Conference on Women. To be sure, Li is critical of the entire Chinese tradition of women's liberation since the late 1990s and of traditional women's discourses. Nevertheless, she perceives them as part of China's history that cannot simply be denied. Li Xiaojiang (2000:58) points out the flaw with regard to socialist-style liberation in China that ignored individual differences, but also concedes 'liberation through socialism was the necessary foundation for the development of women today'. Li places the argument within epistemological considerations; the differences in language and traditions that 'easily lead to distortions and detrimental effects in transfers across cultures and political grounds', namely the 'imperialist' or more precisely, 'postcolonial' structures underlying these transcultural knowledge (Spakowski 2011:37). Additionally, Barlow (2004:272) argues Li's claim to European

Enlightenment and Western feminism in the 1980s is rooted in an equally certain belief in the 'legitimacy and primacy of Chinese thinking about women's liberation for Chinese women'. Li's thought is therefore not grounded in cultural specificities, but rather, it is an assertion that all women are bound together because of a logic of bodily similitude.

The various responses to Western feminism in China can be seen as efforts to re-stabilise the framework of feminist theory in the face of troublesome intercultural encounters. Different voices of the development of feminism suggest a picture of a pluralist and complex feminism in both Britain and China. Different from Li and Du's positions, I place myself at the intersection of globalisation and localisation. I am aware that globalisation is not merely Westernisation or Americanisation, but a hybridisation of all cultures. In considering the way commonalities through the process of globalisation might aid communication, we also need to reframe and pay attention to many local or national projects within a global landscape. According to Walby (2009:3), there is a need both to 'capture the distinctions, differentiations, and nuanced of complex inequalities' and to 'simultaneously keep the global horizon in sight'. A transcultural women's study, therefore, needs to retain the conception of interconnection and mutual respect between cultural differences so as to be able to analyse the global level, at the same time, not falling into the mistaken simplicities of generalisation across cultures.

Against gender essentialism

Influenced by Butler's theory of gender performativity, there has been a major critical movement promoted by women of colour and non-Western women with a focus on the intersection of social relations, for example between gender and ethnicity in the twenty-first century. This criticism draws on theoretical discourses of post-structuralism, post-colonialism, critical race theory and deconstructionist theory. Reilly and Nochlin (2007) believe that gender essentialism is based on the perspective of a particular class of women who take their own experiences for those of a universal woman. This can be problematic as it entails the belief that those characteristics defined as women's essence are shared in common by all women at all times. According to Grosz (1995:45), this belief 'implies a limit of the variations and possibilities of change – it is not possible for a subject to act in a manner contrary to her essence. Her essence underlies all the apparent variations differentiating women from each other'. Gender essentialism, therefore, refers to the existence of fixed characteristics, given attributes, and ahistorical functions that limit the possibilities of change and thus of social reorganisation.

Essentialism is used to homogenise women into one singular category and to reinforce the binaries between male/female and masculinity/femininity. As activist and scholar Angela Davis (2008:19) suggests of feminism in the current century, it 'is not only about women, nor only about gender; it is a broader methodology that can

enable us to better conceptualize and fight for progressive change'. Liberated from the stereotype of rigid and exclusive gender roles, both men and women would also have more options. A study of contemporary feminism must consider the intersections of class, race, ethnicity, age, gender and sexual orientation, as they do not exist separately from each other but are complexly interwoven into things that are not just women's issues (Finlayson 2016), but an entanglement affecting all human beings.

Therefore, an intersectional model of thinking is required in contemporary feminist studies that takes the interlocking categories of experiences into consideration. Crenshaw (2020) believes intersectional feminism is a prism for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. This approach centres the voices of those experiencing overlapping, concurrent forms of oppression in order to understand the depths of the inequalities and the relationships among them in a given context. A feminist concept in a transcultural context is employed throughout this study. It provides a hybrid and multifaceted approach that enables me to address and bridge differences across sociocultural, disciplinary and national terrains. This study uses the term 'touchpoints' to connect these overlapping, concurrent representations of oppression in women's art within different contexts. These touchpoints are subtle and implicit points of contact that tap at the edges between British and Chinese women's art, at the same time, recognise and reserve the differences between them.

2.3 Feminist dialogues and the touchpoints

In order to understand the relationship between feminism and women's art in Britain and China, I have looked into contemporary cross-cultural and transcultural studies and critiques relevant literature in this chapter. Sources from feminist theory, postcolonial theory, women's art history, and exhibitions and curatorial studies further inform my review of existing materials. This paragraph also introduces the term 'touchpoints' and how it works to connect feminism in Britain and China.

Since the reform and the opening-up policy proposed by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China has re-engaged with the international scene. Feminism and improving the status of women re-emerged as part of a broader programme of modernising the nation. However, Edwards (2010:68) points out that the developments of women's studies in China 'are not transnational, rather they are national links into an international space'. Edwards (2010) believes that within these international links and programmes, the overt discourse is one where 'the Chinese woman' stands centre-stage as a special category – China cannot be extracted from the conversation. Chinese feminists who engaged with international feminism would speak as representatives of their nation, providing a Chinese perspective and discourse. Within this framework, antagonistic feminism could be dismissed as being 'un-Chinese' or even 'baizuo 白左'.[2] More damaging for the transnational feminist project however, is Edwards's (2010:68)

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[2] Baizuo (literally 'white left') is a derogatory Chinese neologism and political epithet used to refer to Western liberal ideologies.

contention that such a position 'undermines those points of solidarity women share internationally in their experience of living under patriarchy'. She believes Chinese feminists spoke to and for Chinese women in a context that underplayed their commonalities and similar interests with women elsewhere in the world and promoted the defence of 'China's pride' through a trumpeting of its 'unique circumstance' and 'special cultural characteristics' (Edwards 2010:69). Here is an example of the reluctance of the Chinese scholars Li Xiaojiang and Zhang Xiaodan, who work on women's issues, to engage fully with 'feminism' as a transnational movement. Li and Zhang comment (1994:148):

> And yet it is interesting to note that the term feminist is seldom used to describe women's activities in China, whether governmental or nongovernmental, academic or general. Few women are willing to call themselves feminist and we have not found such a word anywhere except in translations or articles introducing Western feminism. Instead, in Chinese women studies, the word feminology is used, and it rarely implies Western feminist theory. For the Women's Federation, the term feminism is obviously seen as part of a bourgeois ideology and thus against the principles of Marxism. For scholars in unofficial women's studies groups, however, avoiding the term feminism or not identifying their work as 'feminist' is a deliberate and voluntary choice rather than a political consideration. Such scholars respect Western-based feminist theory, and

yet they still believe that Chinese women's studies has its own background and

circumstances unique to Chinese history and social reality. Western feminist

theory is certainly valuable as a rich source of reference, but a Western feminist

tradition can hardly provide standardized answers to all Chinese women's

questions. Ultimately, Chinese women's studies scholars believe that through

their own ways of seeking truth, they may be able to contribute to the Western

tradition of women's studies.

Li and Zhang believe in a Chinese-style development of feminism rather than

adopting a Western-based feminist tradition in a Chinese context. Similarly, Chinese

feminist cultural critic Dai Jinhua (1999) notably emphasises the disjunction between

Western feminism and Chinese feminism because of this specific context: generally

speaking, Western feminism strived for gender equality and broadly challenged

essential differences between men and women, since these are seen as traditionalist

and inherently limiting.[3] In contrast, Chinese feminism mainly strived to cultivate

women's consciousness as women who were essentially different from men.

In the reform-era, despite extensive communications with the outside, China's female

scholars and activists still sought to localise feminist theories to fit their unique

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[3] There are exceptions, for example in what has been termed trans-exclusionary radical feminists, or 'TERFs',
which has created a culture war, especially online, between these different positions on essentialism).

national conditions. This Sino-centric approach to women's issues was akin to the Communist Party's key foreign policy position during that period. As Edwards (2010:69) states, this approach upheld China's right 'to be free from international interference in domestic affairs' and revealed the 'depths of insecurity produced among the intellectual and political classes by decades of isolation from the world'. Xu Feng (2009:208) depicts the situation by suggesting that 'the desire to indigenize western theories reflects an understandable anxiety on the part of Chinese women's studies scholars to contribute to theory building, so that China is not merely a "case" against which western-based theories are tested'. The dominant narrative remains that feminism is a 'hegemonic Western product' from which China needs to maintain a distance rather than embracing it as a dynamic and multi-dimensional movement. In this regard, both Edwards and Xu believe nationalism has hampered Chinese women's recognition of feminism as a diverse transnational project rather than one of cultural imperialism.

However, in the twenty-first century, the defensive position is starting to change. Chinese scholars, such as Li Xiaojiang, are embracing a notion that globalisation would carry Chinese women towards greater chances of becoming individuals outside of family, society, and nation (Li 2001:1277). The international communist movement and global neoliberalism have each developed in a vigorous way in changing the concept of the nation state and moving towards international state systems and global

capital (Barlow 2004). After the Fourth World Conference on Women: Action for Equality, Development and Peace in Beijing 1995, which is widely viewed as the prime catalyst behind the emergence and growth of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) (Xu 2009), such as UN Women, Women for Women International, and Media Monitor for Women Network/Feminist Voices, Chinese conceptions of 'women's issues' have returned to an internationalist perspective as fresh links are now being forged at government-to-government and people-to-people levels around a host of new and old issues (Edwards 2010).

The encounter between Western feminism and Chinese feminism brings opportunities as well as challenges to its development of feminism in China. Contemporary Chinese scholars have faced the dilemma of reconciling Chinese nationalism and Western-inspired enlightenment. As Xu (2009:208) concludes, on the one hand, nationalist sentiment can lead thinkers to be suspicious of Western concepts as vehicles of cultural colonisation and imperialism. On the other hand, modern and enlightenment tendencies in Chinese scholarship have compelled Chinese intellectuals to embrace Western concepts if only to critique Chinese traditions that they have considered backwards. According to Barlow (2004:14), 'once enlighten feminism is recognised to be international, then its depth and multiplicity become more clear'. Barlow (2004:14) believes that the modern Chinese intellectual history in the study of Chinese feminism, 'is not a derivative discourse', rather the origin is always

'aspecific and diffused'; these debates are not of the West, but rather are debates

undertaken now in the disintegrating 'West' and other places about the problems of a

globalised world from specific perspectives. In addition, the Marxist traditions in

China takes a national form but its nationalism presumes an internationalist matrix.

Analogously, for 1980s intellectuals like Li Xiaojiang, enlightenment is always 'by

definition trans- or international', although enlightenment 'naturally unfolds

according to this view in specific national frameworks' (Barlow 2004:268).

Consequently, questions are being asked in the twenty-first century include: how can

we make Western feminist thought applicable in Chinese national conditions? In what

position should we stand under the transnational framework to develop the local

feminist dialogue?

Localisation or indigenisation in China is a deliberately vague term. It can be

interpreted as turning Western thoughts, such as feminism and gender studies into

specifically Chinese practices without attempting to transform, block, or reject them

entirely (Zhang 2001). Accordingly, localisation is virtually about contributing to

Western theories through rich Chinese empirical data, which occurs principally

through numerous reports written to international organisations (Xu 2009:208). The

'local' therefore, acts as a central notion and 'indicates the spatialisation' of feminist

thoughts in a Chinese context (Spakowski 2011:47). It is a site of complex

interactions and contradictions between feminisms of various origins. From a

transnational dimension, Spakowski (2011:48) concludes three means of localising

the development of feminism in China (and other non-Western countries):

> One is the specific (local) nature of certain problems that call for specific (local)
>
> solutions. Another is the necessity to engage with local discursive contexts that
>
> also have a bearing on feminist theory production. A third is the empowering
>
> effect of a long tradition of commitment to women's issues and Chinese
>
> (feminist) history as a legacy and 'resource'.

Therefore, the formula of 'differences within commonality' that put forward at the

Fourth World Conference on Women seems inaccurate, as it focuses on problems

common to women from all parts of the globe (UN Women 1995). Additionally, it

could be argued that the formula of 'differences within commonality' affirms that

differences are based on the commonality, thus ignoring the rich differences in

various contexts and between different individuals and groups.

However, the concept of finding the touchpoints between British and Chines women's

art facilitates an entanglement of their similarities and differences in my study. The

touchpoints on the one hand seek the points of contact between different individuals

or groups; on the other hand, recognise, reserve, and respect the differences between

them. These touchpoints value the distinctions between women's art in different

social and cultural contexts, i.e., in China and Britain and links them through their

subtleties. The touchpoints could, therefore, mutually benefit the development of

feminism as well as women's art without diluting their uniqueness in a transcultural

context.

2.4 Women's art across cultures

In March 1998, about 60 women artists' artworks were presented at *Shiji, Nvxing* 世

纪, 女性 (*Century, Women*) – an exhibition curated by Jia Fangzhou at the National

Art Museum of China in Beijing. Jia (1998) claims that the art exhibition did not

present a group exhibition of women artists in the general sense. The criteria of

choosing the artists were not entirely based on their reputations; instead, it focused on

whether their art highlighted a 'feminine trait' and 'female perspective'. Jia (1998)

believes it was precisely the female features that constituted the specialty of women

artists in the 1990s that were different from previous eras. In the past, although a

considerable number of women artists had been active in Chinese painting circles,

there was no such concept of 'female art' or 'women's art'. Jia (1998) points out

'women artists at that time drew with a style and standard that created by men and did

not have their own gender identity and consciousness'. He then concludes the

academic starting point of holding this exhibition was 'women's art has its own

characteristics: women artists' interpretation of the world is different from male, and

this is the value of women's art' by summarising the basic characteristics of art by women. They are as follows:

1. No longer pay attention to those external things that are not related to personal and emotional life. Focus on digging into inner resources and get inspiration from personal experience and body language. The works tend to be more personalised and private.

2. Rarely analyse the themes from rational perspectives, instead, focus on the sensibility.

3. Not interested in political, historical, social, and philosophical themes, but keen on natural, life, human, and survival issues. Rather focus on small, trivial, and ordinary aspects than grand themes.

4. Lack of interests in the male's world in general. Rarely use men as artistic objects, which is in great contrast to the universality of male artists' image of women. Women artists pay more attention to their own issues.

5. Expressions developed from traditional craftsmanship. They naturally maintain their interests in sewing and embroidery techniques in art and transform them into a feminine-specific discourse. This language, although is not universally applicable, is a unique phenomenon in women's art.

6. Tend to choose everyday objects as their media. Installation artists show distinct

feminine characteristics in material selection, for instance, needles, thread, cotton,

silk, plush, fibres and lightweight materials.

However, it could be argued whether or not there is a basic feminine characteristic or

perception in women's art. Moreover, women-centred exhibitions have been criticised

for committing the pitfall of perpetuating cannon production rather than complicating

it (Low 2019). According to Pat Mainardi (1972:227), 'no one ever asks if there is a

masculine sensibility in art for a very simple reason – men have appropriated all of art

to themselves'. Furthermore, in her book *Women Can't Paint*, artist Helen Gorrill

(2020:173) states that there is no different kind of greatness for male and female

artists – 'the aesthetic of women's painting is not very different to that of men and

therefore perhaps we should not be treating female and male artwork as separate

categories of art beyond the mainstream'. Yet women's creative output is consistently

undervalued, and their work is valued lower than that of men. Pollock and Parker

(1981:169) argue the reason is there exists 'a persistent feminine stereotype within the

structure of art history's ideological practices in which women are presented

negatively, as lacking creativity with nothing significant to contribute, and as having

no influence on the course of art'. This perspective, they maintain, is the result of the

masculine discourse of art history. Jia's reductive definition of women's art and his

list of its essential characteristics as intimate, intuitive, non-political, detail-oriented,

uninterested in men, drawn from traditional handicrafts, and fixated on daily life, was thus problematic.

Compare to *Shiji, Nvxing*, the starting point and motivation of the exhibition *Women's Approach to Chinese Contemporary Art* curated by Liao Wen in 1995 was somewhat different. *Women's Approach to Chinese Contemporary Art* is considered explicitly feminist (Guest 2018). Through *Women's Approach to Chinese Contemporary Art*, Liao traced the history of Chinese women artists and their changing social context to argue that method and consciousness are significant elements in the evaluation of what constitutes women's art (Liao 1999). Liao stated in an interview that she believes the significance of women's art is a particular issue and phenomenon in contemporary art, but few people have discussed the value of women's art in depth compare to women's studies in the fields of sociology, anthropology, and literature (Wang 2016). Liao believes paying attention to women's art is not a token of caring about 'women as a species', nor a fashionable gimmick, nor an academic enclosure, it should be treated as an inevitable academic issue in contemporary art (Wang 2016). In Liao's opinion, the stance of paying special attention only to women is the same kind of Machismo witnessed when we exclude women.

In response to women-centred exhibitions in a Chinese context, scholar and curator Xu Hong also expresses her views. Xu considers if the curators stand in the position

of hegemonic masculinity and select the 'traditionally defined works of women', then they are continuing to maintain the legitimacy of the inequality between male and female artists. In this context, certain opportunities are offered to women artists that appear of providing the ethos of 'care' (Xu 2017). These actions are at superficial level to demonstrate a form of 'equality'. As a result, some women artists, such as Lin Jingjing, refuse to participate in art activities and exhibitions that are classified by gender or display with the prefix 'female' or 'women'. Lin Jingjing (2013) explained in an interview that she believes some curators are just looking for a theme for their exhibitions; they simply invite woman artist to take part in theses exhibitions without having seen this artist's artwork or having a clue about what she does. Consequently, exhibitions such as *Shiji, Nvxing* reinforce the stereotype of the 'feminine characteristic or perception' in women's art and repeat the discrimination in the art world.

Far from merely inserting women participation, Low (2019) believes art exhibitions, activities, and projects need to contribute to the field of art historiography to shed light on women's roles as artists, art patrons, collectors, and consumers. Different to *Shiji, Nvxing*, the exhibition *Half the Sky: Conversations with Women Artists in China* (2016) that emerged from the publication of a book of Australian art writer Luise Guest destabilises the male-gaze and redefines femininity in the contemporary art world. This book organises the material of 30 artists around ten thematic chapters.

Each chapter profiles and discusses the lives and works of the artists on the basis of the author's designated theme. The texts of *Half the Sky* were derived from the authors' direct encounters with the artists through interviews. In this regard, 'there was a strong desire by the authors to not only speak up for the women artists in the male-dominated art spheres', but also crucially to locate themselves as the audience who make meaning of the artworks (Low 2019:103). Therefore, from the perspective of the acknowledgement of women's work by other women, namely a 'female gaze', Low (2019:101) considers *Half the Sky* is not merely reinserting the position of women artists in art history but 'as a form of subjective reception in itself whereby the female authors are variously attempting to construct a lineage of "women's art" in the field of contemporary art'. The women artists and authors in *Half the Sky* were framed as agents who are creating art for women.

In the past decade, several exhibitions held both in China and overseas that contributed to rethink gender in curatorial and discursive practice, such as *Gender-Difference* (2009), *Wo-Men* (2011), *Secret Love* (2012), *Breakthrough: Work by Contemporary Chinese Women Artists* (2013), *Fire Within: A New Generation of Chinese Women Artists* (2016), and *Now: A Dialogue on Female Chinese Contemporary Artists* (2018). These exhibitions as well as scholars' contributions are the foundation of the knowledge on gender in contemporary Chinese art with a focus on women and epitomise the sheer potential of what can be done in the field (Merlin

2019:6). There were signs of an active exploration in women's art, alongside feminism having entered artistic discourses as a significant trend in the 2000s (Liao 2019).

Contemporary Chinese women artists started to explore their existence as female rather than deliberately emphasising or avoiding their female identity in their artistic creation. For example, in their representation of flower, Chinese artists Wang Jihua, Cai Jin, and Xu Xiaoyan use subversive language to convey the subject of flower that symbolises female genitalia. In these artworks, artists change the passive meaning of flowers as objects to be looked at and also highlight women's awareness of body discourse (Xu 2017). It represents the emotions and desires of women's inner world and connects with women's body and experience. The traditional symbol of flower in women's art, therefore, shows a new vitality, having been transformed and reinterpreted.

Another example is the conversion of the everyday object/material. The adoption of the everyday object/material in the work of Chinese women artists makes visible women's historical and social status and explores women's positions from their specific roles in society (Xu 2017). Lin Tianmiao's work, for instance, was influenced by her mother when Lin was a girl. Lin's mother asked Lin to unravel old sweaters to recycle yarn repeatedly and demanded her to do things that fit her identity as 'a girl'.

This was later reflected in Lin's artworks. The domestic objects in her work were wrapped in cotton threads and showed a neurotic repetition and expansion (Xu 2017). Similar to Lin Tianmiao, other artists such as Cui Xiuwen, Yin Xiuzhen, Lin Jingjing, and Tao Aimin also converted the traditional resources in their artwork to challenge the sociocultural definition of women. In doing so, these artists naturally connect their own lived experiences in the artmaking and endow the ordinary, everyday object/material with extraordinary meanings.

While the art world frequently uses narrow interpretations to marginalise and exclude women's art from mainstream discussion, Western critics and curators' 'reliance on the categories of "Chinese" and "woman" can end up reinforcing a similarly limited reading' (Ahn and Zhang 2018:32). Joan Kee (2007) also challenges the Western multiculturalist concept of 'Asian women's art', arguing that such a category erases many of the internal differences between Asian women that it purports to describe, breeding laziness in curators who include artists merely for their Asian-ness and gender.

Ahn and Zhang (2018) offer a way to escape from these interpretations, that is: the deliberate erasure of women artists' femininity. It implies a typical praise for a woman artist would be something along the lines of, her artwork does not look like it was produced by a woman (Ahn and Zhang 2018). Men have the freedom to be

sensitive and delicate or bold and strong, to make art out of their loves or hates, politics or religion while women's art would easily be classified into certain categories. Mainardi (1972) believes it is not true that women are capable of doing anything that men could not do, nor there is anything for good or bad that men are capable of that women could not do. Hence, women's art is not necessarily about feminine characteristics or sensibilities in both Western and non-Western countries.

Consequently, women's art is difficult to define or to categorise into certain traits. From a global perspective, women's art and feminism are English terms that we give to describe certain things. Other cultures, for example Chinese, have words that correspond to art, women's art, and feminism, i.e. yishu 艺术, nvxing yishu 女性艺术, and nvxing zhuyi 女性主义. According to Stephen Davies (2018:93) art can be made without a term or even a concept for it, believing 'the people who made the first art certainly had specific goals in mind but could not have thought of what they made as art, not until the relevant public practice was locally established and eventually named'. Every culture has established its own, independent art traditions and conventions. The definition of art is controversial in contemporary philosophy, and the idea of art has changed over time.

Davies (2018:94) claims that we could see that we share a conception of art because of what art across different cultures has in common, notwithstanding their manifest

differences, such as different languages and customs. It is understandable that we can identify some artworks from other cultures that we are not familiar with, but this is not to say that we are able to understand these works completely. These works take some of their identifying features and contents via relations in which they stand to their art-historical and socio-cultural locations. They can be full of symbols and codes; thus, the art of other cultures can be opaque to outsiders (Davies 2018).

However, it is possible to improve and enrich one's understanding and appreciation of art from an unfamiliar culture because we share much in common with other people whether we belong to their cultures or not. Davies (2018:94) insists that we have the same 'evolved perceptual systems', which enable us to 'organize the manifold or perception' – to find pattern, repetition, and closure, to distinguish a subject from its background, to attend to what is new or different. Although these processes can have a culturally distinct basis (Nisbett 2003), certain 'human refrains' seem to overlap (Davies 2018:94). Davies (2018) explains, when it comes to other people, we look for meanings and intentions; we track social relations and keep score. Theses shared themes are familiar across the world and are repeated in countless tales (Brown 1991). Artworks draw attention to themselves by simulating shared systems, and sometimes, common interests. Therefore, it is possible for the reader to expect the art of other cultures to be accessible in terms of their perceptible structures or thematic contents.

In addition, it is not just for non-Westerners to read artworks from the West, but there should be a mutual communication and respect. Davies (2018:95) who stands from a Western perspective claims 'art is a window into peoples' hearts and souls, so we learn from non-Western art both what we share in common and what makes each culture different and unique'. Davies believes the comparison between Western and non-Western art showcases our deep commonalities and highlights the 'cultural eccentricity and dissimilarity' (Davies 2018:95). Nevertheless, Akkach who stands from a non-Western perspective, doubts Davies' claim that art has always and everywhere been a window to people's heart and soul. Akkach (2018:98) believes the above claim is from a contemporary Western view which is 'not widely shared or universally relevant'. Thus, while a preoccupation with commonalities might make moral sense in encouraging the acceptance of non-Western work and cultural difference, conceptually and methodologically it can lead to misunderstandings and irrelevance through the perpetuation of a Western-centric conventional understanding. Moreover, Akkach (2018:101) claims the aim of cross-cultural studies should be 'to use the dissimilarities and disparities to engage in a dialogical questioning of our own prejudices and to open up possibilities of changing and expanding our horizon'. Akkach's considerations to some extent echo Mohanty's view on women's studies between Western countries and non-Western countries. Mohanty questions the production of non-Western women's studies as a singular monolithic subject in some Western feminist texts. Mohanty (1984:337) believes the distinctions between Western feminists' re-presentation of women in non-Western countries, and Western

feminists' self-presentation are made on the 'basis of the privileging of a particular group as the norm or referent'. In other words, the use of 'women' as a category of analysis in Western feminist discourse on women in non-Western countries illustrated the construction of non-Western women as a homogeneous 'powerless' group, often located as implicit victims of particular socio-economic systems (Mohanty 1984:338).

Similarly, Edward Said (1978:146) believes 'the Orient was always in the position both of outsider and of incorporated weak partner for the West'. Orientalism is not only a doctrine about the Orient that exists at any one time in the West; it is also an influential academic tradition, as well as an area of concern defined by Westerners to whom the Orient is a specific kind of knowledge about specific places, peoples, and civilisations (Said 1978). Consequently, it is easy to fall into the cliché of 'something of Orient' opposing to 'something of West' that implies a sense of the less developed, oppressed, and marginalised. The problem arises when, in this case for instance, 'women of Africa' or 'women of Asia' become a homogeneous rather than a descriptive sociological grouping characterised by common dependencies or powerlessness (or even strengths). Mohanty (1984) believes this usage of 'women' as a stable category of analysis assumed an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalised notion of their subordination that reinforced binary divisions between men and women.

Existing cross-cultural art studies include Shilton's (2009) research, which uses a postcolonial approach to compare Muslim women artists' comic works in a French diasporic context. In this study, Shilton focuses on demonstrating of both exchange and resistance between the multiple distinctive cultures to which the women artist is affiliated, which emerges partly in response to reductive mainstream perceptions. Zhang's (2009) research on Western and Chinese women artists in the late 1980s and early 1990s pays particular attention to the thematic similarities and between artist's paintings. Leuthold's (2010) research presents a clear and engaging examination of world art that is expanded beyond the usual Western theorists and Western examples; using a comparative framework and drawing upon several disciplines, such as art history, aesthetic and visual anthropology, and postcolonialism. In *Chinese Landscape Painting as Western Art History*, Elkins (2010) provides an accessible survey of his personal journey encountering and interpreting Chinese art through Western scholars' writings. He argues that the search for optimal comparisons is itself a Western interest, thus art history as a discipline is inherently Western in several identifiable senses.

Differing from the above-mentioned studies that employ a comparative framework to identify the similarities and differences between art from various contexts, this study takes both similarities and differences into account, striving to make them engage and coexist, namely the touchpoints – an entanglement of similarities and differences –

between British and Chinese women's art. This study also considers my own hybrid background that enables multiple vantage points for transcultural reflections in contemporary art. In addition, I am aware of the contradictions inherent in women's locations within various structures, such as class and race situations in the socioeconomic structure. I am interested in understanding a mutual and respectful communication across cultural boundaries rather than imposing a reductive or essentialist perspective on all women's art. A transcultural study could help considerably in the analysis of how women's art is expressive and what is being perceived when it is so described (Davies 2018). Therefore, identifying the touchpoints between artworks from different contexts facilitate a transcultural conversation in which we might learn from each other about contemporary women's art instead of reinforcing the binary between similarities and differences.

2.5 Thesis scope

Responding to the paragraphs above, this study stands at a crossroads where Western and non-Western cultures meet, aiming to give voices to contemporary women's art. It would be too ambitious to cover all the themes in all forms of women's art in a PhD study. This study takes a subset as a small example in order to open up more potentials and possibilities through a qualitative method. As a result, eight installation works produced by four British women artists and four Chinese women artists were

selected as a sample. The scope of this research can be described under the headings

listed below, which help identify what was included and what was excluded.

Geographical scope: Britain and China

Bringing my own background and experience into play, I identify Britain and China

as the window to look into Western and non-Western art studies. I am aware of these

categories – British art or Chinese art – might be 'a flag of convenience' or 'a means

of getting attention to where it was required' (Corbett 2015:28). I do not mean by this

that the key thing was to argue for the rationality of categorisation nor to essentialise

Britain/British and China/Chinese; rather that these national contexts are 'shifting

entities', imbued with complex power relations (Tobin 2015:41). This includes

looking at how women artists' identities are constituted though art practices. Many of

these practices are the 'product of competing forces', including socio-economic and

cultural contexts, the artists' schools or opinions of feminism, as well as their

relationships to other artists and works of art or practices (Tobin 2015:42). Therefore,

in this study, categorisation emerges in order to sustain what is significant: studies of

artists/artworks, in a wider sense, their historical and national contexts that have

'acknowledged their particularities and specifics' (Corbett 2015:28). This does not

mean that we are either unable to momentarily define British art and Chinese art, or to

adjust the categories within which we make and promulgate knowledge. For some

time now it has been the case that British art and Chinese art have been responding to

the interests in the global, the transnational, and the postcolonial in ways that inflect and open up the nature of the field (Corbett 2015). What is significant is that we have a conceptual category to work within for the purpose of description. It is the indeterminacy and lack of boundaries that make the category flexible in a productive way, meaning that the category can be adjusted when needed. In this context, it is critical to find a recognisable focus/term through which the communal effort of investigation and understanding of women's art could take place.

Time scope: Twenty-first century

As a study of contemporary art, this thesis looks into art practices in the twenty-first century – the time of happening in the current century. Twenty-first century art is a burgeoning and dynamic field of study. Many important topics have been resonating in the present century and inspiring new thinking and scholarly debates in art and visual culture such as semiotics, post-modernism, installations, and new materialism.

One of the key features of the art scene in the twenty-first century is the impact of transcultural communications – the accelerating interconnectivity of human activity and information across time and space (Robertson n.d.). Transcultural communication has made the world more interconnected. The cultural dynamics of globalisation have presented new challenges to existing models for explaining the forms of belonging

and the patterns of exchange that are occurring in the world (Papastergiadis 2005). Culture is no longer understood as the discrete and unique expression of activities and ideas that occur in particular places. At this time, artists from various nations are imaginatively working with both traditional and contemporary media, developing a new model and language for understanding the processes of cultural differences.

It is also the time (since the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century) that the concept of transnational feminism has occurred, serving as a broad heading that includes much of the scholarly research and art practices (Meskimmon and Rowe 2013). Women's art, from a transnational perspective, is concerned with challenging the essentialising forces of mainstream Western feminism and re-evaluating the significance of differences between women on a transcultural scale (Meskimmon and Rowe 2013). A transnational perspective is maintained, context-related and cannot be restricted to a singular definition. Transnational feminist engagement looks into the differences among women themselves: differences within and between cultures, races, ethnicities, and classes.

In the twenty-first century, the way of presenting women's art has been more flexible and open to a wide-ranging context than in the past. In this sense, this method might be seen as a critique of its predecessors (Reilly and Nochlin 2007). I understand that there is a need to look into and revisit the history of women's art, and many

researches and scholars have done and are doing so. Women's art in the twenty-first century is equally important as it is happening in progress. Therefore, this study provides a brief review of the art history as background information and focuses on the current century – artworks produced within the period from 2000 to 2019.

Selection of artists

Considering the complexity and fluidity of defining gender and gender identities (Schermer 2008), this study has selected only cis female artists as the sample group, meaning the selected artist's sense of gender identity corresponds with their birth sex. The selected British and Chinese artists come from three generations – the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s (aged from 30 – 60) – who constitute the mainstream of contemporary art world. They are working as professional artists or/and art educators. Their artworks are presented in influential exhibitions both locally and internationally. The detail of the artists' selection criteria, process, and results can be found in the next chapter on the data collection methods.

Selection of artworks

According to the above sections, the artworks that selected for studying and analysing were produced in the period from 2000 to 2019 by selected artists. These artists work

across media including painting, performance, installation and video. This study takes installation as a subset among various art genres as a starting point.

The term 'installation art' is much contested and as such is not easily defined. In general, it is used to describe works from the 1960s onwards, which are often designed for a specific place or a temporary period of time and incorporates a broad range of everyday and natural materials (Reiss 1999).[4] Installation artworks are mixed-media constructions or assemblages that are usually installed in interior spaces whereas exterior interventions are often called public art, land art or intervention art. However, the boundaries between these terms overlap. One of the features that makes installation distinctive from other forms of art is that installation artists usually work in specific locations, where the external space is treated as a situation into which the viewers enter. The artwork is then dismantled, often as soon as the period of the exhibition is over. This 'ephemeral, site-responsive agenda further insists on the viewer's first-hand experience' (Bishop 2005:6).

In the past few years, I have seen installation artworks by Western women artists such as Louise Bourgeois, Mona Hatoum, Rachel Whiteread, Tracy Emin, Jemima Brown, and Rebecca Horn, and by non-Western women artists such as Lee Bul, Yayoi

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[4] Although before the 1960s, there were important precursors, such as Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven, Man Ray, Kurt Schwitters, Pablo Picasso, and Marcel Duchamp who used found objects/readymades in their assemblage artworks.

Kusama and Cao Fei. There are usually layered meanings behind the materials in their work. The artist's growing experience, background, body image, marriage and motherhood, personal belongings or even nature and the universe become the inspiration when she creates artworks. Particularly in object-based installation works, the concept of the object and its materiality contribute to the merits of the art (Hudek 2014). The objects contain within themselves 'an unknown force, an aura that allows them to live, express themselves and evoke realities, thoughts and emotions' (Sala 2014:3). These objects are considered as vibrant things with a certain agency of their own. The aim of this thesis is to generate an in-depth analysis of selected artists' object-based installation artworks, from whence the touchpoints might be identified.

In order to achieve this aim, I collected a large number of object-based installations produced from 2000 to 2019 by the selected artists. Within these, I identified three themes based on the objects that appeared frequently within them by a thematic refining process of the initial collected data: the female body, domesticity, and reproduction. It is necessary to clarify that the identification of these themes in this research is relevant to the selected artists' experiences but not constitutes a generalised universal mode of representation and interpretation. Here, the categorisation of themes is merely for descriptive purposes. In addition, the recognisable commonality provides a site for investigating and understanding

women's art. Details of the artwork selection criteria, process, and results can be found in Chapter 3.5 Data Collection and Chapter 3.6 Data Analysis.

2.6 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a brief overview of the development of feminism in Britain and China, a basic introduction to some of the cross/transcultural studies of contemporary women's art, and how they shape the concept of touchpoints in this thesis. Women's art is neither an a priori political identity, nor a tokenism for the politically and culturally correct, nor indeed is it a space of uncritical, neo-liberal choice (Millner, Moore, and Cole 2015). The history of feminist movements and women's art is not simply an account of what has happened but helps us understand what has been done and implies how we could do better in the future. This thesis rests on the notion that feminism and women's art in its contemporary incarnation is shaped and informed by history. It is also culturally bound, defined and contextualised. The culture context shapes the political that emerges, and the political context provides the site where culture is developed, and forms where histories are written (Savigny and Warner 2015). Feminism and women's art in its contemporary significance is shaped by its past, but through a restatement of its historical roots, we are, in turn, able to influence how we make sense of it in the present and the future. While some appear to be unsure of what constitutes women's art, or still wonder whether women artists' work evidences a feminine sensibility, this thesis offers a

chance to re-evaluate contemporary women's art in both Britain and China. One way

of achieving this is to identify the touchpoints within differences through a

transcultural, situated feminist lens.

As I cover in more detail in the next chapter, this lens is guided by a

phenomenological standpoint feminism. Using my situated knowledge to interpret the

selected artworks, I become a part of the research and entangle with the data – both

the artists and the artworks. In the following chapter, I introduce how phenomenology

and feminist standpoint theory act as the principle methodology that guides this

research, and how specific methods are used in collecting and analysing the selected

artworks.

Chapter 3   Research Process

3.1 Introduction

This chapter consists of two parts: methodologies and methods. In the first part, I offer definitions of phenomenology and standpoint feminism, review existing studies utilising this approach in relation to women's art, explain why combining phenomenology and feminism is appropriate in this study, and how they can work complementarily to shape and guide this thesis. In the second part, I illustrate the process of gathering the data from selected women artists through interviews and their artworks, as well as through the use of supporting documents and reviews of their work. I introduce how the interview data has supported my analysis and interpretation of the artist's works and the semiotic method I have used to examine the artistic experiences represented by the art. Finally, I present the structure and argument of the touchpoints – points of contact between British and Chinese women's art that I have identified in this thesis. The research process is represented by Table 1 below.
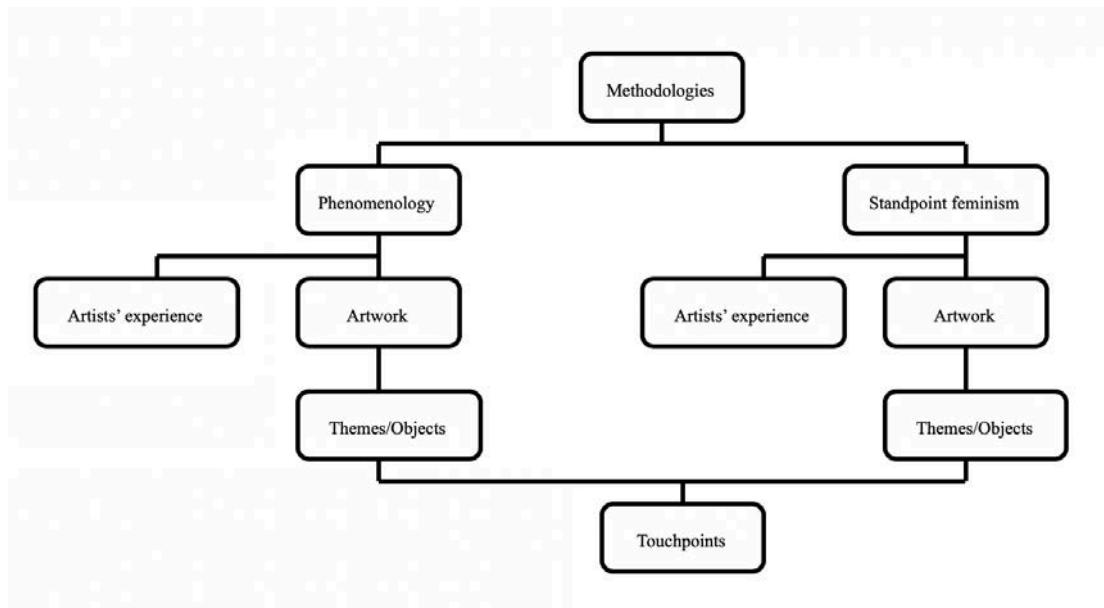
Table 1 Research process

3.2 Phenomenology

Definitions

During the eighteenth century, German philosophers began the search for a new interpretative science that responded to ways of construing the world through empiricism. Their ideas were based on the investigation of life and social worlds through the study of context and an individual's own constructions and meanings within that context (Titchen and Hobson 2005: 123). The imperative to study context, constructions and meanings – or, broadly, *experience* – led to the development of two branches of phenomenology: a *transcendental phenomenology* and a *hermeneutic phenomenology*. These frameworks continue to influence interpretive research methodologies today.

Early theorists of phenomenology at the beginning of twentieth century include

Edmund Husserl and, later Martin Heidegger, who expanded on Husserl's view. One

of the most recognisable phenomenological frameworks developed by Husserl and his

early assistants Edith Stein and Eugen Fink, is *transcendental phenomenology*; the

other framework established by Heidegger, Gadamer, Ricoeur, and later Van Manen,

is *hermeneutic phenomenology* (Husserl 1931; Heidegger 1999; Titchen and Hobson

2005; Creswell and Poth 2018).

The first approach, transcendental phenomenology, focuses on a description of the

human experience and looks at the phenomenon as it presents itself in the

consciousness of the people who live it (Titchen and Hobson 2005). Transcendental

phenomenology is built on the idea of reduction that refers to suspending the

researcher's personal prejudice and attempting to reach the core or essence through a

state of pure consciousness. This concept is called *epoché* (or bracketing). Husserl

uses this concept to set the researcher's experience aside as much as possible and to

take a fresh perspective toward the phenomenon (Moustakas 1994). In other words,

the researcher is on the outside, investigating the foreground of the phenomenon, and

developing research questions that should lead to the systematic study of the

psychological content of a participant's inner world. Therefore, transcendental

phenomenology studies experience as though 'everything is perceived freshly, as if

for the first time' (Moustakas 1994:34). However, this state is rarely perfectly

achieved perfectly considering the integration of personal opinions (subjective aspects) during the description, which differ from person to person, scholar to scholar (Moustakas 1994; Kafle 2011).

On the other hand, the second approach of hermeneutic phenomenology rejects of the idea of suspending personal opinions. Heidegger views that we are first and foremost rooted, immersed in the world and not separate from it. He believes that phenomenology becomes hermeneutic when it is taken to be interpretive instead of purely descriptive. In addition, Heidegger argues that all description is already the process of interpretation (Heidegger 1962). In other words, the hermeneutic approach seeks to get inside the social context of the phenomenon and to live it oneself. The interpretation involves an 'indirect' or mediated understanding (Titchen and Hobson 2005:121). Therefore, the goal of hermeneutic phenomenology is to deepen our understanding of what the phenomenon is to be. The researcher is on the inside, 'shining light within pre-cognitive background of phenomenon' (Titchen and Hobson 2005:122), which is accessed through the researcher's immersion in the participant's life world.

Phenomenology is an approach to qualitative research. It focuses on the common meaning of a lived experience within a particular group within everyday social contexts, in which the phenomena occur from the perspectives of those who

experience them (Titchen and Hobson 2005; Creswell and Poth 2018). As Creswell and Poth (2018:57) state, a phenomenological study 'focuses on describing what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon', or, in Van Manen's (1990:117) words, 'a grasp of the very nature of the thing'. For Gadamer (2013), phenomenology studies how people go about understanding the world in which they live; and according to Merleau-Ponty (1945:vii), phenomenology is a philosophy for which the world is always 'already there' before reflection begins, in which perception plays a foundational role in understanding the world as well as engaging with the world. Later theorists, such as Finlay (2009) states that when applied to research, phenomenology is the study of phenomena: their nature and meanings. Meanwhile Langdridge (2007) defines phenomenology as a discipline that aims to focus on individual's perceptions of the world in which they live and what it means to them. She believed phenomenology is concerned with meaning and the way in which meaning arises in experience (Langdridge 2007).

Phenomenology is thus focused on the way things appear to us through experience or within our consciousness, where the researcher aims to provide a rich textured description of lived experience. Therefore, it is considered appropriate to the aims of understanding British and Chinese women artists' encounters and experiences with phenomena. As a research approach, phenomenology allows for the investigation of human experience at a fundamental level, seeking the common aspects of the lived

experiences of individuals, and recognising the very structures of consciousness. Apart from Husserl, Heidegger, and other philosophical giants; Sartre, Scheler, and Dennett developed methodological frameworks and procedures in relation to phenomenology, extending the theory to art studies (Titchen and Hobson 2005). These ideas have then been applied to the study of women's art, to which I turn below.

Existing studies

In recent years, philosophers, art historians, and researchers have developed the use of phenomenology in relation to artists and artworks (Belting 1987; Paskow 2004; Hainic 2011; Parry 2011; and Madary 2016). Merleau-Ponty, one of the most influential philosophers, believes that works of art are capable of showing people the phenomena under consideration more directly and perspicuously than could any philosophical prose (Merleau-Ponty 1945; Wrathall 2011). Merleau-Ponty's central preoccupation is how art can teach us about the nature of our embodied perceptual engagement with the world. He explains 'art and only art can exhibit for us the world as we perceive it'; the ways of seeing in artist's practice through the media allow us to take part in their ways of seeing the world (Merleau-Ponty 1945:57). There are two aspects of perceiving art that I want to focus on, following Merleau-Ponty: first, the artist's perspectives, the way the artist interrogates/experiences the world with their gaze through their representations; second, the viewer's perspective, which results

from a need to practice a receptivity to the work so that they can see the implicit message from the artwork and make meaning of it (Wrathall 2011). Combining these two aspects in the investigations and discussions of artwork enriches its layered meanings.

Existing studies on the relevant of phenomenology to art include Crowther's *What Drawing and Painting Really Mean* (2017). In this book, Crowther investigates the meanings of drawing and painting as modes of pictorial representation through phenomenology. He states that drawing or painting requires the use of instruments and/or pigment and an impressionable medium or surface that allows itself to be marked by a bodily organ (Crowther 2017). By such means, the artwork is 'made rather than performed', and it is in the making of the artwork that the artist reveals 'important features of our relation to Being' (Crowther 2017:47). Crowther (2017:48) explains that what is important about pictorial media is that they 'change how reality appears in their own distinctive ways'. In other words, simply inscribing or placing marks on a surface is just that: it is only when these actions and their outcomes operate within some convention, wherein the marks are taken to be symbolically significant that drawing and painting become modes of art.

Amabile (1996), Mace (1997), Nelson and Rawlings (2007), and Spence and Gwinner (2014) have also investigated the meanings and experiences of artists guided by a

phenomenological framework. Many of these studies deal with art therapy, mental health, and psychology. In particular, Brooks and Daniluk (1998) have researched the career experiences of eight women artists whose arts practices were in visual, performing, or literary arts. The question that guides the phenomenological investigation is: What is the meaning and experience of a career as it is lived by women artists? In their analysis of the interviews results, they identified nine common themes in the lives and career developments of these women artists, as well as some individual differences (Brooks and Daniluk 1998). Within these themes, Brooks and Daniluk (1998) conclude that there was a lack of quality guidance counselling, which was a major concern in the vocational development of women in the creative industries. They also emphasise the very real gender barriers in the pursuit of an artistic career for women, and the need to help artistically gifted women to name sex discrimination when it occurs. They argue that such interventions could help women artists locate the problem outside of themselves and within a social context of sexual inequality, and to find ways to cope with and overcome such obstacles in their pursuit of an artistic career (Brooks and Daniluk 1998).

Brooks and Daniluk's endeavours are worthy of recognition in improving the status of women artists. However, their study concerns women as artists rather than taking women's art as a subject or discipline, and the artworks produced by these artists were seldom talked about in their study. My research, on the other hand, looks into both the

artworks and the women artists' experiences in order to gain a better understanding of women's art.

Phenomenology has acted as an umbrella throughout this thesis under which a study of women's art and their experiences could be undertaken. Doing so, I then identified the touchpoints between the two locations (British and Chinese) to support the interpretation of their artworks. I now turn to detail the application of phenomenology in this study.

Application in this study

Phenomenological research is interested in the lived experience of researchers as they attune themselves towards the ontological nature of phenomenon while learning to see pre-reflective, taken-for-granted, and essential understandings through the lens of their always already pre-understandings and prejudices (Van Manen 1990). Therefore, a hermeneutic phenomenological approach has been adopted in this study corresponding to the researcher's position. Hermeneutic phenomenology provides a worldview for the me to place myself inside the social contexts of the British and Chinese women's art and to live it myself, through which it is possible to identify any touchpoints between women's art.

During the background research on the eight selected women artists from the UK and China, themes of the female body, domesticity, and reproduction were noted as the themes reflected in their artworks. They could be traced through Tao Aimin's washboards, Gao Rong's embroidery bags and domestic objects, Lin Jingjing's vaginal dress, Jiang Jie's mammal babies, Helen Gorrill's sex cafe chair, and Lana Locke's milky condoms, as will be addressed in detail in the following chapters. The diverse objects that surround us in our everyday life become virtual extensions of our corporeal lives and their agencies are embodied in artworks (De Visscher 1998). These objects taken from our everyday life serve as tools, appliances, and utensils that support our lives. Their 'very ubiquity and commonplace nature' has rendered these objects almost invisible (Kracauer 1995:75), but we should not take their existence in works of art for granted, since each object is not simply an object-in-itself, but is integrated in 'a system of cross-references' that concerns the 'why' of the object (De Visscher 1998:201). Besides, each object in an artwork is a production in the sense that it has been made and used by someone, which gives the artwork multiple layers of meanings. In other words, these objects are not only fundamental necessities that support our lives, but also the embodiment of the artist's and the reader's 'being-in-the-world' (De Visscher 1998:201; Merleau-Ponty 1945). They are extensions of both the artists' and readers' material world that manifest and meditate their existence.

By applying a hermeneutic phenomenology along with the feminist standpoint theory, discussed in the following section, this thesis has identified the themes that are reflected in selected women artists' works and provided a way of interpreting these artworks with a focus on the objects. The next paragraph introduces the situated position of the researcher and how it sustains the interpretation of women's art in this study.

3.3 Standpoint feminism

Definitions

The idea of a feminist standpoint is a significant area of debate about the possibilities of connecting female knowledge and women's experiences to the realities of gendered social relations (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). It supports the view that gender is a defining characteristic of people's experiences, and that knowledge is necessarily biased as it is deeply affected by the conflicts and power relations of the time and place in which it is produced (Harding 1987; Collins 1990; Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002; Bracke and Bellacasa 2009). Standpoint feminism is a way of investigating how women experience life differently from men as they live in specific social relationships to the exercise of male power. This recognition has led to researchers studying topics and bringing questions with particular relevance to women (and other marginalised groups, such as ethnic minorities, queer, and transgender groups) and

gender/power relations, thus increasing the diversity of knowledge and sustaining the

grounds for activism.

However, as mentioned, it is difficult to generalise one single or universal women's

experience (Narayan 1989; Harding 1998). We need to consider the diversity within

different and sometimes even the same social, cultural and national contexts when

applying standpoint methodology. That is to say, women in the same physical

location are not necessarily in the same social location, as social relations organised in

terms of race, class, ethnicity, and other forms of inequality create differences in

interests and in accessing recourses (Collins 1990; Sprague-Jones and Sprague 2011).

In addition, not all women experience male power in the same way, and there can be

different standpoints in relation to different forms of power (Collins 1990;

Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002). The notion of 'standpoint' is a situated,

intersectional position from which to start an inquiry. Sprague-Jones and Sprague

(2011:406) believe that working from the standpoint of a particular social group

'entails grounding inquiry in their experiences and centring on their material

interests'.

Feminist standpoint theory thus can be provisionally recognised as a way of 'taking

women's experience as fundamental to knowledge of political relations between

women and men' (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002:60; Smith 2005). According to Dorothy Smith (1997:395), taking a feminism standpoint means being able to produce the best current understanding of how knowledge of gender is connected to women's experiences and the gendered situation. It makes visible both the hidden power relations of knowledge production and the 'underpinnings of gender'. Smith (1997:393) argues that women's standpoint should 'return to the actualities of our lives as we live them in the local particularities of the everyday/everynight worlds in which our bodily being anchors us', thus the 'social is always being brought into being in the concerting of people's local activities'. This reminds us to think twice about everything that is taken for granted in our everyday/everynight worlds. In addition, there can be grounds for regional, local, or international knowledge from a feminist standpoint, but not for any 'universalising discourse' (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002: 66).

Notably, this study's aim is not to generalise the universal essences between all women's art, or indeed between British women's and Chinese women's art. Rather, it narrows down to a small group of women artists as a starting point and identifies the touchpoints in their artworks for the purpose of a mutual communication and respect. In Donna Haraway's (1988, 1991) words, the solution to the limits of the modern feminist methodology is to explore the notion of partial visions and situated knowledge. Haraway's idea resonates strongly with new materialist aims in its

'complexification' of the way matter comes to be defined (Tuin and Dolphijn 2010:166). As Tuin explains, Haraway planted the seed of what are nowadays is called 'feminist new materialisms' (2015:21). From a feminist new materialist perspective, Haraway's situated knowledge shows the interrelations between epistemology, ontology, ethics, and politics – the agentic capabilities of objects and subjects, human and non-human, and more.

Similarly, Patricia Hill Collins (1986, 1990) develops a feminist position into the 'outsider within status' that provided a special standpoint on self, family, and society for Africa-American women. Collins (1986:15) argues that as outsiders within, Black feminist scholars might be one of many disciplinary researchers from marginalised social groups whose standpoints 'promise to enrich contemporary sociological discourse'. She believes that 'bringing this group – as well as others who share an outsider within status vis-a-vis sociology into the centre of analysis could potentially reveal aspects of reality obscured by more orthodox approaches' (1986:15). Collins's ideas also provide the possibility, in the context of this work, to study women's artistic experience and practices for the reason that they are remaining marginalised in the contemporary art world. Based on this, the next section reviews existing studies of women and women's art through a standpoint theory.

Existing studies

By making women's experiences the 'point of entry' for research and scholarship and exposing the rich array of new knowledge contained within women's experiences, feminist standpoint researchers have begun to fill in the gaps on the subject of women in many disciplines (Brooks 2007: 58). In recent years, scholars have employed a standpoint perspective in disciplines as diverse as biology (Keller 1996), technology (Mies and Shiva 1993), science education (Rosser 1990), philosophy (Parson 1979), posthumanism (Braidotti 2013), international development (Haring 1998), psychology (Chodorow 1978), sociology (Collins 1990), physics (Barad 2007), and art (Sprague-Jones and Sprague 2011; Bracke and Bellacasa 2009). All these works have been important for taking seriously the ways in which gender is a significant factor that creates differences in how people construct knowledge. Furthermore, women have 'cultivated particular knowledge and unique sets of skills' from these concrete experiences (Brooks 2007).

In the field of social science, standpoint feminism uses women's experience as a lens through which to examine society as whole. As mentioned in the previous section, Patricia Hill Collins, for example, revealed African-American women's skills in community building, a skill that has derived from their role of caring for the children of extended families, friends, and neighbours (Collins 1990). Collins (1990) exposes a significant yet previously understudied aspect of the everyday lives of African-

American women called 'other mothering'. She illuminates this phenomenon and practice of other mothering as an indicator of the resourcefulness of African-American women. At the same time, however, Collins points out African-American women's everyday experiences of other mothering, and their reliance on it, throwing lights on larger social and economic issues, namely the lack of quality, affordable child care, and the difficulties faced by many poor mothers as a result (Brooks 2007:59; Collins 1990).

Alison Jaggar (1997) provides another example of how women's experiences and the knowledge that accompanied these experiences serviced as a useful tool for understanding the larger social world. Jaggar (1997:192) identifies the 'emotional acumen' as a set of expertise, a unique and intuitive ability to read and interpret pain and hidden emotions and to understand the genesis of these. The advantage of women's emotional acumen however was not limited to the sphere of home and family. Rather, Jaggar (1997:192) argues that if extended outward and applied to society as a whole, such emotional acumen could help 'stimulate new insights' in the disciplines of sociology and philosophy, and to generate a new set of 'psychotherapeutics tools' in the field of psychiatry. According to Brooks (2007:59), the most profound potential of Jaggar's emotional acumen is in the sphere of 'political analysis and accountability'. This is because emotional acumen has enabled women to tune in more quickly to situations of 'cruelty, injustice, or danger' (Jaggar 1997:191).

Thus, it could become a powerful vehicle for exposing political and social injustices. By providing the 'first indication that something is wrong with the way alleged facts have been constructed, with the acceptance understanding of how things are', emotional acumen could empower women to make 'subversive observations that challenge dominant conceptions of the status quo' (Jaggar 1997:191).

The examples of Jaggar's and Collins's research demonstrates that women's lived experiences, and the knowledge garnered from these experiences, can be used as a means to draw attention to the inequalities and injustices in society as a whole. The acknowledgement of society through the lens of women's experiences is the first step toward constructing a feminist standpoint. However, that is not to say standpoint is merely a socially located perspective. Rather, it is to be achieved through a critical and conscious reflection on the ways in which power structures and resulting social locations influence knowledge production (Intemann 2010). Therefore, the next step is to draw on what can be learned from women's experiences, to identify the power relations embodied in knowledge, and to apply a feminist standpoint towards bettering the conditions of women and creating social change.

Within the context of scientific inquiry, standpoint theory can be seen as a guidebook of how power structures 'shape or limit research questions, methodological decisions,

background assumptions, or interpretations of data' (Intemann 2010:785). Standpoint theory has also been applied in other fields. Ann Holt (2017), for example, looked into Mary Godfrey, the first black full-time art faculty member at Pennsylvania State University, in relation to art education discourse. Holt's work acknowledges the habitually silenced narratives of black women in art education history. She explicitly challenges institutionalised research methods that did not consider the implication of both radical and gendered oppression, critically commenting on the role of historical research practices in silencing women of colour in art education (Holt 2017). Jessica Sprague-Jones and Joey Sprague (2011) apply feminist standpoint theory to explore the dominant standpoint informing the social organisation of Western art through the institution of art and criticism. They find that the assumptions, values, and analytic strategies informing mainstream art and art criticism express the standpoint of privileged men (Sprague-Jones and Sprague 2011). By considering the work of Cindy Sherman as a test of their argument, Sprague-Jones and Sprague (2011:404) argue that, 'while Sherman was working with some fertile possibilities for feminist analysis, her work ended up re-directing this potential into disempowering play with image'. Therefore, they conclude that the celebration of Sherman's work as feminist reveals the workings, as wells as the limits, of the privileged male standpoint in art.

A work of art contains many possibilities and can be read in many ways from many perspectives. However, not all readings are equally likely because no one reading is

totally idiosyncratic, as we learn to read in a context that provides a toolbox of social

and cultural metaphors and meanings (Harding 1998). Sprague-Jones and Sprague

(2011:426) believe that the likelihood that our shared cultural resources could guide

us toward similar interpretations and that the seemingly ambiguous nature of art could

serve to hide an ordered system which shares many commonalities with other forms

of knowledge, including a privileged male standpoint. The next section introduces

how standpoint theory acts as a guide to understanding the selected women artists'

experiences in this thesis and thus, to make reasonable interpretations of their

artworks.

Application in this study

This study extends the (re)construction of knowledge in women's art in contemporary

Britain and China through feminist standpoint theory. Standpoint theory in this study

offers the possibility to position myself at the intersection between the UK and China

as I engage with the artists' works. It enables me as a researcher to see gender as a

basic organising principle that shapes the knowledge of women's art. In directing the

research to start from the lives of a selected group of women artists rather than the

dominant disciplinary conceptual framework, standpoint theory in effect extends the

benefits of methodological controls back to the beginnings of the research so as to

include the 'context of discovery' (Harding 2012:49), to explore and discover the

power relations represented in selected women artists' works in this study.

Despite various researchers mentioned in the previous sections having different views and positions on standpoint theory (such as Harding, Holt, Jaggar, Collins, and Sprague-Jones and Sprague), what they have in common is 'a dependence on women actually sharing some common experiences of subordination and exclusion from knowledge production across their differences' (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002: 73). This, therefore, legitimates my method of relating my intersectional position with the artists and artworks to identify any touchpoints in British and Chinese women's art. The intersectional feminist position offers a hybrid and multifaceted approach that enables myself as the researcher to locate any touchpoints across national boundaries.

The term feminist art can be problematic, since it implies a certain style of work rather than an approach to artmaking which is informed by feminist thinking (Robinson 2015). It is not the point of this study to make a definition of feminist art; rather it is to provide a feminist point of view to appreciate and sympathise with women's art. The aim of feminist informed research is to 'correct both the invisibility and distortion of female experience in ways relevant to ending women's unequal social position' (Lather 1991:71). However, it needs to be clarified that the application of a feminist standpoint theory does not imply that all women artists in this study are necessarily feminists, nor that their works all carry a feminist agenda, nor that the objects they use are not necessarily feminist objects. For example, it could be argued that in Alison Bartlett and Margaret Henderson's study (2016:162) on feminist/activist objects, they posit that feminist objects are defined by 'a direct

connection with the women's movement: they are things made by proclaimed

feminist for movement purpose', meaning that the intrinsically political nature of

feminist objects is maintained in the objects themselves. Moreover, second-wave

feminist objects are an emanation of a new social movement from the late 1960s

onwards, whereas in China (and some other countries), there were no waves of

feminist movements, although some Chinese women's art did come from a feminist

perspective.

For me, the definition of feminist art is relatively subjective and could change under

different contexts over time. According to Letherby (2003:69), feminist methodology

is concerned with 'replacing the norm of objectivity of traditional research,

encouraging some subjective principles of research'. The matter is on the person who

makes meaning of the artwork. In this study, it is me as the researcher. The researcher

is not an invisible, anonymous, and objective voice of authority, but a real individual

with specific cultural beliefs, behaviours and interests (Harding 1987).

The core insight of a transcultural study destabilises claims to universal truth, as this

vision acknowledges the influence of the subjectivity, social location, race, gender,

ethnicity and class of the researcher. The social location of a feminist researcher; that

is, their race, gender, ethnicity and class, shapes the results of the analysis and plays a

role in the research process. While researching, I considered my social location as a

Chinese female researcher who has been educated and is resident in the UK, and how

my questions, methods and findings are affected by my own position and situation. Rather than presenting my research in a passive voice, I have reflected on how I chose my research topic, on my methods for gathering the data and on how I chose the criteria its interpretation (Jaggar 2008).

However, some critics suggest that standpoint methodologies automatically privilege a 'women's way of knowing' (Grant 1987:99). Moreover, other criticisms have focused on the practice of essentialising 'women's lives', i.e. that standpoint theory is employed to identify a unified category of women, arguing that the theory ignores and makes invisible important differences in the conditions of women in different ethnicities, races, classes, and other social and culture contexts (Harding 2012:58). The next paragraph will respond to these criticisms and introduce how phenomenology and feminism are mutually supportive in this research.

3.4 Appreciating phenomenology and standpoint feminism

Phenomenology is, by definition, a philosophy of human beings in the world and a methodology for describing, thematising, and interpreting the meanings of the lived experiences. As a research approach, phenomenology invokes in the researcher a series of systematic reflections of the everyday phenomena of existence and enables the researcher to gain insight into the essential structures and relationships in this largely taken-for-granted world (Nelson 1989; Spiegelberg 1965). According to Jenny

Nelson (1989:225), the phenomenologist emphasises the lived experience of the person as the basis for study has as its 'counterpart' the feminist slogan that 'the personal is political'. Since the lived experience of women takes place within a social and political structure, some feminist scholars stress the need to describe and define women's experiences as they are lived and communicated by women, rather than in terms prescribed by dominant (masculine) structures of discourse (Nelson 1989). Nelson (1989:225) believes women's personal and existential choices necessarily 'carry political implications that more or less confirm or disconfirm existing structures of experience'. In the same vein, she continues, 'political choices carry personal implications'. Therefore, the exploration of the everyday lives of women is a crucial realm of scholarly pursuit for feminists, phenomenologists, and deconstructionists alike (Spivak 1983). Women experience and express the world differently (e.g., in art), and thus, perhaps, experience and express a different world (Nelson 1989).

A phenomenological approach to women artists' experiences enables me to attend to the discursive forces of entanglement wherein a new materialist perspective to our encounters with the world also helps to study women's art. New materialism rejects a series of persistent binaries that have structured human thoughts, such as the idea of a mind/body split, it in favour of the view that everything is entangled and co-constituted one another in an ongoing becoming. According to Barad (2003) and McGregor (2020), focusing on the material structures of experience does not mean

asking what materiality is, but rather asking what it is doing in the context of an intra-active phenomenon. That is to say, investigating the experience of the human subjectivity is not asking what a subject has discovered in the world, but examining how that subjectivity was produced with and in the world, as agency and subjectivity are re-constituted and fluid. Considering a phenomenology of the material means seeing the subject-object relationship as 'shifting and always emergent' (McGregor 2020:508). The binaries of bodily and material, subject and object, are shaped by and with one another in an ongoing intra-active phenomenon. In this view, things, including humans, only exist in their intra-actions – an ongoing, co-constitution of the world, with nothing existing independent of this ongoing relational ontology (McGregor 2020). The 'lively matter' of the world – shoes, chairs, ironing boards, animals, or humans – is entangled (Bennett 2010). Feminist phenomenology is oriented toward movement and entanglement, as it seeks to 'articulate the relation and process between macrostructures of gender and lived experiences of gender' (Mann 2009:87). This entanglement is not just a collection of matters together but an entanglement of relationships and shifting patterns of agentic forces (McGregor 2020). Human lived experience is not made up of isolated encounters with the world, but rather, the world in its entangled intra-acting is productive of humans lived experience. Therefore, a phenomenological feminist approach supported by new materialism, is one of a lived, gendered, raced, classed, and positioned body encountering a world shaped by discursive and structural forces.

There have been feminist scholars who have adopted phenomenological approaches to look into the phenomena of women's lived experiences, such as Jenny Nelson (1989), Iris Marion Young (1980), Marianne Paget (1983, 1990), and Kristin Langellier (1994). Nelson uses phenomenology as a method to research women's communication. She argues, 'the ultimate task of phenomenology is to describe, define, and interpret both the personal and political not as different kinds of experience, but as the experience of different levels of consciousness' (Nelson 1989: 227). Paget's (1983, 1990) endeavour to create a discourse for women's experience explores how phenomenology has situated the subject within the process of inquiry, including the processes of interview, writing, and performing research as theatre. Langellier (1994:65) reflects on the 'what the method does for us' with regard to research on quiltmaking as a discourse among women in Maine, which included quilters' personal relationships and social organisations, their talk and storytelling, and their quilts as expression. In their studies, phenomenology provides a rigorous method for analysing women's experiences. Feminist situated phenomenological within numerous critical discourses about gender, race, class, and other social hierarchies. In this study of women's art, the convergence of these two approaches suggests that the lived experiences of women artists are embodied and situated within their artmaking.

In a phenomenological feminism paradigm, I am aware of the tensions between phenomenology and feminism in discussing subject and object, and the individual and

the universal. For example, there are tensions between participant's own meanings

and my position, from the standpoint of a feminist researcher, in interpreting the data,

and between the phenomenological goals of understanding another's experience and

the feminist goals of women's emancipation (Langellier 1994). Notwithstanding the

unresolved issues and remaining arguments, phenomenology and feminism mutually

inform and enrich each other, particularly in a study of transcultural women's art.

Feminism encourages the situation of a phenomenological analysis of women's lived

experiences within the social differences unavoidable in a society built upon

inequalities (Langellier 1994). The ways that phenomenology and feminism are

supportive of each other can be identified in the several key aspects, as discussed

below.

First, there is the relationship between individualism and universalism. The

combination of phenomenology and feminism recognises the particularity of the

individual but also acknowledges common ground between marginal groups in

society. The term 'the personal is political' underscores the connections between

personal experience and larger social and political structures. The balance of

individual and group experiences is reflected in this research through locating

commonalities of art practices and experiences during one-to-one, semi-structured

interviews with artists. The effort to interpret and re(value) women's art, however,

should avoid a universal definition of 'female' experience (Langellier 1994). That is,

the interrogations of the differences among women and within women need to be

taken into consideration. Although some studies have been generalised the lives of only of all women (or men), such as the accounts' authors who falsely assume an intrinsic 'essence' to all women (or men) (Harding 2012:58). This kind of 'no longer-tolerable error' is not itself part of the considerations of phenomenology or feminist theory (Harding 2012:58). This can be seen by contemplating the theory's eloquent development in the study of Patricia Hill Collins' 'outsider within status' (see Chapter 3.3 Standpoint Feminism). Phenomenology combined with feminism in this study suggests the importance of diversity when selecting women artists; for example, the selected women artists come from different regions and generations. As a qualitative study, the sample size here is not adequate to generalise anything nor it is the purpose of this study. Rather the study opens a window from which to understand women's art in a wider sense.

Second is the power relation between the researcher and the researched. Some studies of human experience have been concerned with addressing the positionality of the researcher within the research process, especially within the interview process, in relation to the historical, social, and embodied conditions under which knowledge is generated and understood (Langellier 1994). In other words, there is a problem of speaking for others – i.e. who has the authority to represent any group's identity (Alcoff 1991; Karnieli-Milller, Strier, and Pessach 2009). These concerns have been embodied throughout the research process to the writing of the research product. As a researcher, I have been granted consent to write about the selected artists (and their

artworks). As a former practice-led art student, I am aware of and acknowledge art terminology and contemporary art theories. As a feminist, I believe that neither women artists nor their artworks are appreciated enough (compared to their male counterparts), and (re)valuing their activities can be a validation of worth in such research. However, as Patai (1991:142) cautions, the research process is still not a 'fair exchange'.

Stacey (1991) emphasises that research methods such as phenomenology, which rely on the human relationships, may place the research subject at risk of manipulation and betrayal by the researcher, such as who controls the text and who is free to leave the system of relations. That is to say, there is a danger of researched person's lived experiences becoming our data, 'grist for the academic mill that becomes commodities of privilege to improve our status in academia while reproducing structures of domination' (Langellier 1994: 75). While there may be no solution to completely eliminate this risk, I am aware of the tension and have attempted to minimalise it.

The research ought to make it possible for other voices to be heard. In my case, the relations among multiple identities as a feminist, an art researcher, and a Chinese woman who lives and is educated in the UK have all shaped the perspective of this study. Both phenomenology and feminism require 'self-reflexive examination' of the

researcher's positionality in the research process (Langellier 1994:77). These efforts

point to power relations as they bear on the politics of knowledge. Therefore,

intersectional positions are especially valuable to analyse these relationships as they

provide a unique analysis of power and inequality.

In this study, I have reflected on my own position as a researcher and considered my

questions, techniques, and methods for gathering and interpreting data through

feminist phenomenology. The findings and conclusions are also affected by my own

social, cultural, and personal situation. In addition, I have been aware of the situation

in which the selected artists could have exercised power over me, such as in the

interviews with British artists in English, which is not my first language. Finally, the

findings of the study were the result of the joint efforts of the researcher and

participants. For example, the interview transcripts were sent back to each participant

for further modification. By doing so, I attempted to reduce the risk and the power

relations between the participants and the researcher in the interviews to the smallest

possible degree.

Therefore, the combination of phenomenology and feminism that is supported by new

materialism in this study is an appropriate approach. Phenomenology has encouraged

close attention to the taken-for-granted experiences in people's everyday lives within

social and cultural conditions. Feminism has focused on the effects of power relations

on the production of knowledge with regard to the phenomena of women's experiences. Together, they provide a rigorous method for analysing discourses/experiences about hierarchical gender/power relations. There may be other methodological approaches that can be used for a study of women's art, such as ethnography, ground theory, or case study methodology, but phenomenology and feminism are particularly suitable for this study. The second part of this chapter will illustrate how phenomenology and feminism has guided and shaped the research process in collecting and analysing data.

3.5 Data collection

Selection of artists

This section introduces the criteria that have been adopted for selecting representative artists (the selection of the artists is the prerequisites for choosing and analysing their artworks). The basis for selecting artists from Britain and China is referred to Table 2 below:

Filters	Chinese Artists / British Artists
Gender	Cis Female
Generation	Born in the sixties, seventies or eighties
Occupation	Work as professional artists or art educators
Influence	Presence in major exhibitions locally and internationally; previously been studied and interviewed by scholars and researchers
Medium of their artworks	Work across media, including object-based installations
Themes of their artworks	Involved in many fields that based on artists' experiences

Table 2 Artists selection criteria

(1) Gender

All the selected artists are cisgender and identify as female. Gender queer and transgender artists are outside the scope of this study, although they are potential to be the subjects of future research. Women artists have made a significant contribution to the history of art by calling attention to identity, sexuality, politics, and history (Gajewski 2015). However, as discussed in Chapter 2, a number of women are still being overlooked (e.g., not as well-known, less featured in collaborative exhibitions, art agencies, and auction houses) compared to their male colleagues. For instance, the majority of galleries, with both commercial and non-profit spaces continue to privilege the work of male artists (Elderton 2013). Some have challenged this statement by referring to figures; for instance, Tracey Emin has defied the statistics,

but her rare success does not mean that all women are equally included (Cochrane 2013). According to Myers (2008), women artists have often been mischaracterised in historical accounts both intentionally and unintentionally. Such misrepresentations have often been dictated by the socio-political contexts that have shaped particular the eras.

I would like to be in a position where I could say I do not think gender matters to art, but as an art researcher, gender/power relations still shape the art world in the twenty-first century. My starting point has had to change after years of identifying women artists purely as 'artists' without bringing the specific conditions of female existence into it. This study therefore produces knowledge of a small sample of women artists to give an in-depth account and demonstrate of the strength of women's art. According to Baldwin (2018), it is a way of saying: hey, we are walking this path together, and if we help each other out and stay positive, we are activating this deconditioning process.

(2) Generation and Occupation

Artists chosen in this research were born in the 1960s, 1970s, or 1980s (aged between 30 – 60 at the time of the study) and work as professional artists and/or art educators. Considering of the small sample size in a qualitative study, it is difficult to include all the women artists of different generations and from different ethnic groups in both

Britain and China. In selecting the artists, I am aware of the complexity of defining culture, nation, and ethnicity. This study has thus involved British and Chinese artists from different regions. For example, although the selected Chinese artists currently work and live in Beijing, they come from very different areas (Hunan, Inner Mongolia, Beijing, and Shanghai). In China, critical events such as the Cultural Revolution, the death of Mao Zedong, and the beginning of Economic Reform marked significant generational turning points from the 1960s to the 1980s (Gao 2015) and had great impact on feminist thinking. In Britain, feminism became a more influential ideology in the 1960s, which carried over to the 1970s. Therefore, the selected artists could accommodate the past of women's art while at the same time incorporating the contemporary.

In the interviews, the selected artists provided different insights and responses to issues like feminism and the art market, which were in accordance with their knowledge and experience that are emerged from the result of their historical, political, and sociocultural backgrounds. Accordingly, their perspectives have enriched the substance of a transcultural research.

(3) Influence

The selected artists have participated in major exhibitions both locally and internationally, which gives this study a degree of authority and promise. They have

also been previously interviewed and studied by critics and researchers, which has

provided supplementary information about the them. The records and transcripts of

the latter can be found on artists' websites and major organisations' websites, such as

Tate, Artsy, The Art Newspaper, Women's Art Journal, and China CAFA (Central

Academy of Fine Arts) Art Museum. The selected artworks by these artists were

produced from 2000 to 2019 (see Chapter 2.5 Thesis scope) and have been introduced

in academic journals and catalogues. Therefore, studying their works gives reliable

access for me to acknowledge contemporary women's art in Britain and China.

(4) Medium

The selected artists work across a variety of media including paintings, sculptures,

installations, videos and performances. This study focuses exclusively on their

artworks that take the form of an installation as it is a significant and promising

format in contemporary art and has the potentiality to interact and communicate with

people (Saaze 2013). An Installation artwork often occupies a specific location that

the spectator can walk through in order to engage/interact with the artwork. What

makes installation art different from other art forms is that it is a complete, unified

experience, rather than displaying separate and individual artworks (Tate n.d.). The

focus on how the viewer experiences the work, the viewer's relationship with the

work, and the desire to provide an intense experience are dominant themes in

installation art. In an object-based installation work, the objects contain within

themselves 'an unknown force, an aura that allows themselves to live, express themselves and evoke realities, thoughts and emotions' (Sala 2014:3). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the materiality of the objects that an artist chooses, the meanings these objects carry and embody, and how the artist's experience is reflected in the artmaking. Object-based installation art thus acts as a vessel to contain artists' knowledge and experience and shows a great potential to engage with the objects, the artists, and the viewer.

(5) Themes

The selected artists are female but not all identify as feminists considering of the fluidity and complexity of defining of feminism and feminist. Some British and Chinese women artists do not wish to label or distinguish themselves as feminists although they are definitely against gender inequality. In Chapter 2.2 Complicating feminism, I discussed that this may be because the word feminist or feminism has been demonised and distorted. Even if some artists considered themselves feminists, they could hold very different positions, and have a variety of opinions about what feminism is and what feminism can be. Accordingly, the selected artworks are not restricted to feminist arts, as the definition of feminist art is ambiguous and can change over the time (Deepwell 2006). This is reflected in the interview data collected with the artists. For example, in my interview with Chinese artist Tao Aimin, she said 'I did not express feminist agenda on purpose. However, as a woman

artist, I put more focus on women naturally . . . we have the same body and feelings

that make it easier to produce a kind of sympathy and understanding'. Similarly, Lin

Jingjing also stated in the interview that it is extremely important to create artwork

from a female perspective, as differences in ways of thinking might be caused by

gender. The selected artists work with various themes, such as technology, nature,

life/death, and politics which are based on their experiences that emerged from the

cultural, social, historical, and political context. Consequently, themes of these artists'

work are relevant to women's experiences but are not limited to feminist art.

As a result, eight women artists were selected. They are British artists Jemima Brown,

Lana Locke, Rowena Harris, and Helen Gorrill; Chinese artists Lin Jingjing, Gao

Rong, Tao Aimin, and Jiang Jie. The next section will introduce the criteria of

artwork selection.

Selection of artworks

Within the scope of this research, an initial analysis has been made of object-based

artworks produced by British and Chinese women artists during the twenty-first

century. There were two steps in selecting the artworks. The first step involved

collecting data for a large number of artworks within the scope of the research, that is,

organising all the object-based installation works produced from 2000 to 2019 by the

selected artists (See Appendix 4 Initial Selection of Artworks). The second step

included a thematic selection of artworks from the extensive sample collected in the first step by focusing on the objects that appeared frequently in these artworks. In this step, the researcher performed a reduction by choosing certain elements thematically from the initial data collected (Nelson 1989). Table 3 records the objects that appear in the selected artists' works as an example of reduction. It provides a starting point of refining the themes for further systematic analyses.

Objects	Chinese Artists				British Artists			
	Gao	Jiang	Lin	Tao	Brown	Gorrill	Harris	Locke
Apparels	�	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	▓
Appliances	▓		▓	▓	▓		▓	
Baby figures and products		▓			▓			▓
Furniture	▓	▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	
Body parts and organs		▓	▓		▓	▓	▓	▓
Groceries	▓					▓		▓
Washboards				▓				
Photos	▓		▓	▓			▓	
Roof Tiles		▓						
Plants		▓	▓		▓			▓
Animals		▓			▓			▓
Health and beauty products	▓	▓			▓		▓	▓
Toys						▓		

Table 3 Objects in the artworks

Linked to the fact that it is just one method, one of the main reasons thematic

selection is flexible is that it can be conducted in many different ways (Braun and

Clarke 2012). Figure 1 shows the draft of a thematic map with different possibilities

of thematising the elements/objects.
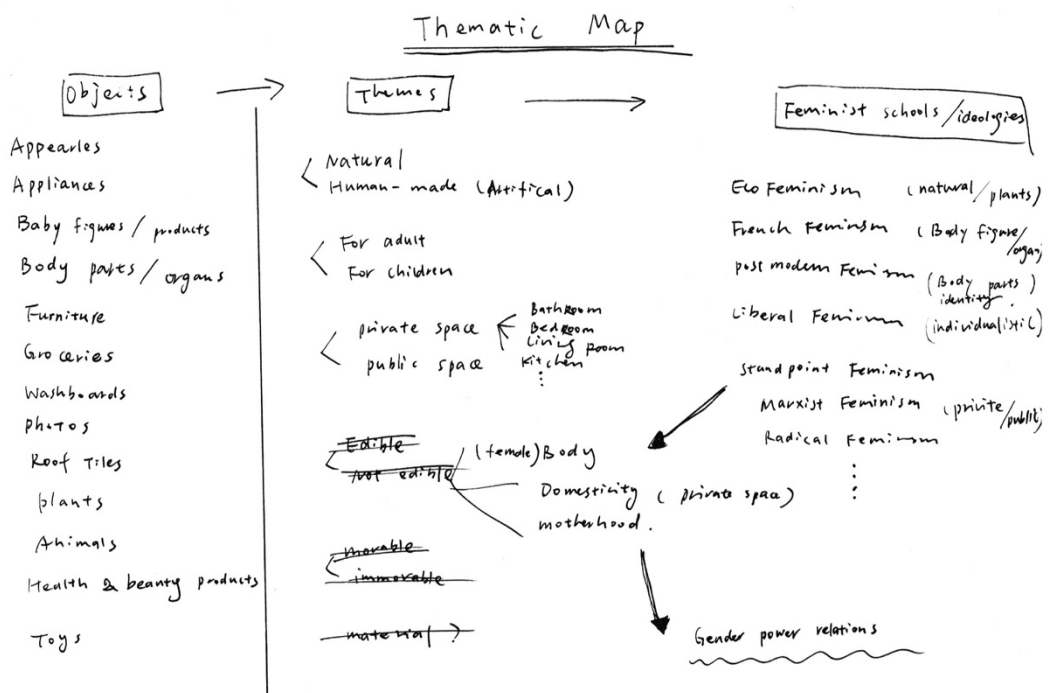
Figure 1 Draft thematic map.

Concerning the objects that appeared in the selected artists' works, they could be

refined into a series of themes based on their attributes and the researcher's position.

For example, these objects could be categorised into natural resources and human-

made products by their materiality; private space and public space by their deposition; and adult and child by the target audience (with attendant overlaps).

In addition, researchers within feminist studies who stand from different positions might extract different concepts and meanings from the same themes. It is possible that from an ecofeminist perspective, the thematic selection might focus on the relationship between women and the environment. In this case, plants and animals may become more prominent, as both are exploited and treated as passive objects for domination by humans. Marxist feminists connect the oppression of women to Marxist ideas about exploitation, oppression, and labour, and might use domestic objects such as appliances, furniture, or washboards as the themes for the criteria.

As a result, in seeking to understand the themes revealed by the initial data, I identified themes around three categories with attendant overlaps as the themes are relevant to women's experiences. These categories provide coherent mapping of the elements in the artwork in relation to gender/power relations guided by standpoint feminism:

a) The female body: the artists make visible the existence of a woman or a group of women through their body (or belongings), and especially make this body visible

by its invisibility. This is a significant theme that reaches across the selected artworks. For example, this theme can be identified from the reclaimed prosthetic limbs in Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, the bride dress in Lin's *Dress*, the women's shoes in Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame*, as well as the washboards in Tao's *Women's River* and the handbag in Gao's *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*. I herein selected three of them in this thesis for a descriptive purpose and to connect them with other artworks.

b) Domesticity: the artists represent a home or family life. For example, this can be found in Tao's *Women's River*, in which washboards are the main elements; and in Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* that focuses on the ironing board and laundry.

c) Reproduction: the artists depict the figures of foetuses/infants in their work. For example, this can be observed in the figures of baby animals that are placed on the dry hay in Jiang's *They Know Who They Are.*

The process of narrowing down all the artworks to these three categories can thus be referred to Table 4 below:

```
┌─────────────────────────┐
│           Art           │
└─────────────────────────┘
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│       Women's art       │
└─────────────────────────┘
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│      UK and China       │
└─────────────────────────┘
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│    Installation works   │
└─────────────────────────┘
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│     Produced in the     │
│   twenty-first century  │
└─────────────────────────┘
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│      Objects/Themes     │
└─────────────────────────┘
             ▼
┌─────────────────────────┐
│       Touchpoints       │
└─────────────────────────┘
```
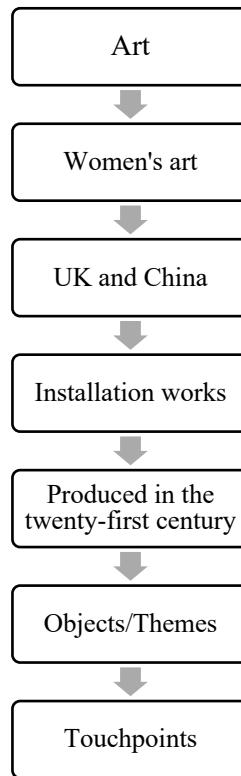
Table 4 Refining process

These three categories meaningfully captured the most relevant elements of the data

and the overall tone of the data in relation to the research questions of identifying the

touchpoints and the embedded gender/power relations. Following this, these

touchpoints in different artworks could be extracted and prepared for further analysis

(see Chapter 4.5, Chapter 5.5, and Chapter 6.4 for the discussion on touchpoints of the

female body, domesticity, and reproduction).

Designing interviews

The influential phenomenological researcher Giorgi (1975:83) states that 'phenomenology is the study of structure, and the variations of structure, of the consciousness to which anything, event, or person appears'. Phenomenology studies subjects' perspectives on their world and attempts to describe in detail the contents of the subjects' consciousness, in order to grasp the qualitative diversity of their experiences and to explicate their essential meanings (Kvale 1996). As a phenomenological-informed project, the interview as a data collection method places special emphasis on the individual's views and personal experiences. It is by far the most dominant method for data collection in phenomenological research (Bevan 2014).

To understand what constitutes a phenomenological interview, it is useful to first recognise the nature of an interview as such. Sociologists Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:97) indicate that one of the distinctive features of the interview in the context of social science research is that the 'objects studied are in fact subjects', in the sense that they have consciousness and agency. In an interview, another subject is studied, meaning that two autonomous subjects, capable of producing accounts of themselves and their worlds, interact together in an open-ended conversation where the experiences and understanding of both interviewer and interviewee resonate (Varela and Shear 1999, Høffding and Martiny 2015). As in an interview conversation, the

interviewer listens to what people themselves tell about their lived worlds and hears

them express their views on their situations and experiences, their dreams and hopes

(Kvale 1996). After this, the interviewer reinterprets the conversation and message

embedded in the conversation through the interviewer's own knowledge and

perspective.

This necessary first-hand knowledge of the interviewee is 'first and foremost

expressed in the exchange of a lot of discursive knowledge' (Høffding and Martiny

2015:544). Therefore, an interview method is appropriate for producing data for a

phenomenological study of women's art as such, because it is closer to the

participants and can offer to provide a collaborative relationship with them.

According to Bevan (2014:4), phenomenological theory has 'sufficient structure to

examine an experience through interview in an explicit way, which can be done

flexibly'. In other words, it allows the researcher to structure their interviews in a way

that enables a thorough investigation. Therefore, phenomenological interviews are

generally deemed to be semi-structured or unstructured. Researchers such as Seidman

(2006) and Kvale and Brinkman (2009) use phenomenological theory to guide their

interview process. Seidman's (2006) method of conducting the phenomenological

interviews requires three steps, wherein the first is a focused life history which

provides context; the second step aims to reconstruct the experience with its

relationships and structures; and the third step allows the interviewees to reflect on the

meanings of their experiences. Bevan (2014) integrates from Seidman and Kvale, and Brinkman's ideas to develop a structured interview method for phenomenological interviewing consisting of three main domains: contextualisation, apprehending the phenomenon and clarifying the phenomenon.

Contextualisation requires the researcher to start from a point of providing context in which the experience is situated to examine the interviewee's particular experience from which meaning is gained (Bevan 2014). Contextualising questioning enables a person to reconstruct and describe their experience as a form of narrative that will be full of significant background information. Further detailed contextualised descriptions can be developed by asking the interviewee to describe accounts of places or events, actions or activities (Spradley 1979). Questions asked in this domain could offer the interviewee a chance to settle down and relax. For this reason, it is suggested to start with 'an easy question': something on which the interviewee might be expected to have well-formulated views, such as their role as it relates to the overall area of the interview (Denscombe 2017:213). This allows the researcher to collect background information about the interviewees, at the same time as letting them begin by covering their familiar territory. In this study, questions like What are you working on at the moment? and Was there any event/experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art? were asked in the interviews. Responses to such questions revealed what the artists had gone through in becoming an artist and provided context for their artmaking. As Bevan

states (2014), 'it is these relationships that begin to offer the researcher insight into the meaning of experience and how it is constituted'. Contextualised questions therefore begin to show the complexity of experience and significant interrelatedness of elements that of experience.

The second phase in Bevan's phenomenological interview approach is apprehending the phenomenon. This phase focuses on the experience that the researcher is interested in and where the research begins to explore that particular experience in detail with more descriptive questions (Bevan 2014). In this phase, questions were asked about artists' gendered experiences in relation to their artmaking. According to Bevan, a single question is insufficient to present the many aspects of an experience, thus the researcher should be prepared to ask more questions, which should remain descriptive. An example of the kind of questions used in this study was asking the artist if she considered herself to be a feminist and if any of her artworks had a feminist agenda. The artists' responses to these questions provided a wealth of information and a standpoint for the later analyses of their artworks. This phase also enabled the researcher to start building relationships among the women's experiences, feminist thinking and their artmaking. Bevan (2014:141) believes this phase provides the foundation for 'maintaining the phenomenological reduction' as well as a 'configuration for examining experience and avoiding premature interpretations' of the researcher.

The third phase is clarifying the phenomenon. It involves the use of elements of

experience or experience as a whole to explore the phenomenon itself. In Bevan's

(2014:141) interview approach, clarification of the phenomenon is undertaken with

the use of 'imaginative variation'. Speigelberg (1971) places imaginative variation

within the process of examining a phenomenon. He believed this step provided

stepping-stones for the apprehension of general essences. Put differently, imaginative

variation helps provide clarity for the presentation of the phenomenon. Imaginative

variation is applied when the researcher is conscious of an element of experience,

which is then put through the process of imaginatively varying its structural

components to uncover invariant parts and thus clarifying its structure (Husserl 1960).

As Bevan (2014) points out, at the start, a researcher is not looking to develop a

general theory of essences of a phenomenon; instead, the researcher is attempting to

add clarity to explicating experience. Essentially, this phase is about the stability of

presentation of the phenomenon under investigation. It is about the 'stability of

presentation of the phenomenon under investigation' (Bevan 2014:141). Bevan

(2014:142) then offers a way of using 'commonly experienced phenomena as

variation questions' to implement imaginative variation in the interview structure,

because different phenomena can be interpreted in different ways, as in this case, a

Chinese non-feminist artist's experience and a British feminist artist's experience. The

method requires a person to describe his or her experience, which is grounded in

context and enhanced claims of trustworthiness (Seidman 2006).

In this phase of the research, questions such as 'is installation art in danger of becoming irrelevant?' and 'can installation art drive a feminist agenda' demonstrated how variations could be applied from the context description. The variation of the artists' experiences began to show clarity of meaning by specifying their application of an object-based art form as the commonly experienced phenomenon. Individual structures can then be compared with those of other interviewees to provide 'an intersubjective experience structure' (Bevan 2014:142). Bevan (2014:142) believes this method adds 'credibility, dependability and trustworthiness' to the research because it is borne out of real experience and is verified by the interviewee.

Bevan's structure of phenomenological interviewing outlined above is built on phenomenological theory and general qualitative research methods. It focuses on accuracy by describing and thematising experience in a systematic way (Bevan 2014). It uses themes of contextualising experience, apprehending the phenomenon and clarification of the phenomenon, which aims to provide an explicitly phenomenological influence on an interview. The next section will introduce the concrete steps of conducting interviews with selected artists in a practical way.

Interview process

A one-to-one, semi-structured interviews schedule was developed. Seven thematic topics were used, intended to provide a uniform structure but also to allow flexible and subsequent explorations of topics raised by the artists. After gaining ethical

approval from Coventry University, pilot interviews were conducted with Coventry University staff from the art faculty. The questions were then developed and refined following their responses and suggestions, some of which entailed the use of subtopics (See Appendix 2 Interview Questions).

The interview questions enable an understanding of the current situation of British and Chinese women artists; and secondly, help identify any possible common aspects in their artmaking. The interview results provided the necessary knowledge of women artists' experiences and thoughts, which helped the researcher to shape the analysis of their works.

Artists were contacted via their websites and agencies through email in 2017. In the initial interview enquiry, I introduced myself and my study, expressed my interests in their works and outlined the interview structure. Artists who were reached included Sarah Lucas, Tracey Emin, Saron Hughes, Jemima Brown, Rowena Harris, Lana Locke, Sarah Maple, Georgina Starr, Jemima Stehli, Fiona Banner, Laura Ford, Susie MacMurray, Karla Black, Katie Paterson, Cornelia Parker, Zoe Buckman, and Helen Gorrill from the UK,; and Lin Tianmiao, Ma Qiusha, Yin Xiuzhen, Hu Xiaoyuan, Ye Funa, Na Buqi, Gao Rong, Xiang Jing, Tao Aimin, He Chengyao, Jiang Jie, Lin Jingjing, and Yu Ji from China. Some of the above artists were not able to participate in the interviews because of the time conflicts and some declined to participate the interview because they felt the topic of this interview was outside the realm of their

art practice. As a result, eight artists were selected for the interview; Jemima Brown, Lana Locke, Rowena Harris, and Helen Gorill from the UK; and Lin Jingjing, Gao Rong, Tao Aimin, and Jiang Jie from China.

The interviews took place in Britain and in China during 2018 and 2019. I had face-to-face interviews with Gao Rong, Tao Aimin, and Jiang Jie in Beijing, and Jemima Brown in Canterbury; a Skype interview with Rowena Harris; a telephone interview with Lin Jingjing and Lana Locke; and an email interview with Helen Gorrill according to the artists' accessibility and convenience.

There are different methods and techniques in the process of gathering data in qualitative research. Face-to-face interviews (and observing, carrying out surveys and other kinds of data gathering) is among the most difficult and time-consuming parts of the task. One method of reducing fieldwork time that researchers may consider is to conduct interviews by telephone/Skype instead of meeting the participants in person (Shuy 2002). As described by Shuy (2002), the advantages of telephone/Skype interviewing are that first, it reduces the interviewer effects. The presence of telephone/Skype interviews together in the same facility 'offers them opportunities to learn from each other, in contrast to the face-to-face interviewer's conversational isolation' Shuy (2002:540). Second, it provides a better interviewer uniformity in delivery. The vocal tone and the delivery of the interviews have also been suggested as the reasons why telephone/Skype interviewing could be more satisfactory than the

in-person mode. Third, some researchers believed that by using telephone/Skype interviewing, they could safely reach respondents in difficult-to-visit or dangerous locations (Groves and Kahn 1979; De Leeuw and Van Der Zouwen 1988). Finally, telephone/Skype interviews offer greater cost-efficiency and faster results.

In contrast to the suggested advantages of telephone/Skype interviewing, Shuy (2002) also reports the advantages of face-to-face interviewing, which include more accurate responses owing to contextual naturalness, a greater likelihood of self-generated, symmetrical distribution of interactive power, a greater effectiveness with complex issues, is better for older or hearing-impaired respondents, has better response rates and is better for marginalised respondents. While a mixed mode of interviewing strategy should be considered when possible, e-mail interviewing could be in many cases be viable alternative to face-to-face and telephone/Skype interviewing. Meho (2006:1292) concludes the advantages of email interviewing from the following aspects. First, it allows access to diverse research subjects regardless of their geographic locations and allows individuals to be interviewed who prefer online interactions to face-to-face or telephone/Skype conversations. Second, it eliminates the expenses of calling, travelling and transcribing, and also allows more than one individual at a time to be interviewed. Third, it allows respondents to take part in the interviews in a familiar environment with sufficient time and eliminates interviewer/interviewee effects resulting from visual and nonverbal cues or status

differences between the two (e.g., race, gender, age, voice tones, gestures, or disabilities). Finally, it allows respondents to construct their own experiences with their own dialogues and interactions with the researcher; and additionally, their responses are better thought out before they are sent.

Different interview techniques have different strengths. Taking a pragmatic approach, the aim here was not to identify the best interview technique, but to find the most appropriate ways to interview the selected artists based on their wishes and preferences. For instance, a telephone interviewing technique was used with the Chinese artist Lin Jingjing when she was preparing for her exhibition in New York; and an email interviewing technique was used with British artist Helen Gorrill because of an unstable Internet connection caused by a snowstorm in Edinburgh where Gorrill works and lives.

For better communication and understanding, the interview questions were presented in the artists' first language (Chinese and English). Both Chinese and British informed consent forms and participant information sheets were sent to each artist beforehand, in both Chinese and English. The interviews were open-ended in order to minimise the imposition of predetermined responses when gathering the data.

These interviews were recorded live by a voice recorder and a mobile phone. After that, the raw interview material that included details in each conversation, such as laughs, pauses and sighs were transcribed. The Chinese-language interviews were translated into English by the researcher according to the original interview recordings and were then reviewed and corrected by a third-party scholar/translator to ensure both the English and Chinese versions had been translated as close to the original as possible (See Appendix 3 Interview Transcripts). Once transcribed and translated, all the interviews transcripts were sent back to each artist to confirm their accuracy. For the necessary precautions of securing data management, all the interview evidence has been digitalised and stored on SharePoint at the Coventry University site.

3.6 Data analysis

It needs to be emphasised that the interviews were conducted to support the analysis of artworks in this study. Here, the interviews were not subjected to methodical analysis, but served instead as background material for the theoretical work and to provide illustrations of the analysis of the artworks. With this in mind, a semiotic method in relation to phenomenology was exploited in this study to offer an analytical tool for taking the artworks apart and tracing how it worked in relation to a broader system of meaning (Rose 2016).

The literatures on visual culture has emphasised the materiality of the media used to carry visual images, specifically of a material object (Rose 2016). Whatever form the images take, these made meanings or representations shape the way people behave in their everyday lives. We are frequently surrounded by different kinds of visual materials, painting, photography, video, television and many more. All these different sorts of images offer views of the world; they interpret the world in visual terms. As Rose (2016) suggests, the interpretation of the visual material is never innocent. Accordingly, there are many ways of understanding visual material. Moreover, different theoretical standpoints generate very different methodological interpretations. The method that I have set out and intended to develop further for data analysis in relation to the methodologies is Peirce's semiotics. The following section introduces Peirce's semiotics and how it has been applied in this study; illustrating how phenomenology directs a semiotic method for analysing artworks.

Although the interest in signs and how they communicate has a long history, modern semiotics can be said to have begun with Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) and Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). Saussure proposes that semiotics takes the notion of the *sign* from the outset: it is 'the study of signs' (Rose 2015:107; Kress and Bezemer 2016). According to Bal and Bryson (1991:174), 'human culture is made up of signs, each of which stands for something other than itself, and the people inhabiting culture busy themselves making sense of those signs'. Saussure suggested

that signs are elements in which two parts: the *signified* (a meaning) and the *signifier* (a material form) have been integrated with each other. The signified is a concept or its implications, for instance, words like purity, elegance, peace and cleanliness. The signifier is the image that is attached to a signifier, for example in the following case, the word 'white'. Saussure made the distinction that there is no necessary relationship between a particular signifier and its signified. In addition, the same signifier can have different meanings in different social contexts. In this example, the colour white symbolises purity, therefore brides traditionally wear white dresses at their weddings in most of the Western countries. In China, Korea and some other countries however, white represents death and is bad luck. A traditional Chinese wedding dress, for example, is red instead of white. The sign only gains meaning 'diacritically' because its meaning is derived from the system in which it is constituted as different from other signs (Tilley 1994:68). For instance, 'white' is only meaningful because it is not black, red, or another colour and vice versa. Meaning thus resides in 'a system of relationships between signs and not in sign themselves'. According to Saussure (Tilley 1994:68), the meaning of a sign 'is not predetermined, but is a matter of cultural and historical convention'.

One of the major criticisms of Saussure's semiotic analysis is in its concern for the relationships between elements and the production of meaning in a text. It ignores the quality of the work itself (Berger 2014). Saussure believes that linguistics should

serve as the main pattern for all the semiotic study, a view of treating all signs as though they are 'fundamentally arbitrary and conventional', like linguistic signs (Iversen 1986:85). It is clear that visual signs are not arbitrary; however, as there is some rationale when choosing the signifier.

Peirce's triadic model of semiotics on the other hand, offers a much richer potential for the purpose of generating semiotics for visual art. According to Iversen (1986:85), Pierce's richer typology of signs 'enables us to consider how different modes of signification work' as shown in Table 5, while Saussure's model can only tell us how systems of arbitrary sign operate as shown in Table 6 below. In particular, according to Saussure's theory, X always means Y, which leaves no room for reinterpretation because the sign will at all times mean the same thing. Meanwhile, Peirce's theory tells us that X can best be interpreted as Y, leaving room for reinterpretation. It begs the question of how these relationships of meaning form. Therefore, Peirce's theory seems more appropriate in the study of exploring the meanings of contemporary artworks.
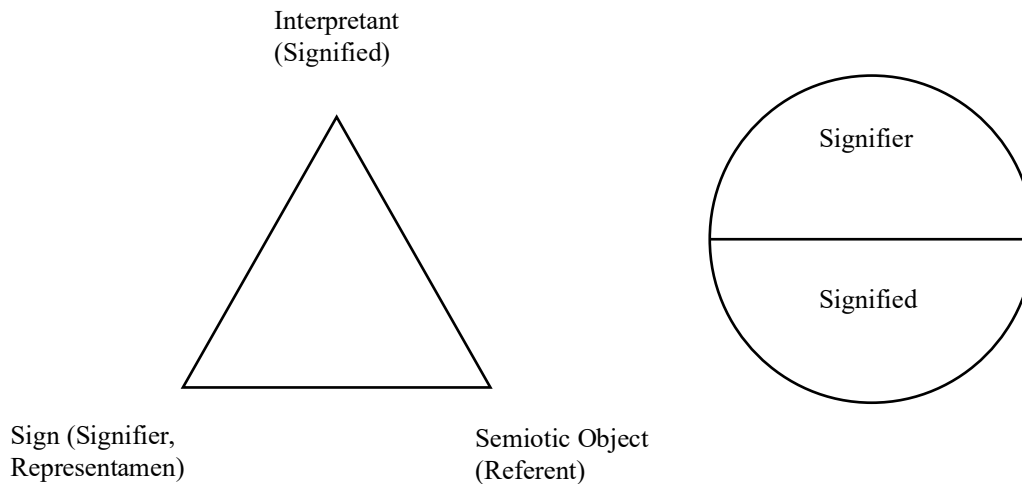
Table 5 Peirce's semiosis model (Left)

Table 6 Saussure's semiosis model (Right)

Peirce calls the relationship and interaction between the *Sign* (or *Representamen*), the

Interpretant, and *Semiotic Object* (or *Referent*) 'semiosis'. In Peirce's semiosis

model, a *Sign* indicates in the broadest possible sense of 'represents', known as

Firstness. A *Semiotic Object* is a subject matter of a *Sign* and an *Interpretant*; it can be

anything discussable or thinkable, known as Secondness. An *Interpretant* is the effect

of a sign on someone who reads or comprehends it, known as Thirdness. This kind of

triadic sign-relation shows that if we are to make sense of our experiences, we have to

consider the objects of those experiences precisely as related, both on the basis of

their own relatedness and through the relations themselves. Only by including the

observation of the relations can we understand the nature of human knowledge.

Phenomenology prioritises lived experience, whereas semiotic seeks to uncover the universal and atemporal structural or relational conditions under which those experience come to be lived as such (Chang 1987). Semiotics, like phenomenology, makes the social totality its primary object of inquiry but starts its analysis by focusing on the systemic difference among the part within a social totality. It is not my purpose here to identify the differences or similarities between phenomenology and semiotics; the crucial question is how they can contribute to one another in studying and interpreting women's art. The task is to identify the points where phenomenology and semiotics meet and to plot the possible trajectory of their productive dialogue in making meaning of the data.

One of the points where phenomenology and semiotics come into contact in relation to this study, as Sonesson (2015:59) says, phenomenology and semiotics are concerned with 'the same fundament of experience: meaning, which may be (in its full sense at least) a peculiarity of human beings'. That is, phenomenology does not only attend to the body of biological organism, but also to the kind of organism-independent artefacts, which are required by some sign systems (Sonesson 2007). Similarly, when examining the lived experiences, Kemple (2019) believes there are parallels in Heidegger's model of phenomenology and Peirce's notion of semiosis. He found that phenomenology and semiotics both depended upon a triad of categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which manifest themselves most clearly

through the semiotic triad of Sign, Semiotic Object and Interpretant (Kemple 2019:221). Kemple (2019:221) continues that if we look at in different ways and in different situations, each member of the sign-relation can be considered as a 'First (or what a thing is antecedent to its being related)', a 'Second (what a thing is such that it becomes related to the other)', or a 'Third (being a mediator)'. Therefore, based on Peirce's sign-theory and the phenomenological methodology, the strategy of analysis in this study can be considered as the following threefold division in Table 7 below.

Step \\ Category	First: Description	Second: Reduction	Third: Interpretation
Sign (Representamen)	Qualisign (Tone): carrier of the sign	Sinsign (Token): single sign	Legisign (Convention): collection of identical signs
Semiotic Object	Icon	Index	Symbol
Interpretant	Rheme (a sign of qualitative possibility)	Dicisign (a sign of actual existence)	Argument (a sign of law)

Table 7 Phenomenological sign-relation

Signs may be identified as qualisigns, sinsigns, or legisigns. A sign might relate to its semiotic objects by sharing it represented qualitative features. Or, a sign might connect with its semiotic objects as a matter of fact by being in a casual relation with

its semiotic object. Or, a sign might link with its semiotic objects by an agreement

(Houser 2010:92). In addition, Peirce suggests that the form taken by its sign, its

signifier, could be categorised into three types: an icon, an index and a symbol. To

demonstrate this, I will use the semiotic object of the vaginal-shaped fabric in Lin

Jingjing's *Dress* (Figure 15) as an example for demonstration (see Chapter 4.4 Lin

Jingjing, *Dress* for a fuller discussion of this work).

Figure 15 Lin Jingjing, *Dress,* 2008-2009.

(1) Icon

In iconic signs, the signifier represents the signified by apparently having a 'likeness'

to it (Rose 2016:119). For example, in *Dress*, the object – the vaginal-shaped fabric –

is an iconic signifier and can be read as female genitalia, which shows the likeness between them.

(2) Index

In indexical signs, there is an inherent relationship between the signified and the signifier. The signifier shows evidence of the signified. For example, the vaginal-shaped fabric can also be an index signifier that represents the whole female body.

(3) Symbol

A symbolic sign has a conventional but clearly arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified. They are connected through some mechanism (social or culture habit, etc.). An icon or index can also become a symbol over time through repetition. For example, the vaginal-shaped fabric as a symbolic signifier implies the female identity.

Since the Peircean sign relation is triadic, each of these signs bears a different relation to the interpretant as well as the semiotic object. According to Iversen (1986:89):

> The convention relationship between sign-vehicle and object characteristic of the symbol relies upon an interpretant who knows the rule. Index signs do not depend on conventional codes to establish their meaning. The icon would appear to have a certain independence with respect to both object and interpretant.

Icon, index and symbol are not in conflict, but in addition, provide multiple perspectives to make meanings of an object. Some signs can have more than one way of interpretation.

Finally, signs might be represented in their interpretant as rhemes: signs of possibility; as dicisigns: signs of fact or actual existence; or as arguments: signs of law. As noted, in Table 4, the higher categories (rows: from top to bottom, columns: from left to right) can involve components from lower categories, but not vice versa. For example, a sign which in itself is a quality, let's say the colour white, is a qualisign. White itself cannot be related to a semiotic object nor be represented in its interpretant. Thus, the colour white belongs to the class of qualisign, iconic, and rhematic.

The phenomenological approach includes three steps in dealing with the data: description, reduction, and interpretation (Lanigan 1982; Merleau-Ponty 1945). In the description step, I have attempted to provide an observation of each piece of artwork without being over-concerned with its socially and culturally coded meanings, while recognising that I am always situated. According to Merleau-Ponty (1945), it is important in this step to describe the given as precisely and completely as possible, to describe rather than explain or analyse.

The second step is the reduction; wherein the direct experience as disclosed in the description becomes the object of reflection. In this step, the researcher considers on the first reflection to specify the structures of lived experiences (Nelson 1989). Here, elements of the description undergo variation. The reduction of the description constitutes a definition of the phenomenon. Therefore, in phenomenological research, thematisation becomes a systematic way of developing and refining data.

Thematic analysis is a flexible, accessible and increasingly popular method in qualitative studies. It is a method for systematically identifying, organising and offering insights into patterns of meaning (themes) across a data set, which allows the researcher to make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences (Braun and Clarke 2012). Thematic analysis also teaches the mechanics of coding and analysing qualitative data systematically and can be linked to broader theoretical and conceptual issues. Braun and Clarke (2012:60) conclude a six-phase approach to thematic analysis which are: familiarising with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, defining and naming themes and finally producing the report. The analysis of this study follows Braun and Clarke's thematic framework in dealing with the artworks supported by the interviews. This framework fits well within the reduction step and provides the structure for further interpretation. The coding process of the data involves bringing together all the data relevant to the themes, concepts and ideas generated from the data itself. During the process, vague ideas are refined, unpacked, expanded, or discarded. That is to say, the

reduction consisted of abstracting words and phrases from the interviews that function as existential signifiers or revelatory phrases (Colaizzi 1973). For Nelson (1989:235), the basic rule informing the reduction is 'to seek out structural or invariant features of the phenomenon'. In this phase, the original descriptions of particular experiences will have been transformed into more general, concise expressions (Nelson 1989). In feminist terms, this means that the personal becomes political.

In this analysis of artworks by British and Chinese women artists, I was conscious of the transcultural differences and particularities (such as culture-specific rituals) but focused more on the general properties of the thematic descriptions, such as the experience of being a woman artist. Notably, the most important lesson of the reduction is the impossibility of a complete reduction (Merleau-Ponty 1945). According to Nelson (1989:235), it is to 'ground essence (the political) in existence (the personal)'. Therefore, finding the common aspects is a means for embodying consciousness in personal and social human existence.

In the analysis, I began to explore the relationships between the themes of the female body, domestic, and reproduction, and to consider how these themes would work together in telling a coherent story about the data. These themes are distinctive and stand alone, but they also work together as a whole (Braun and Clarke 2012). During this phase, it is also important to be able to let go of coded material and indeed

provisional themes if they do not fit within the overall analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2012:65), in qualitative analysis, our job is to 'tell a particular story about the data, that answers the research questions' rather than to represent everything that has been said in the data.

The final step is interpretation, which aims to discover meanings that are not immediately apparent in the first step of description and second step of reduction (Spiegelberg 1965). It combines an artist's experience/background from the interview data and the researcher's relation with the artist/artwork for the purpose of opening up possibilities to read and make meaning of the artwork. It also provides specific existential signifiers or revelatory phrases that serve as indicators to certain hidden meanings. In this step, the revelatory elements obtained from the previous steps are critically examined and selected as the meaning (Interpretant) of the artwork.

To discover the implicit significations embedded in the artwork, the following sub-steps are considered in the interpreting step (Zhao 2016):

1) Architext: the cluster to which the artwork belongs, for example, genre, discipline, or movement (in this study, the artworks are in the form of object-based installations)

2) Paratext: the material supplied by artist, for example, the title of the artwork

3) Pretext: the historical and original background of the artwork

4) Antetext: the influence of previous work (which is not necessarily included)

5) Metatext: discussions and reviews of the artwork

6) Hypertext: the artwork in relation to other artworks by this artists or others

I am aware that signs are not necessary always telling the truth. It is a matter for the perspectives of understanding the signs. This study is neither attempting to produce the absolute truth of women's art nor to mislead the viewer; it merely opens up possibilities to read selected artwork at this moment. This is because 'often the meaning of a work of art grows through its interpretation by other works, as well as through critical understanding' (Shapiro 1974:39). If art were or approximated to being a direct means of communication, then the work would tend to be a disposable instrument that would be exhausted by achieving a definite effect (Shapiro 1974). The objects in the selected artworks serve as signs and can convey a great deal of complex information (Berger 2014). One way of achieving such complexity was to combine various of representations in a single product.

As a result, eight artworks were selected from each of the eight artists, which were categorised into to the three themes above for a descriptive purpose: the female body, domesticity, and reproduction (with attendant overlaps). These data pointed out the first insights on the entanglement of similarities and differences of the selected artworks and provides the foundation for an in-depth discussion. Table 3 in Chapter

3.5 Data collection provides a direct, yet informative classification of the objects in the selected artworks. Using the information in the table, the commonalities on the surfaces of the themes and content between Chinese and British women artists' work have been located. The next three chapters will offer a detailed analysis of the selected women artists' artworks using a semiotic method. The analysis will be divided into three thematic categories as refined above: the female body, domesticity, and reproduction. Potential touchpoints in the selected eight artworks can be identified from the below aspects:

- ghosting presence of the body

- sexual fetish/objectification

- the perfect woman

- temporal inequality

- the entanglement of matter

- the politics of women's bodies in relation to reproduction

The following chapters will introduce and analyse these eight artworks and demonstrate how the above touchpoints create meanings between the works.

Chapter 4   The Female Body

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss three pieces of artwork: Rowena Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame*, Helen Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and Lin Jingjing's *Dress*. A common theme within these artworks is the centrality of the female body, a theme which itself has a long history in feminist analysis and discussion (Shildrick and Price 1999). The theme of the female body is also reflected in the eight selected artworks and links them together. This chapter herein looks into three of them and provides an entrance to the reading around the representation of the female body in women's art, thereby touches upon all selected artworks. Furthermore, these three artworks reflect feminist concerns around bodily oppression and the representation and objectification of the female body in various ways. This chapter presents a way of reading these artworks and attempts to identify any touchpoints within them.

This chapter applies a phenomenological standpoint approach through semiotic analysis to interpret these artworks. Specifically, a three-step method of description, reduction, and, finally, interpretation has been utilised in making meaning of these selected artworks. In the first section, I focus on Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame.* In interpreting the semiotic objects in this work, I note the indexical relationship between her cuts in the concrete shoes that make up this installation work with the

image cropping practice in advertising and on social media. These in turn link to important discussions in feminist theory around objectification. Second, I look to the semiotic objects in Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*. Like Harris's work, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair* also draws on concepts of objectification, with Gorrill making use of prostheses to reference sex trafficking. Finally, I analyse Lin's installation work *Dress.* In this artwork, the artist creates a close semantic link between the (virginal, white) wedding dress, women's genitalia, and erotica, implying a specific limited role of women in heterosexual matrimony.

Taken together, however, a key absence in *At the Edge of the Frame*, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and *Dress* is a holistic female body, which is also a significant touchpoint reaches across all eight selected artworks. The artworks discussed in this chapter demonstrate a particular invisibility, for example, the shoes and dresses that absent the wearer; in the chair, the body in parts are represented by the prosthetic legs. Additionally, in these three artworks, the artists use masculine fetishes to interrogate the objectification of the female body and challenge the fantasy of 'being the perfect women' through the incomplete female body. In attempting to identify the touchpoints among these artworks, I will therefore argue that there is a ghosting/absence of the female body that speaks between British and Chinese women artists, alongside concerns with bodily objectification and oppression.

4.2 Rowena Harris, *At the Edge of the Frame*

Step 1. Description

Rowena Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame* (Figure 2) is a series of sculptured shoes.

This series includes ten pairs of shoes that are cast in grey concrete and polished at

the surface. At first glance, these shoes are similar to Nike Air Max 90 style trainers

(Figure 3), such as the cushioning on the heel and the waffle pattern on the outsole.

Figure 2 Rowena Harris, *At the Edge of the Frame* (series of ten unique), 2017. Polished concrete,

dimensions variable, shoe to scale women's UK size 6.5.

Figure 3 Nike Air Max 90.

However, an obvious distinction of Harris's shoes from the Nike model is that all the toecaps are neatly cut off. From the incisions we can see the rough texture of the concrete interior. These 'non-toecap' shoes are in women's UK size 6.5 and are placed on light blue, interlocking soft foam floor mats, such as those we see in gyms and sport centres. They are arranged in pairs; some of them are juxtaposed and some are laid over each other. In addition, the cut of each pair of shoes can be observed as a clean line from certain angles.

Step 2. Reduction

In my interview with Harris, she told me that she saw the shoes in this work as a way to 'trace the existence of the body implicitly'. These shoes are thus one of the most

significant semiotic objects in this work. They act as an indexical sign of the shoes

belonging to a human, most probably a woman given that they are in women's sizes.

My interpretation is that this work takes Nike Air Max 90 trainers as a reference,

which is classic footwear for exercise and fitness. However, rather than appearing in

their usual fabric and rubber form, these shoes are made of concrete.

Concrete is another important semiotic object in this work. As a noun, concrete means

a building material that can be spread or poured into moulds and forms a mass

resembling stone on hardening; as an adjective, concrete means a physical, not

abstract form. According to Harris in her interview, the solid concrete shoes,

therefore, indicate a contrast to the 'abstract ghosting presences' of the female body.

The clean cutting off of these shoes is also a crucial semiotic object in this work. It is

a sinsign of a digital gesture of 'cropping' for example are used on Instagram or in

Photoshop, which makes references to the objectification of women's bodies on social

media and advertisements (Williamson 2010). In Harris's words, this work creates a

form that 'plays with our familiar understanding of digital imagery, whilst applies the

same gesture to substantial objects'. Harris explained in her interview that she used

the idea of 'imprint' – a material process of pressing something against the skin or

against the body to catch a particular moment – to record the moments of human

activity, to generate contrasts and play with binaries, such as those between digitality

and reality, concrete and abstract, hard and soft, objectification, and subjectification.

Step 3. Interpretation

It is useful to begin my analysis of the meanings of this work with a discussion

around the concept of shoes. Shoes, have historically been a strong maker of gender

identity (Kawamura 2016). Different images of identities are attached to different

types of shoes. For example, the University of Sheffield conducted a research project

entitled 'If the Shoes Fits: Footwear, Identity, and Transition' (2010 – 2013). In this

project, researchers looked into how gender identities are recognised and transmitted

through shoes, with a focus on discussing high heels and the empowerment and/or

oppression of women. Kawamura (2016:59) also suggests that shoes are 'where

gendered identities are most saliently expressed'; she continues, 'contemporary

footwear is a gendered item that draws a line between male and female and the social

implications behind them'. The reason for this gender difference lies in the connection

between footwear and power relations; i.e. male power over women represented

through footwear. According to Trasko (1989:12), 'shoes have expressed social

power, symbolizing men's authority over women and effectively enslaving women by

circumscribing her mobility'. She gives examples of a father's authority over his

daughter in some of the rituals of wedding ceremonies, where the bride is passed onto

her husband by means of her shoes. In other instances, the groom might hand the

bride a shoe; thus, to put it on was to 'concede that she had become his subject'

(Trasko 1989:12). This is strongly reminiscent of the Western fairytale *Cinderella,* or

Ye Xian in Chinese culture.

In *At the Edge of the Frame*, Harris chose trainers as the object rather than high heels

(or other shoe types), where high heels would change the meaning of the artwork as

reflecting the 'ultimate symbol' of femininity (Kawamura 2016: 59). High heels are

considered as an erotic and fetishistic item in heterosexual male fantasy (Hamilton

1977). Harris used another way to express femininity through trainers (and the foam

mats) as trainers are often linked with physical activities in gym spaces. While sport

may appear to endow power by helping women increase confidence and self-esteem,

it could also be said to disempower women in making them feel inadequate or

convincing them that their bodies are flawed and need to be reworked (Bradshaw

2002). On the one hand, organising sport and fitness activities can make women feel

better about themselves and their bodies; on the other hand, the mechanism of this

phenomenon could be questioned: does sport really empower and liberate women or

does it put pressure on women to work to attain normatively attractive bodies (i.e.

slim, toned)? The demand of women's bodily perfection could underpin the fitness

craze which is forms of mutilation of the female body. According to Langston (1992)

and Jutel (2000), the boundary between sport being oppressive or positive for women

lies in their own meanings respecting their participation in the sociocultural context.

For example, the exercise experience of a woman can be liberating when she recognises that she can judge her fitness by other means than the digits on the weighing scale, or how others look at her body. How others look at her does not reflect how she feels, so that her participation in exercise activities may not be driven by guilt. In this reading, Harris talks both the empowerment and disempowerment of women in *At the Edge of the Frame.*

In addition, Harris's employment of women's trainers also suggests a perception of women in the digital realm moving into tangible reality or society. The trace of the female body in this work does not necessarily refer to a particular figure. It works to create an outline alignment of different figures and constitutes them as a general impression of women in society. Ahmed (2004:26) argues, feelings, or the impressions left by others, work to align individuals with collectives – or bodily space with social space – through the intensity of their attachments. The impression of a body surface is an effect of an intensification of feeling (Ahmed 2004). The most apparent and direct sensations that are mediated in this work involve traces of impressions on body surfaces, which Harris termed an 'imprint'. A trace of the female body's existence (in the form of cutting off the trainers' toecaps) transforms into feelings such as pain, fear, disgust, sadness or surprise through the act of reading or experiencing, which also brings forth a judgement.

According to Ahmed (2004), these feelings, which are crucial to the forming of surfaces, suggest that what separates us from others also connects us to others. That is, the bodily surface is not only that which seems to contain us, but also where others leave impressions on us in the encounters we have with them. This allows us to associate the experience of having an emotion or feeling with the 'mark' (e.g., the cut off) left by the imprint of others on the surface of these shoes. The imprint of others on the shoe surface are like marks on the body. The marks become a sign of absence or a sign of a presence that is no longer here, which Harris termed: 'a ghosting presence'. These concrete shoes may in this way record individual's past experiences, past impressions, and past encounters of/with others. In this sense, I consider this artwork to transform the traces of the past into an object of our feelings that appropriates the feelings of others. The imprints left by others impress us; it is on the shoes and the absent/ghost bodily surface that histories are made.

The second significant semiotic object in this work is the gesture of the straight severance of the toecaps, as Harris calls it the 'cropping gesture'. Agamben (2000:56) suggests that severance in gesture means that nothing is being produced or acted upon, but rather that 'something is being endured and supported'. On the one hand, a gesture is a sphere of means to achieve a goal; on the other hand, it is a separate and superior sphere of gesture as a movement that has its end in itself (Agamben 2000:56). That is to say in this work, the purpose of the cropping gesture is to remove

the toecaps of the shoes. Additionally, the cropping itself can be seen as an aesthetic design (to present a perfect figure). The cropping gesture thus can be understood as the endurance the representation of the media character of body movement (usually people use their fingers to perform the cropping tool on their screen/devices). The gesture in *At the Edge of the Frame* becomes an imprint of the digital realm: a process of making a means visible as such (Agamben 2000).

The title of these 'non-toecap' trainers, *At the Edge of the Frame,* is appropriate in applying the digital gesture of cropping to the material form. A straight line dissects each pair of the concrete trainers, through which Harris creates a form that plays with our familiar understanding of digital imagery, whilst the same gesture reveals the sculptures' solid concrete interior and in Harris's words, their 'brutal there-ness of matter'. Expressed in a different way, this feature of cropping creates a binary of the surface, fabricating a contrast between the outside and the inside of the shoes: neat and messy. Notably, there are implications of gender and tidiness/cleanliness. Housekeeping is an act that is often associated with femininity, even nowadays, despite the increasing trend where both men and women are encouraged to work outside the home. For example, research shows inequality in time spent on household chores. It has been demonstrated that women spend on average one hour and 20 minutes per day cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry. In comparison, men spend about 30 minutes performing these duties, with only ten minutes cleaning and tidying

(Thébaud et al. 2019). As a consequence, the more time spent on household chores,

the less a woman has to spend on other activities like sleep, work and leisure.

Figure 4 Rowena Harris, *At the Edge of the Frame*, 2017.

Second, there are differing expectations in housework and tidiness within the house.

Women are judged more harshly than men for being messy, especially in their rooms

or houses (Thébaud et al. 2019). Fulford and Marche (2017:189) comment 'no matter

how successful my generation of women are in the workforce we still judge each

other's domestic spaces. My mom is neat, and I confess that I sometimes see a room

through her eyes, with the value she places on an ordered space'. It is therefore

claimed that people attribute greater responsibility for housework to women than

men, irrespective of their employment, thus women are penalised more often for

clutter than men (Thébaud et al. 2019). Although men and women appear to see the same mess, women may more strongly anticipate being prejudicially judged by their peers, especially by other women (Thébaud et al. 2019). Therefore, in this reading of *At the Edge of the Frame*, it is possible to connect the shoes with this gender division in housework, as Harris has created a contrast between tidiness and messiness by directly exposing both the surface and interior of the shoes.

The cropping gesture (Figure 5) not only creates a contrast between neatness and messiness in reality, but also brings forth contradistinction between objectification and subjectification in the digital realm. The cropping gesture of an image is a significant concept used on it to improve its aesthetic quality by removing unwanted outer areas (Li et al. 2017). This photo editing technique is often used on women's images in magazines, advertisements and posters to make their figures 'more attractive' by focusing on particular parts. In Harris's work, the toecaps of the trainers are considered as unwanted outer parts while the remaining body of the trainers are the focus. It could be read that the unwanted areas refer to the unwanted parts of an images of a woman's body (McRobbie 2009), a practice that appears on social media. By placing these 'cropped' trainers on soft foam mats, Harris creates an atmosphere of indoor exercises that links to physical fitness to the concept of body perfection in this work. The digital gesture of cropping could therefore be problematic as it is

associated with the objectification of women's bodies with its emphasis on desire,

looking and fantasy (McRobbie 2009:99).

Figure 5 Rowena Harris, *At the Edge of the Frame*, 2017.

Women's images in advertisements and magazines are considered as a sign. A sign

that often has value attached and may be used as a sort of currency. Judith Williamson

(2010:20) describes currency as 'something which represents value and in its

interchangeability with other things gives them "value" too'. Advertisers choose the

sign of women whose value seems more attractive as currency to be traded with their

product. Therefore, the advertisers offer the viewer 'objective correlatives'

(Williamson 2010:29): in this way women's images create the meaning and values

that attach it to the product. The viewer however believes the meaning is already there

and originates from the product itself, thus 'certain objects become taken for granted as having certain qualities' (Rose 2016: 90). In this way, advertisements attempt to create a connection between (the value of) the products and 'perfect' images of women. The correlating objects and the products have no inherent similarity – they are only placed together. However, this practice is problematic as the portrayal of women in advertising is not only potentially debilitating and demanding but is also inaccurate. It is notable in advertisements that they create beauty standards of women (skinny, flawless, and young) that are considered intrinsically unobtainable in most cases (Lazier and Kendrick 1993). The cropping gesture that is applied in the digital realm, such as in advertisements and social media, thus, helps to provide inaccurate and 'ideal' representations of women's images which simplistically ignores the complexities of women.

Rose (2016:75) also suggests that constructs of social difference, such as gender, race or sexuality are 'articulated through the advertisement images themselves as knowledge is constructed in such a way to legitimate unequal social power relations'. Rose's arguments somewhat echo to what Berger (1972:45) believes when he states that 'the social presence of a woman is different in kind from that of a man'. The politics of the 'gaze' – or the question of who an image is made by and for whose gaze, has been much discussed. Berger (1972:47) suggests that the social presence of men and women could be simplified as: 'men act and women appear'. Thus 'she turns

herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight'. Some

advertisements particularly present men looking at a 'perfect' product that is linked to

a 'perfect' woman's image, as if he could choose and purchase both. Women, on the

other hand, treat the 'perfect' image as a goal for herself, even if it is unachievable.

This sight distorts reality, objectifies women's bodies, and affects how women (and

men) view their own images (Fredrickson and Roberts 2006; Calogero, Tantleff-

Dunn, and Thompson 2011).

Feminist research has helped us to understand the grip that gender difference in social

presence has had over generations of women, and to locate the thresholds of pain,

dissatisfaction, self-punishment and loss with which these bodily images appear to be

connected (McRobbie 2009). In Harris's work, the cropping gesture which results in

fragments of the body are seemingly detached. Some parts are considered as

'unwanted and dissatisfied' from the visible and integrated body. Braidotti argues,

fragmentation has been women's historical condition as it reflects the

vulnerability/fragility of women, and wounding and scarring as forms of bodily

fragmentation (Braidotti 1994; June 2010). However, while the fragmented body

symbolises pain, oppression, or self-punishment and loss, it also acts as the vehicle

through which female characters recognise their shared historical wounds and

catalyses resistance and reclamation through recognition. Women's recognition of

these shared or sometimes different experiences allows for connections and

resistance. It accelerates the healing process and builds bonds between women from diverse cultural backgrounds (Shahar 2007). In this sense, Harris's representation of the fragmented body becomes a site of collective memories and past experiences of women; it becomes a means to unite women to resist against forms of oppression, such as patriarchy, racism, and heterosexism.

The material Harris used to cast these trainers is also an important semiotic object. Concrete is an artificial material with an aggregate of stones, gravel and sand, bound together with lime and cement. The material is nothing special in itself, neither noble nor base (Joray 1977). From an aesthetic point of view, Joray (1977:13) believes 'it only exists through the hand of man [sic] and the inspiration that guides the hand; the act of creation transcends the material'. In other word, concrete is given a soul and meaning only through human inspiration. Peter Thole (1997:12) describes cast concrete as the symbol of 'authentic, one-off, primal, timeless yet of the present, heavy, solid, voluminous, tough and sober'. In other words, it is indestructible, difficult to change, and can be preserved for a good while.

Harris also used concrete as a material in her early works, for example, *Extend/Compress* (Figure 6) and *Haul* (Figure 7). In these works, Harris defines a kind of 'ghosting presence' – something that aids in bringing the space together with

the body – which reflects to Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'phantom limbs' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 428). Similar to Merleau-Ponty's point that the body must be conceived of as a comprehensive living body and as 'an assemblage of parts whose relations to external objects and to each other involve efficient or mechanical causality' (Merleau-Ponty 1945: 423), Harris attempted to capture some brief moments and sensibilities beyond the limited existence of the flesh body with concrete and made them last for eternity in her artworks.

Figure 6 Rowena Harris, *Extend/Compress Part 2*, 2013. Cement and chewing gum, dimensions variable (Shirt 30 x 18 x 11 cm/Button 3 x 3 x 1 cm) (Left).

Figure 7 Rowena Harris, *Haul*, 2013. Cement and polystyrene, dimensions variable (Each 35 x 35 x 35 cm) (Right).

At the Edge of the Frame also plays with the perceived transformation of mind and body. Harris describes this in multiple ways such as being akin to the expectation of

wearing soft and comfortable trainers that are however made of solid concrete; to

stepping on hard ground but finding it is soft beneath your feet; and to perceiving the

trace of a body's presence but being unable to touch or see it. The body is at the

centre of Harris's investigation in the form of sculpture and installation art; she has

considered the body as no longer limited by the boundary of the skin. Our bodies have

become media, and media are reconfiguring our matter. Inspired by poetic sculptors

and artists, such as Rachel Whiteread, Nina Canell, and Marie Lund, Harris told me in

her interview that she enjoys using the titles of her work to allow the ideas to come

slowly to the viewer. Embedded in her feminist methodology is a fundamental belief

in ways of thinking about things that are assembled, the relationship between things,

and things that are always affecting other things. It is a situated approach of thinking

rather than a singular identity that is somehow contained in her works. If we spend

time in a space with Harris's works, these messages of her feminist agenda may

slowly emerge.

Above, I have analysed Harris's representation of the female body in *At the Edge of
the Frame* as an absent and ghosting presence. This work uses the shoes to talk about

cropping practices on women's images in advertising and on social media. The female

body is also a distinguishing feature in Helen Gorrill's installation work: *Fushë
Kosovë Sex Café Chair.* In the next section, I will discuss this artwork in which the

female body parts call on strong emotions in a representation of women's oppression, particularly related to sex trafficking in Eastern Europe.

4.3 Helen Gorrill, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*

Step 1. Description

Helen Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair* (Figure 8) shows a sculpture made in the form of a chair. A chair is an object that may appear every day and mundane, but in this work, it presents a complex of qualisigns: reclaimed prosthetic limbs, sex toys, steel, leather, fishnet, nylon and resin. These qualisigns are signs that consist of qualities of feelings and possibilities before we try to understand the work in depth.

Figure 8 Helen Gorrill, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair,* 2010. 83 x 93 x 74 cm.

The support of Gorrill's chair is composed of four broken prosthetic legs in Caucasian skin colour of varying lengths with black fishnet stockings. The under-seat structure comprises metal rods attached to the legs by black leather straps, supplemented by sex toys, chains and padlocks. At the top of each limb are inlays with embroidered vulvas, children's toys, sweets and Moldovan coins. Two adjustable leather straps connect the back pair of the legs as the chairback. The seat cushion is in pink and divided with lacing in the middle. It is made by machine and is hand embroidered in shiny silk with soft stuffing. Several black steel rods reinforce the chair at the bottom by connecting the four ankles of the legs to support the weight of a sitting human.

Step 2. Reduction

The qualisigns in the section above are to help with manifesting ideas about the body and integrity in sinsigns. The sinsign can be understood as a token: a sign that consists of a reaction or resistance, an actual singular thing, an actual occurrence or fact. The sinsign is iconic in denoting some of the assembled objects in Gorrill's work, such as the reclaimed prosthetic limbs, the lace-up cushion and the embroidered vulvas, all of which function as a metaphor/synecdoche of a woman's body (Figure 9).

Figure 9 Helen Gorrill, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair,* 2010.

Metaphor/synecdoche is also presented to a great extent in the objects with other indexical properties, for instance the fishnet stockings, childhood objects and sex toys. The childhood objects at the legtops are metonymic of innocence; the fishnet stockings and sex toys are metonymic of sexuality and probably indicate a BDSM relationship. These objects perhaps offer a synecdoche of pornographic and fetishistic sex scenes.

Step 3. Interpretation

It is useful to begin my interpretation with a discussion of the title of this work.

Gorrill's work is titled *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*. In naming her work as such,

Gorrill uses a series of signs that seemingly create contradictions, which I would argue work to unsettle the viewer. The title comprises two parts. First, Fushë Kosovë is the Albanian name for a town in central Kosovo, which is known as a transit location for women trafficked from Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine (Amnesty International 2004). By contrast, the second part of the title: café chair is a suggestive sign of something mundane, an object that would not be out of place in the mass-replicated spaces of chain coffee shops such as Starbucks.

These contrasting signs work with and against the installation work itself. Gorrill's chair is composed of semiotic objects associated with sex, including fishnet stockings, sex toys and objects associated with bondage and BDSM, such as leather belts and chains. These connotations are not necessarily sinister in and of themselves, since how we make sense of sex is located in the social and cultural milieu and such objects have become increasingly mainstream (Attwood 2009; McNair 1996). Gorrill's use of the four prosthetic legs however is suggestive of a more problematic and unequal sexual relationship. These damaged prosthetic legs are forms of mutilation of the female body, and thus indicate the oppression of the trafficked women through this artwork. In addition, the prosthetic legs of women also suggest male fetish – the fetish of the body parts imposed on women through the masculine gaze – which is also reflected in Rowena Harris's use of women's shoes in *At the Edge of the Frame* and the foot binding custom in the early twentieth century in China. Nochlin (1994:38)

believes 'the fact that these are women's legs, not men's, is of great significance',

since the men's fragmented legs would obviously represent something very

differently to women's. This becomes particularly clear if we compare the artworks

representing the detached female and male legs.

Nochlin (1994) gives as an example, comparing Eugène Disdéri's (Figure 10) and

Paul Renouard's (Figure 11) work. Disdéri's photomontage of the legs and feet of

contemporary ballerinas at the Opera Ballet has 'distinctly erotic overtones', while

Renouard's cartoon of two sets of male legs and shoes does not (Nochlin 1994:40).

Those radical but conservative paintings of juries in Renouard's work tell of the

differences in the details of the social position/hierarchy that are at stake in the leg-

work.

I read these prosthetic legs as representing the dismemberment of the female body, so

that interpreted together with the mundanity of the sign 'café chair', one possible

analysis of this work is that it represents the normalisation of a dehumanised view of

women.
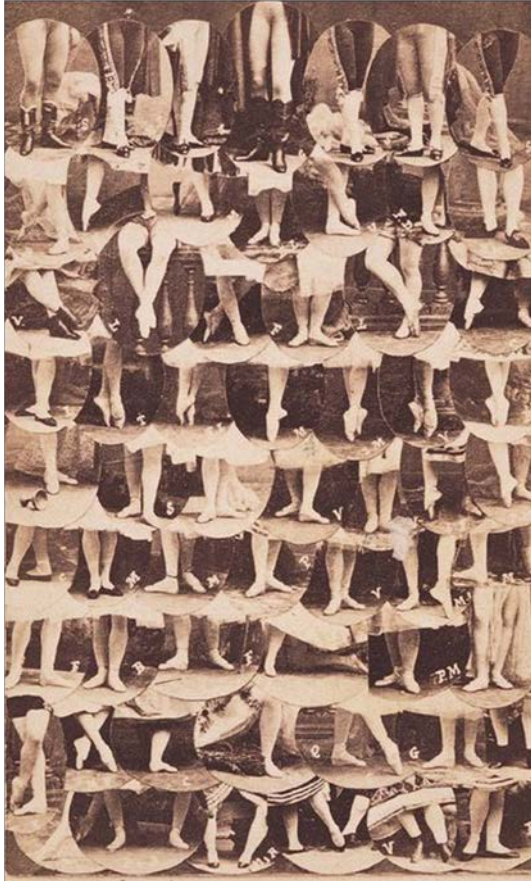
Figure 10 Eugène Disdéri, *Les Jambes de l'opera, Mosaïque Breveté s.d.g.d.,* circa 1862.
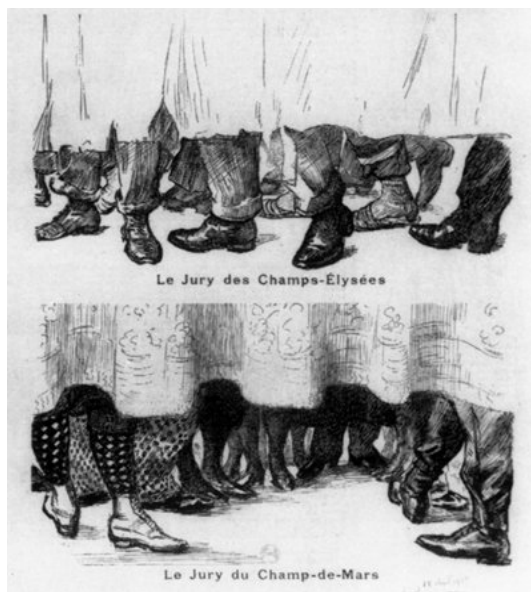
Figure 11 Paul Renouard, *Le Jury des Champs-Élysées; Le Jury du Champ de Mars*, 1877.

The chair as a product is a significant sign in relation to this reading. Whilst a café

chair can be considered mundane, chairs more generally hold important meanings in

relation to social status, for example the chair occupied by the head of a table, the

sovereign's chair (or throne), or the worker's stool (Massey 2011). Another example

is the electric chair used as an object of discipline (Aydin 2015) in which the subject

was strapped into the chair and electrocuted to death. For Massey (2011:50), the

electric chair is the 'ultimate symbol of control and discipline'. In artistic practice, its

most recognisable use was in Andy Warhol's screen-printed pieces of the empty

electric chair in 1963 (Figure 12) which took place the same year as the last execution

by this method in New York (Massey 2011).

Figure 12 Andy Warhol, *Big Electric Chair*, 1967.

In addition to the reading above, the meaning of the chair can also be related to personal and lived experiences. It is because of its intimate relationship with the body and the strong, anthropomorphic aspect of its structure to the human body, with its legs, back, arms and seat that can represent the absence of its designer or owner (Cranz 1988). However, like any object that is made sense of within specific cultures, chairs have a complex history and set of meanings. These meanings date back to the period of ancient Egypt, when chairs first became a vital sign of power relations between rulers and ruled. In many cultures today, chairs still remain embedded in power relations that are differentiated by age, class and gender (Cranz 1988; Wu 1997). Other contemporary artists, such as Joseph Kosuth, Ai Weiwei, Joseph Beuys, and Edward and Nancy Reddin Kienholz, have explored different indexes, symbols and representations of the chair in their work, often indicating the presence or absence of human relations in terms of power, repression and objectification.

Gorrill told me in her interview that most of her work has revolved around gender issues, in particular, women and women painters in Europe, the United States, and the Middle East. In *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, Gorrill encourages the viewers to sit in the chair and to engage with its drilled and shackled legs juxtaposed by resins embedded with sex toys and childhood objects (Figure 13). Some people commented on the Celeste Prize website (2010) that this experience made them feel unsettled and

was provocative, as it represented the authority of the person (trafficker) controlling

the sitter (trafficked women).

Figure 13 Helen Gorrill, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair,* 2010.

Gorrill was inspired in the making of *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair* by Allen Jones's

women-as-furniture artworks in the 1960s (Figure 14) and Hans Bellmer's disjointed

limbed dolls in the 1930s. However, in contrast to these male artists' representation of

female as objects, Gorrill conveyed her sympathy for women, particularly the

trafficked women in *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, through which Gorrill made

visible such an industry and how it treats women as the objects of consumption, and

investigated enforcement and reactions to patriarchal society.

Figure 14 Allen Jones, *Chair*, 1969.

In the analysis above, I have argued that Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*

represents women's bodies as the objects of oppression, referencing sex trafficking in

Eastern Europe and the dismemberment of the female body vis-à-vis male sexual

pleasure. Sexual pleasure is also a theme in Lin Jingjing's work, in particular her

installation work *Dress*. In the analysis below, I present the description and reduction

of this work, before turning to the interpretation, which I will read in terms of the

relations of power present in marriage between men and women in China.

4.4 Lin Jingjing, *Dress*

Step 1. Description

Lin Jingjing's *Dress* (Figure 15) features a modern, long sleeved dress made of white lace. The dress is displayed against a flat, pink lacy background surrounded by round, uniform sized photos of two naked female torsos with their backs to each other. Approximately 35 of these identical photos are evenly distributed in the background, while the dress is located in the middle of the artwork.

Figure 15 Lin Jingjing, *Dress*, 2008-2009.

There are layers of ornamental white pleated lace gathered at the lower part of the dress. Tiny white beads are attached all around the edges of these ruffles. The central ruffles are gathered in an oblong shape. The colour of the central oblong gradually

changes from deep to light pink. Small pink cotton balls embellish the heart of the light pink ruffles.

Step 2. Reduction

As one of the most important semiotic objects in this artwork, the dress carries multiple meanings. The white lace and details of the dress suggest it is an Anglo-American wedding dress. Lin also confirmed this assumption in her interview. The wedding dress can be read as an iconic sign of the presentation of a bride figure in a wedding ceremony. The waves of pink ruffles, the softness of the cotton balls and the places they are attached on the dress are also crucial semiotic objects that indicate a likeness to female genitalia. Here, the female genitalia are not featured solely as a sign to represent women however. Rather, the female genitalia are central to pleasure in women's bodies and lives and are a powerful representation of feminine sexuality (Frueh 2003).

Figure 16 Lin Jingjing, *Dress*, 2008-2009 (detail).

The texture of the ruffles and cotton balls functions as a metaphor that is typically

associated with femininity. Meanwhile, the photos of naked female torsos in the

background are another important semiotic object that functions as an iconic sign of

women's bodies and are metonymic of her sexuality (Figure 16). The interplay of

erotic elements and the (virginal, white) wedding dress bespeaks the contradictions in

marriage, for example 'elevated and degraded, purified and reviled, worshipped and

subjugated' as Lin stated in the interview.

Step 3. Interpretation

Lin Jingjing's *Dress* features semiotic objects that are 'typically related to the idea of

feminism', as Lin told me in her interview. The dress is a crucial semiotic object that

is linked to this reading, through which the artist poses a question about 'where are women placed in society in terms of gender identity'? Dress is a basic fact of social life; it can be seen in social encounters before conversation can be initiated (Entwistle 2015; Stone 1962). Understanding dress in everyday life requires an understanding of how the body is represented within the fashion system and its discourses on dress (Entwistle 2015:344). It also requires knowledge of the lived experience of the body and the role dress plays in the presentation of an identity. Identities are communicated by dress by announcing the social positions of the wearer to both the wearer and observers within a particular situation of interaction (Roach-Higgins and Eicher 1995).

In many societies, a wedding dress is specifically worn by a bride in a wedding ceremony rather than as part of everyday attire. The wedding dress is sufficient to communicate the identity of the bride and to call forth expectations for behaviour appropriate to this woman so identified. Lin believes there is 'an affectionate relationship' between women and their wedding dresses because the wedding dress 'closely wraps onto a woman's body and breathes with them'. For many women, the wedding dress is the best dress they will wear in their lives, and the wedding ceremony chronicles the collision between ordinary women and high fashion (Worsley 2009).

The title of this work, *Dress*, is rather straightforward in describing the nature of this work. However, a wedding dress is more than just a dress; it has always been a highly symbolic garment, its colour, details and accessories are resonant with meaning (McBride-Mellinger 1993). Archaeological records of the ancient Egyptian civilisation provided us with many details that an Egyptian bride was 'traditionally draped in gossamer layers of accordion-pleated white linen' (McBride-Mellinger 1993:13). In Western culture, the colour white, as symbolic of virginity, is often worn on festive occasions, including weddings. Although virginity is no longer 'a pre-requisite for a suitable wife', white is still the most traditional colour for a wedding dress in a Christian or Jewish ceremony today (Ashliman 2004; Worsley 2009:254). Although in Western culture, white is understood as signifying virginity and purity, in some cultures, it is associated with death and condolence. For example, it is a Hindu funereal colour. In China, the deceased person wore a white robe while the spectators dressed in black and Victorian women in mourning in the colonies wore white dresses with matching weeping veils (Worsley 2009; Yau 1994). Colour could also be an indicator of social class (Worsley 2009) and also, by extension, race. White was often associated with the upper classes, as it gets dirty easily. Therefore, clothes in white were more expensive to look after and to keep clean.

Lin used an Anglo-American styled white wedding dress as the semiotic object rather than a traditional Chinese red wedding gown in this work. Perhaps because Lin works

and lives in both New York and Beijing, her work has become influenced by Western culture; besides, the white wedding dress has been increasingly popular in China in the twentieth-first century. Wedding dresses form a complex set of interlocking relationships that tie closely with the societal and cultural tradition in a larger sense (Foster and Johnson 2003). In postfeminist studies, the 'good' wedding is understood as a site of women's ultimate success (Negra 2009). In becoming this successful bride, the wedding dress is a key element – it is understood by women as important to find and wear the 'perfect' wedding dress on the wedding day. The wedding day therefore, is understood culturally as the bride's 'special day', but this special day is closely structured through the attendant limitations placed on agency through consumerism (Broekhuizen and Evans 2014: 346), such as the consumer practices and traditions of preparing the wedding banquet, the tiered wedding cake, the wedding dress, and the wedding gifts, in both Britain and China. The wedding has been the focus of critique by feminist analysts for maintaining gender power asymmetries, given the financial expense and expanding consumer culture surrounding a practice that is traditionally a ritualised ceremony (Brook 2002; Ingraham 2008). Moreover, wedding cultures as a consumer practice has been identified as 'maintaining heterosexual and patriarchal relations between men and women' (Broekhuizen and Evans 2014: 336). Although marriage rituals are in a constant state of flux, traditionally a wedding is a rite of passage where a woman gives up her primary role as her parent's daughter to become her husband's wife (Worsley 2009). The wedding ceremony and wedding dress therefore, symbolise the transition of a woman from an

innocent girl to wife, which is more relevant to Lin's idea (according to her interview) of the contradictions between a woman's virginity and the loss of it, and the changes to a woman's role in marriage.

The pink ruffles that are gathered as an oblong shape in the middle of the dress are also crucial semiotic objects. As stated in the previous step, they indicate a likeness to female genitalia and can be read in this context as women's sexual liberation. The representation of female genitalia in art has a long history. In contemporary art history, for example, in Hannah Wilke's *Sweet Sixteen* (1977), the artist shows sixteen vaginally shaped sculptures of ceramic, all of them different from each other (Figure 17). The female genitalia in *Sweet Sixteen* are as a fragment detached from the women's bodies. Wilke intends to create 'a counterpart to the omnipresent phallic symbols' for establishing a positive reformulation of the female organ (Kubitza 2002:175). Similarly, in Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, the iconography of the plates on the dinner table was developed out of the artist's extended experimentation with centralised imagery in her work since the late 1960s and her interest in using metaphors for women's experiences (Chicago 2006). *The Dinner Party* (Figure 18), in Jones's (2005:414) words, challenges the Western aesthetic conventions that 'privilege images of the female body as fetishistic objects for male spectatorial pleasure' yet prohibit direct representation of the female genitalia. This artwork and its representations of female genitalia have the effect of empowering feminist

thoughts in challenging the masculinist boundaries between art and pornography

(Jones 2005). The representation of female genitalia can also be found in Chen

Lingyang's *Twelve Flower Months* (Figure 19). In *Twelve Flower Months*, Chen notes

the changes of nature and seasons, and the cycles of plant life coinciding with

women's menstrual cycles. This artwork breaks a taboo by bringing the menstruating

vagina into the open to be viewed by the public (Cui 2016). In addition, Chen's use of

the mirror reflection in *Twelve Flower Months* generates self-recognition and liberates

women from the idea of structured social positions to express desire through the body.

These examples have in common a reflection of a concern for more liberated genitalia

and sexual values of women, and also mark an emerging awareness of the social

construction of gender and its political implications.

Figure 17 Hannah Wilke, *Sweet Sixteen*, 1977.

Figure 18 Judy Chicago, *The Dinner Party*, 1974-1979.

Figure 19 Chen Lingyang, *Twelve Flower Months*, 1999-2000.

In this reading, the shapes, textures, curves, colours, and the position of the ruffles and cotton balls make a clear reference to female genitalia in Lin's *Dress*. The female genitalia in *Dress* can on the one hand be interpreted as a synecdoche and a sexualised abstraction to represent the female body; and on the other hand, it suggests a prohibited desire as well as a mutilation of women's bodies in heterosexual sexual intercourse. The representation of the combination of the female genitalia and the wedding dress in this work, therefore, can be read as an expression of the contradiction between sexual liberation and oppression.

The photographs of naked female torsos are another important semiotic object in *Dress*. According to Lin's description, these are photos of sex dolls. Sex dolls are a representation of the female body crafted for sexual use. Developments in the manufacturing of artificial materials, such as silicon, have made these sex dolls appear more lifelike than their predecessors (Figure 20).

Figure 20 Example products of simulation dolls from Exdoll.com.

As they become more lifelike, constructed with realistic flesh and skin texture, they are often associated with what Mori (2012:98) calls 'the uncanny valley'. As these dolls become more lifelike, they are often associated with 'uncanny' or 'creepy' feelings. This is where appearance and behaviour are incongruent and cause discomfort and distress. Men who use sex dolls are also judged for their sexual 'perversion'. This is because, according to Kim (2012:96), sex dolls 'in their similarity of size and anatomical correctness, are woman-objects designed to be fused physically with male bodies in accord with a version of heterosexual male desire'.

Moreover, sex dolls manufactured for adult men may also 'derive from the sexualisation of childhood innocence represented by the dolls', which could form the belief that sex dolls are a manifestation of the objectification of women (Kim 2012:96). The photographs of sex dolls attached to the dress indicate a sexual desire, which is the opposite of the symbolic meaning of innocence and virginity of a white wedding dress. The photographs of sex dolls also signify the objectification of women's bodies and is on the contrary to the presentation of female genitalia as women's sexual liberation. By emphasising these semiotic objects and their relations, Lin has built contradictions within the transition of women's roles from girl to wife in heterosexual marriage.

Looking at the artwork *Dress* as a whole with all the above semiotic objects included, I suggest that the artist is pointing to the question of women's roles in marriage. Historically, marriage in many cultures is a financial arrangement between two families. In some cases, marriage is still an institution based on the agreement of family circumstances, and love is inconsequential (Worsley 2009). In the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, research on heterosexual marriage by sociologists and feminists developed a cogent argument for heterosexual marriage as a practice and institution that constructs gender (VanEvery 1995; Brook 2002). The essence of this argument is that gender is constructed as a power relationship, that is women as subordinates in families. A group of radical feminist activists during that

time had chosen to remain unmarried. The reason they made such a choice, as

Jeffreys (1985:88) posits, was 'either because they regarded marriage as a form of

humiliating slavery and dependence upon men, or because they wanted to pursue a

career and fulfil their potential in such a way which would not have been allowed

them by husbands'. This group of radical feminists advocated being unmarried

because of the inherent danger and inequality perpetuated by the institution, which

could result in the loss of a woman's identity, subordination and oppression (Garcia-

Rodrigo 2008). They placed great emphasis on the patriarchal history of marriage and

on the historical dominance exercised by men over the women they possessed as

wives.

Other voices, such as Pateman (1988), considers marriage from a social contract

perspective. She believes that in a patriarchal society, marriage and female fidelity are

requirements for heterosexual relationships (Pateman 1988). Therefore, the central

issue in the heterosexual marriage for Pateman is men's domination over women.

Rubin (1975: 175) refers to heterosexual marriage as a traffic or exchange of women:

'women are given in marriage, taken in battle, exchanged for favours, sent as tribute,

traded, bought and sold', thus treating women as objects of consumption in marriage.

It denies women's access to sexual freedom and continues the separation of women

from each other (Rosa 1994).

Nevertheless, as marriage has become more diverse and pluralistic, the situation has changed. According to Brook (2002:55), although marriage organises social relationships in various fundamental ways, it is 'neither regulated nor experienced in any necessarily uniform fashion'. Contemporary marriage may be characterised as 'flexible, pleasure-centred, co-operatively regulated with loosely defined roles for husband, wife and children' (DiFonzo and Stern 2008:1).

Research shows that over the last decades, society has shifted towards more egalitarian attitudes (Zuo and Tang 2000). This shift has marginalised the notions of distinct gendered responsibilities for wives and husbands (Baker et. al 2009). Women's roles have changed in contemporary marriage largely because of women's empowerment through education and opportunities for financial independence (Auchmuty 2012). In this sense, *Dress* not merely presents women's struggles of their roles in transforming from a single woman to a wife in marriage, but also celebrates women liberating from subordination to independence in marriage.

In the analysis above, I have argued that Lin's *Dress* exposes a power relation in heterosexual marriage and the unequal standards and requirements for women as wives. *Dress* tells a story of a wedding dress, at the same time it can be understood as a wish for women' s liberation in contemporary society, an implication of the escape from what has been attached to the wedding dress. The wedding dress, in this reading,

becomes a vital site for the artist to express women's contradiction and transformation in heterosexual marriage.

4.5 Touchpoints

Looking at Rowena Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame*, Helen Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and Lin Jingjing's *Dress* simultaneously, I find touchpoints among them in making gender/power relations visible by means of the female body. This can be read in at least three ways, which I explore below.

First, the cut, the crop and the fragmentation (in concrete or abstract forms) of the female body in these artworks represent the existence of the wholeness. That is to say: it is presented as a total entity of the absence or what Harris called 'a ghosting presence', which both completes and leaves open the body-as-conception. Rebay-Salisbury, Sorensen, and Hughes (2010:1), and Nochlin (1994:37) suggest two opposing interpretations of the fragmentary: a) the conformation of fragmentary is out of contingency – it is an unconscious act; and b) the design of fragmentary is after careful consideration. To break this down in more detail:

a) The work is cropped or cut-off accidentally or unintentionally. An equivalent of the meaningless flow of the reality itself, a casual reality that has no linear

narrative. This is a structure associated with aspects of *Realism* in art, literature and photography in the nineteenth century. Photography for example, was often thought to be particularly 'artless' because of its tendency to simply to record the raw data of visual material, whatever happened to be caught by the lens at a particular moment, whether or not a unified composition resulted, and whether or not human figures were oddly dissected by the photographic frame.

b) The work is understood to be cropped or cut-off deliberately. It can be considered as an indexical sign and function as metonymy and as synecdoche of the whole, with references to the invisible owner corresponding to the artist's intention and aesthetic design. The cut or crop can be read as a strategy of a 'slowly come to reveal' process, as described in Harris's artwork, whereby the viewer is encouraged to complete the fragments to form a complete image of the figure in reading/understanding the artwork.

Nochlin (1994:37) also provides a third alternative interpretation. She states that it is also possible to read cropped borders as a kind of 'designation of image/making as play, play with habitual boundaries of all sorts'; an oscillation between certainty and uncertainty. In the selected artworks analysed above, the fragments of the female bodies stimulate the viewer's interest to some extent. The viewer who chances upon

the art scene is immediately implicated in formulating a narrative (Rebay-Salisbury, Sorensen, and Hughes 2010). On closer inspection, the body fragments seem to have been carefully arranged. *At the Edge of the Frame*, for instance places the 'non-toecap' shoes at particular angles where the viewer is able to observe that a straight, invisible line dissects each pair. The trace of an unseen agency intensifies the viewer's search for deeper meanings: What do these fragments represent? What relationship do they bear to the wholeness? Why do the artists show only a limited part of the whole? Rebay-Salisbury, Sorensen, and Hughes (2010:2) believe that a fragmented part may 'acquire a distinct meaning through its enchained relationship to the whole' or it may alternatively be used in a more straightforward manner to represent the whole. Therefore, it is reasonable to interpret that the body fragments in the selected artworks are designed and cut intentionally by the artists which indicates the violence of the mutilation of the bodily form.

Additionally, in Chapman's (2000) exploration of the relationship between whole and fragments, he suggests an interpretation of fragmentation is built through a process of 'enchainment'. Chapman's theory posits that the breaking of the whole does not automatically entail its loss; on the contrary, the parts of the object can become meaningful independently and play a role in different contexts. At the same time, in comparison with the fragmentation of objects, the relationship between the body or its belonging parts and the whole seems to open up new dimensions to the ways people

and things may be enchained (Chapman 2000). In interpreting selected artworks, there are examples showing how the body or belonging can stand metonymically and synecdochically for the whole, or how parts could still be symbolically connected even when they are separated, or alternatively how parts could be differentiated and their links to the whole severed (Rebay-Salisbury, Sorensen, and Hughes 2010). In all cases, the body or its belonging fragmentations (more or less) lose their original function when disarticulated from the whole, but simultaneously, they can acquire new meanings and significances.

A second touchpoint is the sexual fetish imposed on women through the masculine gaze. In Nochlin's (1994) *The Body in Piece*, she focuses on the cut-off elements, especially on the women's legs and feet in the Western male artists' work. For instance, a fetishistic reading is illustrated by the existence of the provocative drawings of women's legs and feet by Edouard Manet. In the context of traditional China, female footbinding lasted for a thousand years. The Chinese have offered various explanations and reasons for footbinding. For example, for Chinese men bound feet were 'universally associated with higher-status love and sex' (Mackie 1996:1001). It carried strong connotations of both modesty and lasciviousness (Mackie 1996). Levy (1966) believed that footbinding originated in an aesthetic appreciation of the small foot and was maintained by male erotic interest, while Freud (1961) concluded that footbinding appeased male castration anxieties. Bound feet thus

became sexual fetish; they were said to be conducive to better sexual intercourse, although this claim was medically false (Van Gulik 1961). Although I doubt that fetish is recognised by its adherents as an abnormality, it is certainly opposed if its enactment is out of objectification or violence towards women (and men).

In this reading, gender difference is the major factor in constituting the meaning of the body parts. As in postmodernist productions, the body fragments in art 'assume new and different transgressive forms' (Nochlin 1994:54). In the three pieces of work introduced above by Harris, Gorrill, and Lin, the use of women's legs, sex organs, shoes, and other belongings de-fetishises the attached assumptions and fantasies of male (artists) on women, challenges the representation of the female body through the masculine gaze/objectification, and implies the imbalance and repression of women's roles and social positions in the form of art.

A third touchpoint is that the female body in the analysed artworks does not always appear as an idealisation of beauty. This is different to the tendency of traditional paintings by male artists in the nineteenth century that took the female (nude) body to be the 'dreamy goddess' (O'Reilly 2009: 12). Goldenberg and Roberts (2011:85) agree on this and believed there is a long tradition of construing women as 'being elevated above nature, idealized, and even worshipped as goddesses'. Therefore, the stereotypes about women are paradoxical as they contain both negative and seemingly positive judgments. As Glick and Fiske (1996) suggest, women are simultaneously perceived as less competent and less valuable than men, but are also idealised (for example, in their roles as wives and mothers), and their bodies are revered as cultural symbols of beauty and male desire. The incomplete body parts in Harris, Gorrill, and Lin's works are examples of showing the imperfections of women. According to Shahar (2007:449), the 'fragments, like wounds, have the texture of a cut'; they are broken or unfinished texts that 'embody allegories of crisis and loss in history and present moments of absence'. Fragments such as Harris's 'non-toecap' women's shoes or Gorrill's broken prosthetic legs bear the form of a rupture and stand as evidence of deficiency and imperfection. These fragmented female bodies in the selected artworks represented by a combination of objects allude to the absence and the suffering in women's lives. By engaging the topics of imperfect or distorted female body, Harris, Gorrill, and Lin have illuminated the struggle that many women go through in their daily lives. It is not only the need for more treatment and care that

is recognised, but also the flaws and scars themselves are recognised not as ugly nor negative reminders of the past but as marks of healing and surviving. More importantly, all artworks speak to the ways in which the media and society more generally impose harmful expectations and guidelines on what the female body should be, which should stop.

In this chapter, three pieces of art: *At the Edge of the Frame*, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and *Dress* in relation to the female body were introduced and analysed, supported by interviews with the artists. In reclaiming the female body in these artworks, Rowena Harris, Helen Gorrill, and Lin Jingjing intended not simply to recover but to recreate the representation of women's art in art history. Through this, I identified touchpoints observed in these artworks and aim towards a transcultural knowledge of women's art. Herein, I investigated how British and Chinese women artists inscribed the female body both implicitly and explicitly, thereby making the artistic experience of gender/power relations start to unfold. The following chapter will discuss another three artworks in relation to themes of domesticity, where their touchpoints are located in the private sphere of women's lives.

Chapter 5   Domesticity

5.1 Introduction

I explore three artworks in this chapter: Jemima Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, Tao Aimin's *Women's River*, and Gao Rong's *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*. A common theme within these artworks is a focus on domestic labour, where such labour is heavily divided by gender (Gillis and Hollows 2009). In discussing these three artworks I pay attention to the relationship between domesticity and female oppression/emancipation. This chapter shows how a transcultural understanding of gender relations can facilitate an in-depth analysis of women's roles in domestic life. I highlight the multiplicity of gender dynamics in different social and cultural contexts through selected artworks in the twenty-first century.

I use a semiotic method that is guided by my phenomenological approach to analyse these three artworks. In the first section, I analyse Jemima Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*. In making meaning of the semiotic objects in this work, I look into the relationships between the ironing board/laundry and the 'traditional' gender division of domestic labour within a British family. In the second section, I focus on Tao Aimin's *Women's River* and her representation of Chinese women's domestic labour and their lived experiences through well-worn washboards. Finally, I analyse

Gao Rong's embroidery work *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*. In this work, the artist sews realistic household objects into replica luxury handbags using traditional nvgong 女红 (feminine needlework). By applying textiles and sewn appliqué as a language, Gao depicts a life scene of the person she observed in one of China's major railway stations.

Looking at these three artworks simultaneously, a central theme is the representation of women's roles within the domestic sphere through the use of household objects. One of the most common meanings associated with the idea of domesticity is family. However, this analysis does not assume that domesticity is always oriented towards the family. To do so not only excludes the experiences of those who live outside of 'conventional family structures' but also limits the cultural significance of the domestic (Hollows 2008:7). In this chapter, I take the view that the concept of domestic life is far from natural or traditional, rather it is the product of sociocultural and economic transformations (Hollows 2008).

Domesticity has frequently been understood as gendered and associated with femininity. Taken together, the artworks discussed in this chapter reflect on the domestic in different ways that communicate ideas about women's place in contemporary society. This can be traced from the ironing board, washboards or

embroidered washing powder and their relations to women's labour. In identifying the touchpoints in these works, I argue that the everyday domestic objects co-constitute human subjectivity and actively engage with human. Furthermore, there is a gender division and unequal responsibility in the domestic space that is represented in these three artworks, specifically the underlying temporal gender inequality.

5.2 Jemima Brown, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*

Step 1: Description

Jemima Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* (Figure 21) is an assembled sculptural piece that consists of a mixture of readymades/found objects and cast wax. The main section of the work is an upturned standing ironing board that has been linked by the cast wax to a laundry basket with laundry inside it. The main body of the ironing board is white and covered with floral cotton padding. A mid-length brunette wig is placed at the top of the ironing board. Below, a light-brown/cream dressing gown is draped on the padding and tied at the waist. Two hands that have been cast in wax are assembled at both sides of the ironing board and protrude from the sleeves.

Figure 21 Jemima Brown, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, 2019. Metal, clothing, plastic, hair, and

acrylic on wax.

The figure's left hand morphs into the right hand of a smaller figure, which emerges

from a pile of tangled laundry in a plastic grey basket. A red, round, padding mask is

featured at the top of the small figure. In the laundry basket, there are clothes in plain

grey, olive green, pink stripe, navy blue and more.

Step 2: Reduction

In *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, the figure of the ironing board, along with the wig and light-brown/cream dressing gown, shows a likeness to a woman's figure (Figure 22). Looking closely at this woman's 'facial features' that are made up by the pits of the metal iron holder at the top, we could interpret this as connoting emptiness. The casual and relaxed dressing gown indicates the woman is in the domestic sphere instead of the public. Behind the woman's figure, there is a smaller figure that is likely to represent a child who emerges from a pile of tangled clothes in the laundry basket. These two figures are holding hands, symbolising a close connection between the mother and the child. The laundry in the basket can be interpreted as either waiting to be washed and ironed or having been newly washed.

The sinsigns (tokens) of this artwork, such as the ironing board, the clothes and the basket, are references to domestic labour. The plain, drab clothes in this artwork, along with the white grey background, imply dullness and function as a synecdoche of tedious housework and childcare. In addition, the housework and childcare are all handled by the woman, considering there is no trace of a husband/father figure. Therefore, all the semiotic objects discussed above point to a woman's role in domesticity. This artwork creates a scene from an ordinary everyday life, focusing on a mother and the housework and childcare that need to be done.

Figure 22 Jemima Brown, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, 2019 (detail).

Step 3: Interpretation

An initial step of interpretation would be to start with the title of this work. *Our Lady
of Perpetual Distraction* is a humorous title that refers to the long history of 'Our
Lady of …' in relation to women's roles in religious art. For example, *Our Lady of
Perpetual Help* is a Roman Catholic title of the Blessed Virgin Mary as represented in
a celebrated fifteenth century Byzantine icon (Figure 23). In this iconography, Mary
is represented as one who guides people to the Redeemer. It also highlights Mary's
role in the plan of salvation as our Mother.

Figure 23 Unknown Byzantine painter, *Our Lady of Perpetual Help*, the thirteenth or fourteenth century.

In the contemporary world, devoted Catholics, especially women, were inculcated with the belief that they should seek to navigate the temporal world through Mary (Kelly and Kelly 1998). Specifically, Catholic women were encouraged to emulate the attributes of Mary as a universal model of silence, passivity, self-sacrifice, and submissiveness and of women's social subordination (Holland 2006). This devotion reinforces the idea that the public and the domestic spheres are understood as gendered. From this perspective, women were 'naturally' more suited to domestic life than men because they had a 'natural' connection to virtue and self-sacrifice.

However, these notions of encouraging women to be self-sacrificial are both

dangerous and problematic because they assume that there is a universal feminine

identity bound to women's roles as wives or mothers (Hollow 2008). In this sense, the

title of this artwork implies an ordinary woman's role and her sacrifices for the family

by making a reference to the idolised figure of the Virgin Mary. The semiotic objects

that are investigated in the following paragraph also reinforce the idea of a gender

division of labour in the domestic sphere.

In *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction,* both the ironing board and the laundry are

significant semiotic objects (Figure 24). The ironing board is a common household

item and is symbolic to working-class and middle-class domestic life. It is a tool for

doing laundry, but becomes a gendered object only in certain relations. In the same

manner, a woman is a woman. But she becomes 'a wife, a mother, a chattel, or an

attachment' in certain relations (Rubin 1975:158). In the majority of heterosexual

families, there is a 'traditional gender division' of domestic labour where women take

responsibility for housework 'out of love' while their husbands work full time outside

the home (Pink 2007:163). In addition, women who are employed as full-time

workers are still responsible for significant amounts of unpaid domestic labour. This

phenomenon is known as women's second shift (Hochschild 1997). In heterosexual

families where both partners have paid jobs, women often spend more time than men

on household chores and caring work. Rubin (1975:159) calls this part of social life

the 'sex/gender system'. As Rubin explains, this is 'the set of arrangements by which a society transforms biological sexuality into products of human activity, and in which these transformed sexual needs are satisfied' (1975:159). The life scene in *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, shows the sex/gender arrangements of a woman as a domestic drudge in this reading, where the figure of a man is absent. In this way, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* relates women's social activities and domestic housework to the system of patriarchy, in which sex/gender has a central function.

Figure 24 Jemima Brown, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, 2019.

The issue of housework was first raised as a political issue in the context of the labour struggles of the early 1970s. Dalla Costa and James (Dalla Costa and James 1972; Mies 1998:120) point out that what a housewife produces in a family is not simply use-values, but the commodity of 'labour power', which the husband can then sell as a 'free' wage labourer in the labour market. Dalla Costa believes the productivity of the housewife is a presupposition for the productivity of the (male) wage labourer. Thus, the housewife and her labour are not excluded from the process of value production but constitute the very foundation of this process. Nevertheless, this kind of contribution is often overlooked and undervalued compared to other kinds of labour because of its 'voluntary' nature. When issues around housework are raised, they are not considered in the same way as paid employment. Given these discrepancies, Silvia Federici (2012:16) argues that housework is the most 'pervasive manipulation, and the subtlest violence that capitalism has ever perpetrated against any section of the working class'.

In both capitalist countries and socialist countries such as China (see Chapter 2.3 for a discussion of Britain and China's economic differences), housework and the family are the pillars of value production. Women's unwaged work is the same as the function they perform for capital (Federici and Cox 2012). In response to Marx's (1972:171) discussion of the 'historical and moral element' which determines that women rather than men do housework, Rubin (1975) argues that within this historical

and moral element, the entire domain of sex, sexuality and sex oppression is subsumed. The difference between housework and other jobs lies in the notion that not only has it been imposed on women without them being paid, but has also transformed into 'a natural attribute of the female physique and personality, an internal need, an aspiration' that supposedly comes from the depth of the female character (Federici 2012:16). *Our Lady of Perpetual Distractio*n, therefore, undermines this 'natural attribute' of the female characteristic and makes the 'natural' unfamiliar by connecting the notion of the Virgin Mary's self-dedication and the sex/gender system in contemporary society; and by representing this through an ironing board. Additionally, it exposes 'nature' as the genesis of women's oppression and social subordination in an ironic way through the artist's gaze.

In my interview with Jemima Brown, she stated that her work *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* illustrates 'a narrative of a stay-at-home mum surrounded by housework and childcare'; this stay-at-home mum might have other things to do but cannot concentrate. The domestic work, as indicated by the title, is perpetual. Taking laundry as an example, the laundry basket in *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* infers that the clothes in it were next to be washed, ironed, then folded, then worn, then inevitably stained, and returned to the wash cycle again. In this reading, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* is about time and decision-making – how do women manage their time and escape from the second shift of doing both domestic labour and paid labour?

Brown also explained in her interview that this work asks, 'how much of the time we are able to claim for ourselves, and what prevents us from claiming more?'. This is implicit in the sex/gender system as Rubin sees it: that is, the real difference between housework and other work is the persistent, repetitious quality of it. It is a perpetual cycle.

In *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, Brown responds to this gender division of labour. She stated in her interview that her work is 'not always flattery, sometimes, it could be quite savage towards its portrayal of some women'. Some might consider Brown's works to contribute to women's psychological distress through the negative and limiting ideas of being a woman. However, these people ignore the humour embedded in Brown's works. Her works might not always celebrate the beauty of women but sometimes reveal a cruel reality of the traditional division of gendered labour.

This particular work was a part of Brown's solo exhibition *The Great Indoors*. On one level, the title of Brown's exhibition *The Great Indoors* is contrary to 'The Great Outdoors'. In its common usage since the early nineteenth century in Britain, the phrase 'The Great Outdoors' suggests 'the epic sweep of the world beyond the four walls of our homes: mountains to scale, deep forests to get lost in, sunlit uplands

where we might wander free', according to the exhibition catalogue (Brown 2019).

'Indoors' might here be read as an ironic nod towards the smallest, trivial things in domestic life. In addition, the English (cockney) slang for a housewife is 'her/er indoors' (Brown 2019), which again, enforces the idea that women's role is that of wife and her place is in the domestic sphere.

As stated above, Brown's artistic practice or style is not about celebration. Brown explained in her interview that 'if anything manages to exist in the real world then it is always in some ways unsatisfactory'. That is to say, things are gradually fulfilling but are not satisfying in the end. Brown also believes that some of the objects in her artworks take time to 'cook for a while', which echoes with Rowena Harris's idea of artwork that 'slowly comes to reveal' itself. Brown told me that in the making of *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, she and the ironing board 'chose each other'; in other words, the ironing board and Brown had stayed together for a while before it became a part of Brown's artwork. Brown's description of her artistic practice in *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* echoes in this sense Bennett's (2010:2) concept of 'the force of things'. In Bennett's description, the active role of nonhuman materials, or what she calls 'thing-power', means that objects can have an active force, and thus the capacity to exceed their status as objects and to manifest traces of 'aliveness' (Bennett 2010:2). The found objects in *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*: the ironing board, wig,

dressing gown, and laundry, were vibrant things with a certain agency of their own

before becoming parts of an artwork.

I have reasoned in this analysis of *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* that this artwork

represents a gender division in domesticity where women are oppressed, with this

oppression represented through Brown's use of everyday objects. Similar to Brown,

the theme of domestic labour is also embodied in Chinese artist Tao Aimin's

installation work *Women's River*. In the analysis below, I provide a way of reading

this artwork through my three-step semiotic method and discuss how the artist uses

washboards as her medium to communicate and share empathy with Chinese women

in relation to domestic labour.

5.3 Tao Aimin, *Women's River*

Step 1: Description

Tao Aimin's *Women's River* (Figure 25) is a large-scale installation work that

comprises of 56 wooden washboards. On the surface of each washboard there is

elderly women's portrait painted with ink. The ridges of these washboards have been

rubbed smooth. They are arranged in four rows and hang juxtaposed from the ceiling

by transparent nylon lines. Silk is placed on the floor under the washboards. A blue

light is projected onto these washboards from above and creates ripple effects on the

silk. There is also background noise of a washing machine at the site of this

installation work.

Figure 25 Tao Aimin, *Women's River*, 2005. Used washboards, fishing line, silk and water light.

Step 2: Reduction

In *Women's River*, the well-worn washboards are both the main body and

fundamental semiotic objects. After the invention of washing machines in the early

twentieth century, washboards gradually fell out of use in urban areas in China.

However, in some rural areas where technology is less developed, washboards are still functioning as a main and common household tool. They are mostly used by women in doing laundry; these women usually wash clothes by rivers in their neighbourhoods.

Given the dominance of the washing machine, the washboard acts as a sinsign (token) of the washed relic and a witness of history as they are not new, having taken their form through the duration of time and use. In collecting the used washboards from these women, Tao also took photographs of them and recorded the stories that emerged when the women spoke about the washboards. Later, when Tao came back to her studio, she painted these women's portraits with ink on their washboards. Each painting represents the woman who owned it. Tao told me in her interview that many of these women in rural societies were illiterate housewives who possessed no visual records of themselves. These portraits on the washboards are in a sense these rural women's only visual record. Additionally, they act as an iconic sign of the existence of their owner and as an indexical sign of a cultural memory of Chinese rural women. The smoothed ridges on the washboards record the traces of domestic labour and indicate both the age of washboards and the wrinkles of their owners. The background noise of the washing machine in *Women's River* deliberately create a sense of disharmony from what we see and indicates the modernisation process in China.

The arrangement of the semiotic objects in this work perform as an iconic sign of a

flowing river as rural Chinese women do laundry together by the river (Figure 26).

This phenomenon of Chinese women washing clothes together by rivers in rural areas

is in contrast to the isolation of housewives in Western suburban culture. Therefore, in

the Chinese context, the flowing river is a testimony of time, as well as a testimony of

the historical and cultural phenomena of rural Chinese women. These worn

washboards are an obvious agent of communication in telling these women's stories.

Figure 26 Tao Aimin, *Women's River*, 2005.

Step 3. Interpretation

In order to explore the meanings carried by the semiotic objects identified in the

above step and the process of making this installation work, I will start my

interpretation from the title of this artwork. The title *Women's River* is fairly

straightforward and functions as a linguistic double meaning. On the one hand, it shows a likeness of the arrangement of washboards in this work; and on the other hand, Chinese culture and language uses the river to describe a long history. *Women's River* thus pictures the history of Chinese rural women and records the lifetime of labour of their owners through washboards.

In *Women's River,* 56 wooden washboards were collected by Tao in person from Chinese rural families in Hunan Province. Tao (2013) expressed in an interview that the process of collecting is similar to undertaking a performance piece. In the collecting process, Tao and the owners established an emotional connection so that she was able to understand their stories. Tao (2013) recalled that since nobody had ever collected their used washboards before, 'the typical reaction of these washboard owners (rural women) was surprise'. This is because nowadays, washboards are rarely used in China since most families have a washing machine. However, these women still fondly remember washing clothes with washboards and some of them still used them as Tao (2013) noted, perhaps in the belief that hand washing was cleaner. Tao usually bought the used washboards or swapped them for new ones, which these women were generally very happy to do. Through the process of collecting washboards, Tao took photographs and asked the owners questions about themselves and their washboards, such as how long they had used them and who they had washed

clothes for. These women were very supportive as Tao recalled, some of them even gave Tao washboards for free.

When Tao returned to her studio, she painted the owner's portraits on the collected washboards with ink (Figure 27). The ink technique Tao used in painting these women's portrait is also a significant semiotic object. In Imperial China, there was a traditional activity named 'Yaji 雅集' where usually all-male scholars gathered together to play chess, listen to music, and appreciate ink painting and calligraphy. The ink painting of the rural women, therefore, challenges a gendered historical narrative where women were absent from the literati ink tradition through the characters of illiterate housewives. In doing so, Tao parallels the linguistic creativity of rural women living in Confucian-agrarian communities in remote Hunan Province in the past (Guest 2018). Additionally, the idea of painting women's portraits on the washboards came from 'the sense of history in their wrinkled, time-worn faces' (Tao 2013). As Tao drew each woman's portrait on the worn washboards, their wrinkles coincided with the ridges of the washboards. In her interview, Tao told me that other objects used for laundry in the past, such as wringers or bowls 'cannot express the sense of time as effectively as a washboard, which clearly shows the trace of time with its rubbed surface'. Besides, because everyone rubs in different ways, the washboards appear to be palimpsests, showing individualised surfaces and appearances, which represent the individual women. Therefore, each piece of the

washboard becomes a metaphor for the length of a woman's life experience; each

piece of the washboard turns into a mark of the time a woman dedicated to domestic

labour.

Figure 27 Tao Aimin, *Women's River*, 2005 (detail).

The washboards have symbolic meanings as the fundamental semiotic objects in

Women's River. As a laundry tool, the description of the washboard first appeared in

Tang poetry in China (Tang Dynasty AD 618-907) and were mostly used by the

woman in a family. However, it is difficult to determine when the washboard was

invented due to the lack of historical records from that period. Through these washboards, Tao recorded the vast number of nameless women and the value of their domestic labour in everyday life that has always been forgotten and neglected by history. The old washboards are not only a symbol of women's labour but also their history of 'suffering' and 'her family role and status' (Tan 2017:29).

Historically, in traditional Chinese agricultural society, especially under the doctrine of Confucianism, women were responsible for most of the domestic work and therefore spent most of their lives staying at home, while the men worked outside to earn the family income (Tan 2017). It is similar to the notion that Catholic women were encouraged to emulate the self-sacrifice the attributed to the Virgin Mary represented in Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*. This gender segregation was most common in exploited and lower-class families before the industrial age in China, and still exists today in some rural and suburban families (McLaren 2004). In the late 1950s, Mao Zedong stated explicitly that the solution to reduce women's domestic labour did not lie in the mechanisation of household chores: 'to liberate women is not to manufacture washing machines' (Malraux 1970:463). Mao rationalised that China had 'neither the resources nor the inclination to go in for a range of household gadgetry' (Croll 1985:113). Therefore, for many years, poorer rural families (where domestic demands were the heaviest) were the least likely to be in a position to purchase appliances such as washing machines. In other words, the

largest burden of domestic labour was (and still is) on the shoulders of rural women. Women could do a better job outside the home if they had no domestic responsibilities, which are still conceived of as 'extraneous worries' that are outside the mainstream of social, political, and economic life.

The present leadership in China has recognised that if women are to increase their contribution to production and to a modernisation programme, then the domestic demands on their labour must be reduced (Croll 1985). I argue that it is the responsibility of the Chinese government and the Women's Federation to be concerned with the difficulties of women in doing household chores and to help solve these problems, so that women can concentrate their efforts in the workforce. Therefore, *Women's River* not only recalls the past memories of rural women's lifetime labour, but also invokes more attention for rural women more generally.

Chinese critic Tong Yujie (2015) describes the instrumental nature of the washboards as signifying female bodies. It also connects with Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* in which the ironing board is turned into a female body. In Tong's words, the washboards in *Women's River* show these rural women's low, even embarrassing cultural status in history. Thus, in *Women's River* Tao seeks to discover the bitter side of Chinese women's culture. Tao told me in her interview that she treats her

artmaking as storytelling, a journey of one woman looking out for other women's lives and experiences. The process of collecting the washboards was to collect the stories that imbued them, and to memorialise the oral history of Chinese women. Tao thinks that as a woman artist, she naturally focuses more on women as we share a kind of sympathy and understanding. In addition, Tao believes that whether male or female, the artwork is actually about the 'human and anthropology'. In other words, the possibility of bringing the ordinary life stories of 'invisible' people into artwork elicits a dual role for Tao: artist and anthropologist (Cui 2016).

As an anthropologist, Tao collected women's stories through fieldwork where her ethnographic subjects were the ordinary women with washboards that she observed and represented. As an artist, Tao took the materials she collected as the subject for the construction of an installation work. In *Women's River*, the washboards become the agents of Tao's artistic creation. In her artmaking, Tao experimented with the boundaries between anthropology and art, between women's experience and representation. According to Guest (2018), Tao developed a gendered visual language in which the ink paintings of the rural women and the washboards emphasis embodied female experiences of domestic labour in a poetic manner. In drawing upon rural women's gendered experience, Tao not only made the invisible history of these rural women visible, but also highlighted the exclusion of women from the 'Yaji' activities in ancient China. Through *Women's River*, Tao aligns herself with those rural women

who have been relegated to the margins, 'an alternate literati' (Guest 2018:180). The integration of visual language and anthropology carries significant meanings in which *Women's River* inscribes into historiography and women's subjugated histories: the identity of an ordinary woman with no historical trace except a well-worn washboard. Through recording the women and their lived evidences in her artworks, Tao wants to give people more opportunities to see and understand the objects and people of the past, and to elevate these washboards into the realm of history and culture (Tao 2013).

In the analysis above, I have examined Tao Aimin's *Women's River* in which the washboards take ordinary women as the central subject and bring the history of Chinese women's domestic labour into the discipline of visual art. Similar to Tao's representation of the memories and experiences of Chinese rural women, Gao Rong records the life scene of a woman in urban area through her artistic creation that emerges from her surroundings and impressions of the world.

5.4 Gao Rong, *Guangzhou Station: Things in the Bag*

Step 1: Description

Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag is an installation piece that is composed of a luxury bag with a pack of washing powder inside it (Figure 28). Looking more closely however, reveals that the washing powder package is actually made by needlework.

The package is half placed inside the bag and half uncovered. It can be observed from the exposed top half that the washing powder is in blue and red packing. Some texts, such as '2.8 千克' (2.8 Kilogram) and '8 折装' (20 Percent Off) that are stitched onto the upper right corner of the package in Chinese characters. On the left side, '多次洗涤依然洁净如新' (As Clean As New After Repeated Washing, '新升级' (New Upgrade) and a folded white shirt pattern are embroidered onto the package.

Figure 28 Gao Rong, *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, 2013. Copy bag, cloth, embroidery and sponge.

The luxury handbag is a found object, an actual commodity that the artist collected. This handbag is small in size and the design looks like a women's bag. It is in beige and white, featuring the Louis Vuitton monogram on the surface. However, the handbag is likely to be a counterfeit because it looks of low quality and the stitching

is raggedy (Figure 29). In addition, a black rectangle tag is tied to the gold coloured

hardware of the handle and embroidered with '广州站 8 号' (Guangzhou Station No.

8).

Figure 29 Gao Rong, *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, 2013 (detail).

Step 2: Reduction

Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag consists of two main semiotic objects: a pack

of washing powder and a luxury replica handbag. It is also the combination of a

handicraft and a found object (commodity). The first semiotic object is the washing

powder package. Although the package is handmade embroidery, it is hard to

distinguish from a real product without a close and careful observation. The

embroidered washing powder is iconic to a real commodity. There are texts stitched

onto the upper half of the washing powder package exposed from the bag, such as

'2.8 千克' and '8 折装' (Figure 30). These texts suggest first, that it is a large pack of

washing powder; second, that this 'product' can be purchased with a discount; and

third, that this washing powder is a great product and produces a clean result.

Therefore, this washing powder is made to represent a bargain product of great value.

Figure 30 Gao Rong, *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag,* 2013 (detail).

The second semiotic object, a replica Louis Vuitton handbag, is a found object and

functions as a sinsign (token) of certain phenomenon, such of the trend of selling and

buying luxury replica goods. The handbag has imitated the logo monogram of Louis

Vuitton on its surface, however, it looks poor quality because of its raggedy stitches

and poor hardware. This inferior Louis Vuitton handbag is likely to cost significantly

less than a genuine Louis Vuitton handbag. The target consumers of such fake bags

include those with lower incomes who are unable to afford authentic luxury bags; and

those with less interest in fashion who are therefore not willing to purchase luxury

bags (Yang 2016).

The black tag tied to the bag handle is another semiotic object. It bears only a text of

'Guangzhou Station No. 8', which indicates the place of origin or the place of trading

such goods. There is missing information such as price, material, category, dealer

information, maintenance methods, or certificate. It can be understood that either the

seller is unable to provide this information or there is no information about the

product at all. Moreover, there is an unspoken rule about the origin of such counterfeit

products between the seller and the consumer, because selling counterfeit goods is

illegal in many countries, including the UK and China.

The artwork implies that carrying such counterfeit bags is a common phenomenon in

Guangzhou Station. Guangzhou is the capital city of Guangdong Province (formerly

Canton). It is also one of the most densely populated cities in China, after Beijing,

Shanghai, and Tianjin. As one of the main railway hubs in China, Guangzhou Station

is a site where people from different places gather. Additionally, more than 60% of

the population of Guangzhou are permanent or temporary domestic migrant workers.

That is to say, Guangzhou station is a necessary place of transit for Chinese migrant

workers when they enter the city or return home. It is also a popular site where vendors set up stalls for selling counterfeit products to migrant workers who are waiting for trains or meeting up with others.

If we look at the semiotic objects as a whole, *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* could be interpreted as narrating a potential story about a migrant worker who is carrying a replica Louis Vuitton handbag with a large pack of washing powder inside and is departing from Guangzhou Station or has just arrived. The next section provides a more comprehensive and diverse analysis of these semiotic objects.

Step 3. Interpretation

Gao's artwork is entitled *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* which emphasises that the location is an important element of this artwork. Guangzhou is a port city northwest of Hong Kong and Macao on the Pearl River. As mentioned above, the population of domestic migrant workers in 2009 constituted more than half of the city's total population. Additionally, it has become one of the most populated cities in China, following Beijing, Shanghai, and Tianjin.

Guangzhou, as a city with a large number of migrants, has high capacity and high-level transportation systems. Consequently, Guangzhou Station is one of the most important transportation hubs for migrant workers to travel to and from work. The concept of domestic migrant workers in Chinese culture is different to how migration is understood in a Western context. I explore this below in relation to the Hukou 户口 (Household Registration System) in China.

Migrant workers have been the engine of China's spectacular economic growth over the last 30 years. A large number of migrant workers hold a rural Hukou; that is to say, they are employed in an urban workplace but reside in a rural area. The current system of Hukou was formally introduced by the Communist government in 1958 and was designed to facilitate three main programmes: government welfare and resource distribution, internal migration control and criminal surveillance (China Labour Bulletin 2019). Each town and city issued its own domestic Hukou, which gave residents access to social welfare services in that jurisdiction. Migrant workers who hold a rural Hukou face different costs of living in cities and have different access to government-provided public services and social welfare services in urban areas. This means that migrants with rural and non-local Hukou who work in the cities like Guangzhou have no or little access to welfare services provided by the local city governments. The vast majority of these migrant workers are employed in low-paid

jobs, such as in manufacturing, construction and service industries, which means they remain marginalised and subject to institutionalised discrimination (Song 2014).

According to her interview, *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* is a scene that Gao Rong observed in Guangzhou Station. Gao told me that she enjoys observing her surroundings and expressing it in artistic ways. *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* was thus created and inspired by, in her words, 'the phenomenon of selling and using counterfeit luxury goods'. Gao explained that it is common practice to sell and buy replica luxury bags in Guangzhou Station. That is to say, the counterfeit market makes a profit in such places. The Louis Vuitton handbag in *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* is a reproduction of an authentic Louis Vuitton handbag, and according to Gao, it would have been purchased in a wholesale market near Guangzhou Station. The existence of this counterfeit handbag, among other things, represents the absence of an original Louis Vuitton handbag. The representation of an authentic luxury goods and their replicas can be interpreted with reference to Walter Benjamin's concept of 'aura'. For Benjamin (1935), the value of a work of art is related to its originality and its uniqueness, that is, its aura; whereas its replica, no matter how accurate, begins to lose its aura. In addition, precisely because the presence of the original is the prerequisite of the concept of authenticity, and authenticity is not reproducible, 'the intensive penetration of certain processes of

reproduction was instrumental in differentiating and grading authenticity' (Benjamin 1935:20).

In the same manner, the trade in counterfeit luxury goods is an instance of the decay of aura. This is because the quality of a luxury goods 'is not just the result of their material characteristics, but also of the allure and prestigious image which bestows on them an aura of luxury' (Kovesi 2016:116). Since luxury goods are high-class goods, the aura of luxury emanating from them is essential in that it enables consumers to distinguish them from similar goods (Kovesi 2016), and vice versa. This aura of luxury thus differentiates the consumers of counterfeit goods from the consumers of luxury goods. In *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, the consumer of the counterfeit Louis Vuitton handbag is excluded from a high social status. The artist thus depicts the consumer's image implicitly through the raggedy counterfeit Louis Vuitton handbag. In addition, in the artmaking of *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, the absence of aura is also presented for the producer of the counterfeit through a craft that is not quite an art. Women's embroidery also suffers this absence of 'aura' that would make it an authentic work of art (a discussion on women's embroidery/needlework and craft culture will be addressed later in the text).

For Yang (2016), lower-priced and counterfeit goods will continue to have a place in the retail market in China because of the income disparity across China's diverse population, such as urban elites versus migrant workers. The acquisition of high-status brands creates an image of wealth and social class. They are moreover aspirational. However, not all potential consumers are able or willing to spend money on such brands. Therefore, replica goods become these consumers' alternative option. This group of consumers are 'wanting to identify with the halo associated with [a] prestige brand', as well as wanting to be seen as belonging to that consumer group, thus they acquire these replica goods in an attempt to be accepted as equals by significant and affluent others (Perez, Castano, and Quintanilla 2010:219). In doing so, these consumers (re)construct their identities through the consumption of counterfeit luxury goods. Chan (2008: 325) believes the consumer uses 'public symbolic goods to express their location within the social hierarchy'. By purchasing and using a replica luxury bag, the consumer is seeking to optimise their resources. In doing so, they benefit from the emotional gain derived from knowing that maximum value could be achieved within their affordability (Perez, Castano, and Quintanilla 2010:227). In addition, the counterfeit-consumer's self-esteem is enhanced by viewing themselves as smart decision makers and being accepted by significant others (Martinez and Jaeger 2016).

In *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, the owner of the counterfeit Louis Vuitton handbag, as imagined by Gao, is therefore likely to be a lower-income female migrant worker who is unable to afford such luxury bags. We could interpret that she has purchased the counterfeit bag to improve her self-esteem and attempt to be accepted by the urban residents.

The washing powder is another important semiotic object in *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*. As an indispensable element when doing laundry, washing powder connects to the idea of domestic work, cleanliness and women's work (Orr 2001; Gamman and O'Mara 2001), as discussed earlier in this chapter. In *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, the slogans and texts on the package of the washing powder imply it is a bargain – with a reasonable price for lower-income groups. However, someone carrying a fake fashion bag with a large pack of washing powder inside it in a railway station of a major city is not so common. The combination of a big city station, a pack of cheap washing powder, and a fake fashion bag projects the characteristic of the person Gao observed – a smart decision maker who has some knowledge of fashion but calculates to plan carefully for every expense. *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* makes one think about the lives of the migrant women workers who collect such counterfeit bags as testimony of their success and stylish taste, but they are also a reminder of the 'factory girls' who make them (Guest 2013).

The washing powder is hand-embroidered by the artist. It shows a clear link with craft culture and domestic labour that relate to gender roles (Liu 2019). Craft art or handmade objects are imbued with touch and offer a connection to the maker through their technique and 'learning apparent in their construction and they demonstrate time spent in a way in which other objects cannot' (Turney 2009:80). Gao Rong's embroidered washing powder, therefore, is marked by its unique or singular existence in the world. In this sense, observing this embroidered object represents more than just inviting an audience to see it. Gao describes embroidery as a principally tactile medium with the capacity to produce a felt affinity with the audience (Liu 2019:24). The audience is therefore encouraged to be an active cocreator of meaning by observing and exploring the relationships within the object. In other words, the handmade object signifies a vibrant materiality that lies in the process of making (Luckman 2015). Opposed to mass-produced commodities, handmade objects remind us of the defining qualities of human, our capacity to work with and upon materials. As Luckman (2015:82) posits, the process of making 'reminds us of our agency within the physical world'. Hand-embroidery, by way of both the physical motion of stitching and its traditional associated with clothing, connotes a bodily act (Liu 2019). Gao's embroidered object thus bears traces of the material and the time that have gone into its creation.

The embroidery technique Gao uses is also a crucial sign in relation to the gender division in domesticity. Historically, social and economic forces have categorised embroidery as 'a feminine, domestic art and finally as almost a secondary female sexual characteristic' (Parker 1984:60). It is an 'inherited' skill because in traditional families, from the Renaissance onwards in Europe and the Han Dynasty in China, mothers taught their daughters how to spin and sew, and how to be virtuous and obedient. It is also a symbol for women's textual production – their agency of narratives (Frye 2010). As Gao told me in her interview, this embroidery technique was learned from her mother and her mother learned it from her grandmother.

With the arrival of industrial development in both Britain and China, the majority of workers who left home to work in factories were men, thus it was men who 'gradually change[d] their basic way of life, they moved from open spaces to closed-in rooms, from loose seasonal time to fixed industrial time' (Hochschild 1997:240). As a result of a gendered industrialisation that presumed the male experience of a shifting pattern, women's paid labour has been distorted both inside and outside the home (Allen and Wolkowitz 1987). The majority of women were rarely either exclusively housewives or paid labourers, but combined both kinds of work. Consequently, for many women, their lives and labour remained centred on home. This gender division of men doing paid work outside home came to 'seem exciting', while women doing unpaid work in the domestic realm seemed 'dull' (Hochschild 1997:242). Moreover,

the debate on the value of craft also suggests gender division in relation to it as an art form.

There is an important connection between the hierarchy of art and craft, and gender division. In the hierarchy of art forms, painting and sculpture are valued as an expression of the individuality of the artists, while craft is placed lower in the artistic hierarchical classification because it has been 'a collective effort associated with workers lower on the social scale than aspiring painters' (Parker 1984:81). For women who are doing artistic craft, this meant that their work did not allow them to express a powerful artistic personality, but a culturally transmitted feminine presence or nature. This art and craft hierarchy indicates an unequal position between artworks made by thread and artwork made with paint and marble. However, the real difference between art and craft lies in the person who makes the artwork and where the artwork is made. To reject this stereotype of craft as non-art and worthless was to 'run the risk of appearing to disparage other women, or to endorse the stereotypical view of art propounded by a male-dominated society' (Parker 1984:7). Crafts such as embroidery signify both a state of mind and self-experience. It can also lead women to an awareness of, in Parker's (1984:11) words, 'the extraordinary constraints of femininity, providing at times a means of negotiating them, and at other times provoking the desire to escape the constraints'.

For Gao Rong, embroidery is a significant technique and language in her artistic practice. In her interview, Gao told me that she was much influenced by her grandmother and traditional Chinese embroidery, including its history and categories of embroidery. She figured the best way for her to express her artistic creation was to 'use the language of embroidery as a reference instead of emphasising the embroidery skill itself'. Therefore, for Gao, employing embroidery as a principally tactile medium 'allows the audience to focus more on the spiritual level of the work, and also the relationship between material and me'.

Jin (2013) describes Gao's artworks as the perfect combination of traditional craftsmanship and contemporary concepts. Gao's use of embroidery as her approach to create art is not only beyond the traditional function of embroidery as decorations, but also offers as a reference to redefine the tradition. Gao is also conscious that her work could be considered as 'typical feminine art'. Moreover, needlework could be a very feminine way of creating, especially as, in Gao's words, 'a symbol of the bondage to women by patriarchy'. However, such arguments do not restrict Gao's artistic creation. Similar to Parker, Gao also believes embroidery can empower women and that it makes her artwork powerful; besides, she feels there is 'a kind of sensitive and ingenious art' in imitating everyday scenes. In her artistic practice, Gao creates a visual experience for the audience that is between the authentic and

inauthentic – what the audience expects to see and what they really feel about the

artwork (akin to Rowena Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame* discussed in Chapter 4.2).

In the above steps, I have discussed the semiotic objects in *Guangzhou Station –*

Things in the Bag, as well as one of many scenes of a female migrant worker's life

and her characteristics as depicted by these semiotic objects. In *Guangzhou Station –*

Things in the Bag, Gao Rong created a contrast between authentic and inauthentic,

mass-produced commodity and handmade craft through a combination of found

object and handmade embroidery. Moreover, this artwork provides a chance to

recalibrate the tradition of regarding embroidery as 'a feminine activity' and craft as

'a lower art form' that is mostly made by women.

5.5 Touchpoints

These three artworks: Jemima Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distractio*n, Tao

Aimin's *Women's River*, and Gao Rong's *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* that

have been discussed above indicate touchpoints among women artists in the UK and

China in relation to gender division within domesticity. I discuss these touchpoints

below.

First, these artworks all identify vibrant objects, that is, the materiality of everyday objects. The analysis in this chapter has highlighted the found or handmade objects, such as the ironing board, washboard, washing powder, and copy bag, as vibrant things with a certain effectiveness of their own. As Bennett (2010: xvi) puts, there is 'a perhaps small but irreducible degree of independence from the words, images and feelings' that these objects provoke in us.

The meaning of the found or handmade objects in the three artworks introduced in this chapter seem taken for granted, as they are everyday objects that we have either heard of or used. Besides, the isolation of object and life encourage us to ignore the vibrance of objects and the lively powers of material formations (Bennett 2010). In Jemima Brown's *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, the ironing board itself acts as a quasi-agent of force with trajectory, propensity or tendency (Bennett 2010). The ironing board has the ability to stimulate emotions. It provides us with a context for the narrative by signifying domestic labour in working-class and middle-class families and also connects with women's roles in domesticity. In this sense, the existence of the ironing board is not directly related to the artist as owner but its own vitality. In addition, according to Brown in her interview, the object and the meaning of the object are tied up with each other; they are not mutually exclusive. As Barad (2007) puts it, objects and meanings (subjects) are not separate elements. Therefore,

the ironing board becomes art through Brown's mediating; Brown exploits the symbiosis between object and human.

While *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* depicts a scene of a woman's domestic labour from Brown's perspective, *Women's River* gives voice to a group of women's shared memories and experiences. Similar to the ironing board in *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction,* the washboard in *Women's River* is a significant sign of women's domestic labour. These worn out washboards in *Women's River* were used by rural women in Hunan, China, and therefore, are acting as the testimony of time.

Additionally, Tao's collection of the stories of the used washboards provides layers to the understanding of this piece of artwork. These well-worn washboards represent their owners' lifetime. Tao said in her interview that rural women spent their whole life washing clothes (and doing other domestic work for the family) that their bodies were confined to domestic spaces. The artist drew each woman's portrait on the used washboards, as noted above, shows the marks or imprints of time. Each washboard Tao collected represents the labour of a lifetime of a particular woman in Hunan. These washboards and women constitute a collective participation in everyday activities.

Corresponding to *Women's River*, Gao Rong's *Guangzhou Station* also witnesses the lives of a particular group of people. The counterfeit bag is a found object that itself connects with a consumer culture, as well as the value judgments of the consumers. Selling and buying such counterfeit luxury goods is a common phenomenon in places such as Guangzhou Station. The washing powder placed inside the copy bag also shows a clear link to domestic labour. Moreover, the washing powder is not a mass-produced commodity; rather, it is a unique object embroidered by the artist. The counterfeit handbag and the embroidered washing powder, two seemingly irrelevant objects, however, create an absurd scene when placed together in this context: a female migrant worker (factory girl) who is waiting for trains or meeting up with others in Guangzhou Station.

A second touchpoint in these artworks is the concept of time, specifically, a temporal inequality of women. This inequality is reflected in the domestic sphere mediated through the being of the objects. Gary Becker's theory of specialisation suggests that there is an underlying gender inequity in leisure (1985). According to Hochschild, Schor, and Wajcman, women are suffering from time poverty (Hochschild 1997; Schor 1991; Wajcman 2015). That is, although men and women have similar quantities of free time, women bear a 'dual burden' or 'second shift' as both family providers and family carers (Bittman and Wajcman 2000, 165). Thus, the concept of (free) time is considered a re-emerging gap between genders. Because of this dual

213

burden, women add a shift of paid employment to their existing responsibilities for domestic labour.

Women's 'specialised responsibility' for domestic labour suggests that women's experience of time is fundamentally different from men's (Bittman and Wajcman 2000). According to Gregg and Kneese (2020), the development of clock time as a social function is closely linked to the industrial organisation of labour. Since men 'specialise' in paid employment in workplace, their subjective lives are controlled by linear clock time (Bittman and Wajcman 2000). Women's time, on the other hand, has been argued as predominantly cyclical or task oriented (Adam 1995; Kristeva 1981). Women's work usually involves coordinating multiple tasks, thus women need 'sequencing and prioritizing of certain times' (Adam 1995:95). It implicates that women's experience of free time is distinctive and is difficult to disconnect from multiple, overlapping tasks. The crucial issue of a gender gap in free time is not just that women may have less primary free time, but that women's free time may be qualitatively 'less free' than men's (Deem 1988; Bittman and Wajcman 2000).

Perhaps *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* has expressed the above argument of women's time poverty from its title. The distraction of women's time is perpetual, the housework and childcare seem endless. *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* focuses on

the female character (and the child), but there is no sign of the other member – the man in a heterosexual family. The only companion of the woman is the child, who doubles as the laundry supply. That is to say, the child, ironing board, and laundry supply are the witnesses of this woman's time spent on the endless domestic work and childcare. Additionally, research shows domestic technology rarely reduces women's unpaid working time and even produces as increase in domestic labour with the development of domestic appliances (Bittman, Rice, and Wajcman 2004). Bittman, Rice, and Wajcman's research (2004) suggests that the use of domestic appliances raises the standards of a greater quantity or quality of domestic production, for example, using an ironing board or washing machine is expected to bring tidier and cleaner laundry. Namely, domestic appliances are used to increase output rather than reduce labour time, especially in working-class and lower middle-class families. Therefore, domestic appliances tend to reinforce rather than undermine the obdurate sex-segregation of domestic tasks, and it tends to be men who are the beneficiaries.

Similarly, *Women's River* also records women's time that spent on domestic work and their dedication to the family. Again, the image of the male member in the family is absent in *Women's River.* The washboards in this work connect a specific group of women's experiences and memories. They are culturally constructed to consolidate the possession of past events associated with their ownership (Rowlands 1993). These washboards are collected and displayed by the artist to be talked about and to recall

the memories and times associated with their lifespan. The washboards therefore link the past, present, and future through their materiality. In addition, these washboards carry memories and times because unlike brand new commodities, they have been used and worn out. Each piece of the washboard has its unique imprint on the surface depending on how the owner rubbed it and washed clothes with it. The artist also painted the portrait of the owner on each washboard. These washboards with ingrained women's portraits show the marks of time, the length of these woman's lived experience and labour.

Women's River shows a scene of Chinese women's everyday lives from which we observe the decades of time that these women spent on washing clothes. What we do not know and what has not been shown is the time they would have spent on other domestic work for their families, and the time they spent on themselves, if any. In the same manner, Gao Rong's *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* also records women's time but through the process of making this artwork – the time-consuming embroidery technique. Gao's choice of medium exists at the intersection of reproduction and domesticity that relates to gender divisions. Embroidery has long been considered as a 'typical feminine' technique. It is suggested that embroidery as well as other handicraft-making is 'conceptualised and explained as a type of activity that offered comfort and cultivated feminine virtues, while also preparing women for their future role as mothers' (Yamasaki 2012:259). Moreover, as home-based labour,

embroidery is widely portrayed as an unpaid leisure-time activity (Wilkinson-Weber 2004), a time-consuming activity that women largely participate in. This argument again reinforces the idea that women have less free time than men. According to Nancy Fraser (1997), an important dimension of gender equity concerns the distribution of leisure time. This echoes with Bittman and Wajcman's (2000) analysis that there continue to be a gender gap in leisure. Unpaid work, especially housework and childcare continue to be 'women's work'; meaning families still exhibit a pattern of specialisation on the basis of gender.

In this chapter, three pieces of artwork: *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction, Women's River*, and *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, were discussed and interpreted in relation to domesticity. In representing the gender division in the domestic sphere, artists Jemima Brown, Tao Aimin and Gao Rong mediate their own or other women's experiences through found and handmade objects. These objects have become testimony to an individual woman or a group of women's time and memories in domesticity. Through the discussion of domestic labour, these three artworks also bring to light gender relations in the use of time. In the interview with Jemima Brown, she asked the question of 'how much of the time we (women) are able to claim for ourselves, and what prevents us from claiming more?' I can only wonder that if domestic work was shared relatively equally, would we (women) be able to claim as much time as possible for ourselves in line with our preference?

The following chapter will introduce a further two artworks. These artworks are associated with the themes of reproduction, in which artists Lana Locke and Jiang Jie create works that reflect on life and death, and women's reproductive rights in the heterosexual relationships.

Chapter 6   Reproduction

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I look into two pieces of artwork: Jiang Jie's *They Know Who They Are* and Lana Locke's *Untitled*. The theme of reproduction is common between these two artworks. It is also a theme that has been at the core of feminist and women's movements in terms of women's human rights and body politics (Neyer and Bernardi 2011). Jiang and Locke's artworks discussed in this chapter investigate the entanglement of organisms, the potential of birth as well as the vulnerability of life through reproduction.

This chapter introduces one reading of each artwork and identifies the touchpoints in them through a phenomenological semiotic method. In the first section of the analysis, I focus on Jiang Jie's *They Know Who They Are.* In making meaning of the semiotic objects in this artwork, I pay particular attention to the entanglement of lives between different species. In the second section, I analyse Lana Locke's *Untitled*. Locke uses objects to represent heterosexual responsibility and the mutual effects between the maternal body and the foetus/infant.

Looking at Jiang's *They Know Who They Are* and Locke's *Untitled* together, a key semiotic object is the figure of the foetus/infant. Both artworks indicate the vulnerability of small lives through the artists' arrangements and use of materials. Additionally, both artworks illustrate the entanglement of human and non-human others, and the connection and separation of the foetus/infant and its 'home' – the (indivisible) maternal body. Considering the different social and cultural contexts in China and Britain, Jiang and Locke also reflected their own cultures and their impressions about life and women's body in relation to reproduction in their artworks.

6.2 Jiang Jie, *They Know Who They Are*

Step 1. Description

Jiang Jie's artwork has been translated into English as *They Know Who They Are* in *Gendered Bodies: Towards A Women's Visual Art in Contemporary China* (Cui 2015) and *They Know Their Identities* in the Central Academy of Fine Art's website. Considering of the interpretation of this artwork in relation to Wisława Szymborska's poem, which, according to the artist, was the inspiration behind the piece,[5] and the existence of humans and non-humans, *They Know Who They Are* is the more appropriated and will be used throughout this study. *They Know Who They Are* (Figure 31) is a large-scale installation/sculpture presenting a chaotic amalgamation

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[5] There are further issues with translation in this, since the original poem was written in Polish, and so has been translated from Polish to English, then from English to Chinese, and, for the purpose of this thesis, back to English.

of foetus/infant figures, including humans, cattle, horses, pigs, rabbits, and other

animals piled up on dried hay. These foetuses/infants are made of pale pink silica gel,

which makes them look tacky and sticky. All the figures are similar in colour and size

to real foetuses. They are mixed together on the pile of hay making it difficult to

distinguish their species at first glance in the exhibition hall.

Figure 31 Jiang Jie, *They Know Who They Are*, 2007. Silica gel, gauze, and dried hay.

Step 2. Reduction

The foetus/infant figures are the most significant semiotic objects in *They Know Who*

They Are (Figure 32). These figures are placed in a haphazard and crowded way on

the hay. As such, it is difficult to determine whether they are alive or dead, or existing

somewhere in-between. The figures are made of silica gel with a soft and smooth

surface, which is similar to the texture of human/animal skin. In this way, these

figures are both iconic and indexical to simulate lives that (once) existed or never

existed in the world.

Figure 32 Jiang Jie, *They Know Who They Are*, 2007 (detail).

The dried hay is another important semiotic object in this artwork. Dried hay is a

farming and nesting material used when mammals are giving birth, but it is not used

for humans in real life.[6] In this work, these figures of mammals and humans are

discarded on the hay together randomly, which indicates an equal disposability

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[6] Despite the fact that in Christian tradition, baby Jesus was born in a manger. Thus, nativity scenes usually depict a newborn human lying on the hay. However, considering the proportion of Christians in China (2.71% in 2018) and the researcher and artist's background, this reading will not be emphasised in this analysis. I do not consider it as a limitation of interpretation, but a different focus from my perspective.

between different species as they are placed in the same space and are treated the same way.

The sinsigns (tokens) in this artwork include the way both the foetus/infant figures and dried hay, both referring to the beginning of life as equal and chaotic. Taking all the semiotic objects together, this artwork indicates, first, the vulnerability of life, particularly of foetuses/infants; and second, an equivalent treatment for creatures of different kinds. The next section will provide a deeper understanding and interpretation based on these semiotic objects.

Step 3. Interpretation

To unpack Jiang's *They Know Who They Are,* I will begin with the title of this work. Jiang told me in her interview that the title *They Know Who They Are* references to the poem *Seen from Above* by Polish poet Wisława Szymborska. The poem includes the following lines:

> A dead beetle lies on the path through the field.
>
> Three pairs of legs folded neatly on its belly.
>
> Instead of death's confusion, tidiness and order.

The horror of this sight is moderate,

its scope is strictly local, from the wheat grass to the mint.

The grief is quarantined.

The sky is blue.

To preserve our peace of mind, animals die

more shallowly: they aren't deceased, they're dead.

They leave behind, we'd like to think, less feeling and less world,

departing, we suppose, from a stage less tragic.

Their meek souls never haunt us in the dark,

they know their place,

they show respect.

And so the dead beetle on the path

lies unmourned and shining in the sun.

One glance at it will do for meditation –

clearly nothing much has happened to it.

Important matters are reserved for us,

for our life and our death, a death

that always claims the right of way.

In this poem, Szymborska attempts to change our ideas of life and death to comprehend that even small things matter and are relevant to life as a whole by depicting a dead beetle. Similarly, when talking about *They Know Who They Are*, Jiang emphasised the phrase 'meek souls' and also her sympathy towards weak and small lives, including humans and non-humans.

Figure 33 Jiang Jie, *They Know Who They Are* (sketch provided by the artist through personal communication).

In the context of Szymborska's poem, the interpretation of *They Know Who They Are,* to my understanding, is twofold. First, as the most important semiotic objects, the foetus/infant figures in this work illustrate an entanglement of humans and non-humans – as in the world. In *They Know Who They Are,* the figures are of the same size and placed on the same hay, which shows their equal disposability. Jiang told me in the interview that she believes there is 'a mutual relationship among animals,

humans, and the world'. No life should be despised, and no life is made up of isolated

encounters with the world; rather the world in its entangled intra-acting is productive

of humans and non-humans (McGregor 2020). Jiang enlarges the existences of

different forms of lives and pays particular attention to humans and nonhumans,

which, from the point of view of the artwork, are neglected and taken for granted.

Additionally, the entanglement of non-humans and humans in *They Know Who They*

Are implies the fluidity of dualism. According to Gruen (2015), when dualisms

become value dualisms – distinctions that elevate one side of the dualism and

diminish the other – they provide the conceptual bases for exploitative and oppressive

practices. The animal/human relation in this artwork can be extended to a broader

system of familiar dualistic concepts, such as nature/culture, black/white, self/other,

and female/male. The distinction between boundaries are not constructed nor

reconstructed regularly. Gruen (2015) gives the example of the distinction between

self/other where the central point is that a balanced and clear self-concept is needed to

be able to engage empathetically with others. She believes the self/other distinction

does not reduce the other's value; instead, it 'helps to make vivid both the durability

and the fragility of the self in relation to others' (Gruen 2015:30).

Figure 34 Jiang Jie, *They Know Who They Are*, 2007 (detail).

Our (human) relationships with the non-human others co-constitutes human subjectivity in this reading – who we are and how we configure our identities and agency (Gruen 2015; McGregor 2020). Human subjectivity is not isolated; rather, it is continually produced through relations with others, i.e. people, ideas, event, discourses and material things. This is the central premise of what Barad calls 'a relational ontology' that rejects fixed boundaries and individualism (Barad 2003:814). We are already entangled in complex relationships. As we exist in relation to other organisms, our perceptions, experience, attitudes and even our identities are entangled with them, our actions can make their experiences be better or worse (which can in turn affect our own experience). We should the attend to this self/other and

human/non-human entanglement (Gruen 2015). *They Know Who They Are* in a way

motivates us to improve on these relationships between human and nature, since we

do not want to affect or be affected in a 'bad' way, such as the biological extinction

caused by global warming and human activities. Given that we are inevitably already

in relationships with everything in the world, we need to work to make these

relationships mutually satisfying and coexist. *They Know Who They Are* also attempts

to fight against the idea that some lives are more valuable and precious than others; it

makes a complaint of humans' superiority over other creatures. Moreover, this

artwork invokes us to cherish lives of different kinds – lives of humans including

different races and gender, and lives of non-human including animals, insect, and

plants.

As mentioned above, the mixing of non-human animal and human figures in *They

Know Who They Are* suggests an entangled relationship that is mutually affecting. In

additional, *They Know Who They Are* also represents the equal vulnerability of both

humans and other creatures, especially those meek and small lives that are

haphazardly disposed on the dried hay. They do not have names, they 'know' their

place is insignificant, and their lives are taken for granted. This reading is also

reflected in Jiang's 1994 artwork *Fragile Products* (Figure 35).

Figure 35 Jiang Jie, *Fragile Products,* 1994. Gauze, wax, and plastic film.

In *Fragile Products*, Jiang uses figures of small human babies. Some of them are

placed randomly on a clinical plastic film on the floor and some are hanging from the

ceiling. Because the corners and sides of the thin film were hung vertically, these

figures were inevitably squeezed and bumped into each other in a state of disorder.

The scene in *Fragile Products* shows a likeness to mothers delivering babies in clinic

– babies are falling out of the womb. *Fragile Products* suggests a separation between

the foetal and maternal bodies. Jiang told me in her interview that *They Know Who*

They Are is a continuation work of *Fragile Products.* In both artworks, the

infant/foetus figures are made of fragile materials and placed in an isolated status

without any caretaker. *They Know Who They Are* (and *Fragile Products*) can also be

looked at as the scene inside the womb – meaning there is an imagined womb in the

artwork. This brings us to the second reading of *They Know Who They Are* and places

the central point of this reading on the 'home' of the foetus/infant – the maternal

body. The placental relations between maternal and foetal bodies are conceptual

resources. First, for re-imaging relations of self/other in pregnancy (Fannin 2014), and

second, for addressing emergent ethical issues over women's reproductive autonomy

and rights in the Chinese context.

In Iris Marion Young's (1984) essay, she emphasises that the pregnant subject has a

unique experience of her body and challenges the presumed universality of the male

body and masculine subject in the existential phenomenological tradition. Young

(1984) believes that the dichotomies between self and other, and self and world,

breaks down. In the process of pregnancy, the foetus is part of the woman's body, yet

it is the other life – a new life. In Young's (1984:46) words, the woman 'experiences

her body as herself and not herself, its inner movements belong to another being, yet

they are not other, because her body boundaries shift'. The pregnant woman and the

foetus are one. This is because when the foetus is inside the womb, 'the placenta sets

up the circulatory communication between and within the maternal body and foetus

rather than destroying each other, through the mediation of the placenta, they engage

in mutually beneficial fluid exchange' (Oliver 1998:150). Therefore, the dualism

between self and other is ambiguous and fluid in a foetal-maternal relation. In this

reading, although there is no physical existence of any maternal image in *They Know*

Who They Are, we are able to imagine the invisible womb or placenta that closely

connects with the foetus. This reading also suggests an important shift in perspective

from self/non-self paradigms to make visible the potential of bodies and organs. In the

same manner, to reorient studies of foetal-maternal relations away from antagonistic

notions of fixed identities, such as self/other, towards the function of the mediating

placenta or womb could focus attention on what a new materialist feminist

perspective suggests are the agential capacities and entanglement of matter (Colls and

Fannin 2013; McGregor 2020).

Figure 36 Jiang Jie, *They Know Who They Are,* 2007 (detail).

The foetus and the maternal body are always inseparable during pregnancy, unless the

progress is interrupted. Here, in turning to the interruption of pregnancy, I refer

mainly to a forced interruption. In the Chinese context, this interruption is strongly linked with the population control policy. The Chinese government implemented the strict policy of birth limitation (one child per couple under most circumstances), which had been a defining factor in China's strategy to control population growth since 1979 (Ross 2010; Sun, Gordon and Pacey 2016). This set of regulations brought reproduction into the plan for activating the economy as well as concerns about overpopulation from rapidly increasing life expectancies and declining child mortality rates (Sun, Gordon, and Pacey 2016). This policy might have been very successful in preventing rampant overpopulation, but it has also produced a number of unintended negative consequences, such as late term or forced abortions, forced contraception, and the abandonment/mortality of children.

In 2016, the Chinese government relaxed the family planning strategies, from a one-child to a two-child policy, to raise the number of children a couple could have (Zhou 2019). In recent years, China has become a society with low or lower fertility; thus, Chinese women's fertility has again become a principal issue to observe. Research on women's reproductive decision-making, such as the ideal family size and fertility desire (Liu and Lummaa 2018) have provided a reasonable prediction of family size and factors that influences fertility. However, the central point of reproductive-related issues lies in women's freedom over their fertility or the size of their families, rather than the policymakers (Raymond 1995). From a feminist perspective, the Chinese

government should return to women the free will to make their own decisions on how many children they should have and take responsibility for providing social security and health assistance to women and their family units (Sun, Gordon, and Pacey 2016). Jiang Jie's location in the history of women's art means that she has experienced the times of one-child and later two-child policy and is still witnessing the political changes towards women's fertility and bodies. In *They Know Who They Are*, Jiang did not directly indicate her dissatisfaction with the policymakers and government regulations but reveals a cruel scene of the forced interruption of foetal-maternal relations.

To conclude, on the one hand, *They Know Who They Are* on the one hand, invokes respect to both human and non-human lives, especially those vulnerable and taken for granted lives. On the other hand, it reveals a brutal fact of governmental limiting of women's reproductive rights in China. To explore the subject of foetal-maternal relations and women's reproductive rights under a different social context, the next section investigates British artist Lana Locke's *Untitled*.

6.3 Lana Locke, *Untitled*

Step 1. Description

Locke's *Untitled* (Figure 37) consists of the figure of a foetus/infant lying in the

middle of 11 plaster-filled condoms. The figure is made of self-drying clay in reddish

brown with no obvious gender characteristics. Its eyes are closed, mouth slightly

open, hands bent over the chest, and legs bent up to the waist. The condoms placed

around the figure are filled with solidified white plaster; each tied with a knot at the

end. Some dried plaster powder is scattered on the figure and on the dark background.

Figure 37 Lana Locke, *Untitled*, 2006-2015. Self-drying clay, plaster, and condoms.

Step 2. Reduction

In Locke's *Untitled*, the most obvious and important semiotic objects are the plaster
filled condoms and the foetus/infant figure. The condom is an important and efficient
method of reducing both the probability of pregnancy and the sexually transmitted
infections during (heterosexual) sexual activities. The condoms in this artwork are
male condoms (different from female condoms), with the condoms representing the
construct of the male sex drive.

The condoms here are iconic to the phallus as they are mostly used by men. Their
failure in this work, given the figure of foetus/infant, invoke either the mistaken or
deliberate misuse of condoms by the male (Berer 2006). The condoms are filled with
a white plaster that could be interpreted as breast milk or semen. The white plaster
that fills the condoms is likely to represent breast milk, with the scattered plaster
powder on the infant and in the background indicates leaking of breast milk.
Alternatively, it could be considered that the white content inside the condom is
semen, a mixture of semen and breast milk or vernix caseosa that protects the infant.
My interpretation takes different possibilities into account, however, in this analysis I
will argue that the content has been made to represent breast milk, but also recognise
that this is one interpretation among many.

The reason I have suggested the content is intended to show that breast milk is twofold. First, in reading this artwork, the existence of a foetus/infant figure suggests woman's pregnancy as well as the failure of contraception. Besides, the shapes of these knotted, plaster-filled condoms are similar to women's breasts. Biologically, milk production begins around the midpoint of pregnancy. Two to three days after birth, the milk will increase and may leak. Second, during the period of producing this particular artwork, Locke was experiencing pregnancy and became the mother of two children. Third, the maternal body is a continual theme in Locke's works, as in her *Violent Womb Form* (2015), *Milk Boob and Tights* (2016) (Figure 38), *Mother's Milk* (2016), and *Placenta* (2018) where Locke pays particular attention to maternal organs and cells.

Figure 38 Lana Locke, *Milk Boob and Tights*, 2016.

Taking this direction, the foetus/infant figure and condom in *Untitled* reinforces the

implication of the maternal bond and also intersects with gender, political, medical

and health discourses that link heterosexual activity, women's bodily rights and

population reproduction (Riley, Evans and Robson 2018). Alongside these issues,

Locke indicates an antagonism between pregnancy and contraception – life and death

– through the foetus/infant and condom in *Untitled.*

Step 3. Interpretation

The role of *Untitled*'s first semiotic object, the condom in, is culturally significant as its use can largely avoid sexually transmitted infections and pregnancy. The use of condoms during sexual intercourse suggests safer sex for penetrative sexual encounters. However, some males enter into sexual relations with a dislike of condoms and a perception of condom sex as 'embarrassments' and 'other sex'. Some think that condom use is unnecessary because of a belief that they are in safe and monogamous relationships (Browne and Minichiello 1994). For instance, Holland and her colleagues (1991:146) explore young women's experiences in relation to condom (non-)usage and found that 'the language of heterosexuality privileges male over female sexual experience and desire'. Males have traditionally been and still are seen as being entitled to pressure females with regard to sexual practice, e.g., refuse to use condoms. In addition, in social science studies, heterosexual men's perceived reluctance to wear condoms is understood to have a negative effect in relation to public health campaigns, which aim to reduce the heterosexual transmissions of diseases (Vitellone 2008). The condoms in *Untitled* thus show a close link with sexual encounters and an intimate responsibility between partners in a heterosexual relationship.

Sexuality is a vital aspect of development and sexual rights are a precondition not only for AIDS prevention, reproductive health and rights, but also more widely for gender equality and social inclusion (Magar and Storer 2009). In non-reproductive heterosexual sexual encounters, there should be a cooperative vigilance by both partners to ensure condoms or other scientific contraception methods are used (Browne and Minichiello 1994). For condom use and safer sex to become mutual cooperation, the traditional male and female sexual roles and behaviours must be abandoned, and a new mutually responsible heterosexuality promoted.

In *Untitled*, white plaster fills these condoms which has been reasoned as breast milk in the previous step. Breast milk, as the second semiotic object, its role and other intra-corporeal matter within breastfeeding assemblages can be understood by approaching the maternal body as an event that is both dynamic and intra-active (Grosz 1994; Barad 2003; Boyer 2018). Boyer's (2018) considers breast milk as lively matter in order to produce a conceptualisation of motherhood and infant feeding in which agency is distributed. Such a conceptualisation enables us to achieve better understandings of the myriad ways the universe 'acts back' against the things that parents do in raising children, and to recognise that the maternal body can be understood as a force that shapes how we live in the world (Barad 2007; Stark 2017).

Breast milk is a highly politicised form of matter about which there are distinct

opinions. Similar to other bodily substances that transgress the body's boundary,

breast milk is sometimes vilified (Boyer 2018). For example, as Locke describes in

her interview 'the breast has become functional rather than aesthetic and my clothing

chosen to facilitate breastfeeding and expressing of milk rather than to be attractive to

others', and yet a public gaze is invoked as 'I have to choose to hide in these spaces

rather than confront the gaze of others in more comfortable but exposing arenas'.

From this, we can see how some people express disgust over breast milk in the

context of breastfeeding in public. In addition, Grosz (1994) and Bartlett (2005) argue

that breast milk is problematic within sexist and misogynist cultures as it represents

women's biological productivity. Such a discourse serves to reinscribe women within

the power structures of reproduction by demanding a model of motherhood dictated

merely by her body (Short 2018).

While breast milk is sometime vilified as distasteful, it is also an iconic form that

connects with giving comfort and nourishment (Hausman 2003). It is suggested that

breast milk is the best form of infant feeding in terms of health benefits for both

mothers and children (Victora et al. 2016). For babies, breast milk reduces the risk of

diarrhoea, allergies and sudden infant death syndrome; it also reduces the chances of

getting leukaemia, lymphoma, diabetes and asthma as children grow older (Goldman

2000). For mothers, breastfeeding reduces instances of vomiting and chances of

getting pneumonia; it also reduces the risk of breast cancer and osteoporosis later in life for mothers (Gartner et al. 2005). Breastfeeding can even shape the mood of mothers and babies as it contains oxytocin, the hormone that produces feelings of trust and wellbeing (Lane et al. 2013; Ishak 2011). In addition, breast milk changes its composition based on the health and condition of the mother, for example, breast milk carries the flavours of the food the mother eats. Therefore, breast milk as well as hormones, nerves and other bio-matter within the maternal body and a nursing infant constitute an agential intra-action between a range of bio-materially entangled and mutually affecting phenomena; it functions as active and vibrant matter.

The foetus/infant figure in *Untitled* is also a significant semiotic object that connects with the cultural perception of prenatal space. The foetus/infant figure is placed on a dark background, which shows a likeness to foetal photography such as the sonography produced through ultrasound technologies. According to Cannon (2014), addressing cultural perceptions of the prenatal space, within which the foetus is pictured and framed within, illustrates the surface-oriented fantasies about foetal photographs. Ultrasound technologies and foetal photographs provide visual access to the yet-to-be-born child inside the womb by collapsing distinctions between foreground/background and inside/outside, but this limited and mediated visual access can produce a paradoxical sense of amazement 'dependent not on what we see but on how we see' (Stormer 2008:668).

Stormer's meaning can be understood from two aspects. First, ultrasound technologies have facilitated mirror-like visible access to the internal womb space, so that we are able to catch sight of the foetus. Second, cultural prioritisation of ocular-centric engagements with visual culture is barely extended to prenatal space (Cannon 2014). For example, the engagements with ultrasonography privileges the visual images and the ultrasound technologies reiterate pedagogies and epistemologies of vision by emphasising sight as our primary mode to engage with the foetus (Petchesky 1987). Therefore, ultrasound images operate within the visual because of their materially boundaries. However, perceptions of pictures become potential and valuable through the invisible movements of images, such as the figure of the infant emerging from foetal photographs.

The invisible movements of images, as Cannon (2014:273) puts, enables and enacts desires by 'functioning as a mental thing that encounters materiality within the realm of visual culture by mediating their pictorial representations'. While ultrasound technologies privilege visual access to the internal womb, the image of the foetus facilitates the possibility to picture (parental) expectations about a yet-to-born child and functions as an interface for normative fantasies about the child. After using the foetal photograph as a reference, the unborn child is imagined by being labelled with a future, such as 'the best baby', 'future scientist' and more. This is another form of mirroring that emerges from normative cultural perceptions about and investments in

the figure of the ideal child. In this process, the fantasies and desires projected upon

foetal photograph confine the foetus within an isolated foetal figuration (Cannon

2014). This expectation of the yet-to-born child also echoes with Clarke's (2004)

argument in which she suggests the relational process of 'having' a child is

considered as a social transformation that is far more complex than the mere bearing

or biological creation of a foetus/infant. However, it is impossible for every child to

fulfil the expectations of this ideality, which may start to generate unnecessary

dissatisfactions or disappointments that come only from the imaginations. In addition,

in *Untitled*, the material of the foetus/infant figure – self-drying clay – can be quite

fragile and easily breaks off after hours of air-drying. The fragility of this material

acts as a metaphor for the vulnerability of the foetus/infant; however, it does not

necessarily indicate that the future of the child would be difficult. The dark

background in *Untitled* can be interpreted as mimicking how sonography and the

foetal photographs it produces are reduced to surfaces where soon-to-be parents can

imagine and fantasise about who they misrecognise as their yet-to-born child (Cannon

2014).

In the above analysis, I have provided one possible reading of the significant semiotic

objects in Locke's *Untitled*. The condoms, breast milk and foetus/infant figure signify

concerns around sexual responsibility as well as a maternal-foetal relationship. The

topic of reproduction is also reflected in the interview with Locke, where she explains

'lots of the themes in my work are around motherhood and procreation, and even before becoming a mother, there is a kind of fear around being able to procreate, worries about a kind of sexual dysfunction'. After becoming a mother, Locke suggests that 'the childbirth and childcare [means] having to split one's time between work and looking after the children and being pulled to different directions'. For Locke, maternity and childcare obviously restrict the hours she has been able to work on artistic practice and to visit/participate in exhibitions, so that she had to make compromises and negotiations with her partner – someone else has to look after the children. Therefore, in *Untitled*, Locke expresses her experience and feelings about heterosexual responsibility and the mother-child bonding process through these semiotic objects. My interpretation takes this as a starting point and extends to a broader sense of meanings in relation to reproduction.

6.4 Touchpoints

Taking Jiang Jie's *They Know Who They Are* and Lana Locke's *Untitled* together, I identify touchpoints between them in relation to reproduction and the maternal that link with the entanglement of humans and non-humans and the politics of women's bodies in relation to reproduction. The discussion below provides a detailed reading about the touchpoints.

The first touchpoint is the entanglement of matter. Differencing from the discussion of vibrant everyday object in the previous chapter, this chapter focuses on the entanglement of organisms – the entanglement between humans and non-human animals and the entanglement of the corporeal body. The titles of both *They Know Who They Are* and *Untitled* indicate the unnamed social beings in the world that we humans, from the artists' perspective, should attach more importance to. Both artworks highlight an entanglement of all the beings in the world. It includes the entanglement of humans and non-human animals in nature that are mutually affected in *They Know Who They Are*, and the entanglement of cells inside the maternal body in *Untitled* where the fluid/nutrition exchange benefits for both the foetus and the mother. They bring together human, cattle, horse, pig, placenta, breast milk and foetus as lively and intra-active. These become not just a collection of things together, but an entanglement of relationships and shifting patterns of agentic forces (McGregor 2020). Alaimo (2010) also addresses this when she explains that humans are not living an encounter with an outside world, but human experiences are in and of our environment, such as the air in our lungs, the virus in our livers and the heavy metals in our blood – a feedback loop between the world and humans. Therefore, human lived experience is not made up of isolated encounters with the world; rather, the world in its entangled intra-acting is generative of human lived experience. In addition, this argument also breaks the dualism between self/others, mind/body and

human/non-human, which opens up more possibilities for all the matters of being-in-the-world to intra-act.

A second touchpoint between *They Know Who They Are* and *Untitled* is the politics of women's bodies in relation to their reproductive rights. This is reflected in both artworks through the foetus/infant figure(s). The analysis of the foetus/infant figures in *They Know Who They Are* specifically involves a discussion around women's pregnancy and reproduction in a Chinese context. The Chinese government strictly controls women's reproductive rights through the one-child policy, which was later changed to the two-child policy. These regulations have led to a series of consequences that damage women. Mosher (2012) witnessed in 1979 that young mothers were ordered to have abortions. Some of them were incarcerated under conditions of extreme psychological pressure because they had refused abortions. Mosher (2012:1558) describes how those who still refused 'were physically dragged into the local medical clinic where they were held down on the operating table while they were aborted and sterilised; many of these women were in the third trimester of pregnancy, some were already in labour'. Forced abortions are not just an aberration of that time but have been an integral part of the enforcement mechanism of the policy since its inception (Li 2012). The policy and the consequences of this policy seriously damage women's basic human rights and their health as well as their infants' right to survival.

In a British context, the government controls over women's bodily rights are more moderate by providing suggestions, such as the Optimum Population Trust advices that all couples should keep the number of children within two in order to protect the environment and achieve sustainable development. In *They Know Who They Are*, Jiang Jie represents the politics of women's reproduction through her experience and opinions of the Chinese government's policy. Similarly, Locke discusses the politics of women's sexuality by indicating the use of condoms as a mutual responsibility between partners in penetrative sexual encounters in *Untitled*. Drawing on feminist theory, heterosexual relationships are closely connected to the power relations within which sexual practices are embedded (Holland et al. 1990). The social pressures and constraints through which women negotiate their sexual encounters impinge directly on their ability to make decisions about sexual safety. As a result of these 'moral requirements', women are expected to take responsibility for safer sex practices (Holland et al. 1990). In reclaiming women's bodily rights, we need to explore the complexity of heterosexual encounters and acknowledge that sexual negotiations, such as the (not)use of condoms, is shaped by the inequalities inherent in gendered power relations.

In this chapter, I have discussed issues around the entanglement of matters and the politics of women's bodies through the analysis and interpretation of *They Know Who They Are* and *Untitled*. In both artworks, Jiang and Locke explore things inside and

outside the (imagined) maternal body by employing the figure(s) of foetus/infants

where the entanglement of things is always ongoing. Additionally, in representing the

maternal-foetal relationships, the female body is always present. Jiang and Locke also

bring their own experience of maternity and reproduction into their art practices,

revealing women's inequality in heterosexual relationships and the embedded

gender/power relations. I, thereby, have reflected on my position and the relations

between me and the artists/artworks to identify the touchpoints through the

interpretation of these artworks and to build connections between contemporary

British and Chinese women's art.

Chapter 7   Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This thesis has provided an original interpretation of the selected eight artworks explored through the themes of the female body, domesticity, and reproduction to identify touchpoints between these artworks; and has indicated the benefit of these touchpoints as important points that can promote a mutual respect and understanding of women's art in British and Chinese context. It is my argument that this thesis has therefore opened up new ways of seeing contemporary British and Chinese women's art by entangling their similarities and differences through my situated interpretative lens, simultaneously, encouraged and permitted a transcultural communication between women artists from various contexts in the future.

7.2 Summary of this research

I began this research with an interest in contemporary women's art, particularly in the form of object-based installations. Installation art is often designed for a situated location or for a temporary period of time. Spectators can walk around or through the display location to engage fully with installation works, which implies a dissolution of the boundary between 'art' and 'life'. Installation art thus transforms the way we see, feel, or think about the world. The complete, unified experience of viewing an installation work, rather than a display of separate, individual artworks makes it

different and exciting (Tate n.d.). In this thesis, I have used contemporary installation work as one example of an art form to explore the entanglement of the similarities and differences – the touchpoints – between women's art in a British and Chinese context. Drawing on my interests in how to understand and interpret women's art as a form of transcultural knowledge, I have brought together previous researches on women's art in the Atlantic West and China, such as Akkach (2018) and Zhang (2009) and others, who pay particular attention to the differences and similarities between artworks from different contexts. However, this approach might reinforce a binary division that works to oversimplify the diversity of women's art and is in the danger of placing one of the binary terms in a position of privilege. Consequently, this is not beneficial to the coexistence of women artists and their artworks in different contexts.

My contribution in this research is centred on the entanglement of the similarities and differences, namely the touchpoints between contemporary British and Chinese women's art from my situated, transcultural perspective to offer a new way of reading installation works. I have drawn on theories of phenomenology and standpoint feminism to argue that the value of these touchpoints benefits a transcultural understanding of British and Chinese women's art. The phenomenological feminist approach I have adopted in this research draws upon the notion that the artwork emerges out of the artist's experience, as a situated knowledge. More specifically, the artist, the artist's experience, the artwork, the researcher, and the researcher's

understanding of the artist/artwork are situated in culture and partial. This situated knowledge of each participant together forms a unique interpretive position and provides a new way of thinking about the relationship to contexts on the part of these artworks. Such a position enables the researcher to explore the notion of partial visions and situated knowledge of the studied artworks. Additionally, the phenomenological feminist methodology in this study is oriented towards the concept of entanglement found within new materialist thought (Barad 2003, 2007), as it seeks to 'articulate the relation and process between macrostructure of gender and lived experiences of gender' (Mann 2009:87). The concept of entanglement also comes into play when making interpretation of the studied artworks, in particular the meaning of the objects/materials, their relationships with each other, and their relationships with humans.

Considering my background and experience of being a Chinese woman who has studied and practised art in Britain, I began by investigating installation works produced by British and Chinese women artists. My situated position, touching upon both theoretical and practical art studies, provided one way among many to read and interpret the selected artworks. The initial data collection included an examination of a large number of artworks by women artists from Britain and China. After a thematic selection of the initial data, eight installations created by eight women artists were discussed. These artworks were *At the Edge of the Frame* by Rowena Harris, *Fushë*

Kosovë Sex Café Chair by Helen Gorill, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* by Jemima Brown, *Dress* by Lin Jingjing, *Women's River* by Tao Aimin, *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag* by Gao Rong, *They Know Who They Are* by Jiang Jie, and *Untitled* by Lana Locke. The selected artworks were categorised into three principal themes based on their application of the objects. These themes were: the female body, domesticity, and reproduction, all of which are central to the feminist discussions. My engagement with these themes aimed to make visible gender/power relations and challenge the traditional binaries, such as male/female, masculinity/femininity, self/others, human/non-human, natural/cultural, and objectification/subjectification in the selected artworks. Touchpoints were then identified in the analysis of these artworks under the three themes from my transcultural perspective, thereby opening up a window to connect women's art in Britain and China.

A phenomenological and feminist standpoint methodology worked together in this study in a complementary way, seeking to explore the making of meaning, understood here through a systematic analysis. In addition, this blended methodology has helped to narrow the scope of this study to a small group of women artists as a starting point, producing rich material to identify the touchpoints in their artworks under the three themes mentioned above. The methodology has also enabled a set of methods to interpret artworks in-depth. The specific method used in this research to make meaning of the selected artworks has been a semiotic analysis, supported by semi-

structured interviews with the artists, including other documentations, such as images, catalogues, and other discussions of the work. The semiotic analysis offered a three-step method in dealing with the visual data as signs: description, reduction and interpretation. In the description step, I attempted to provide an observation of each piece of artwork without being over concerned with its socially and culturally coded meanings while recognising that I am always situated. In the reduction step, I identified the significant semiotic objects in each artwork in relation to phenomenological standpoint feminism. In the final step, interpretation, I expanded further on the semiotic objects that were identified in the previous step and combined this with the artists' experiences/backgrounds extracted from the interviews and other data. The semiotic method provided a direct and informative classification of selected artworks and helped to locate the touchpoints within them.

The touchpoints identified within the three primary themes of the female body, domesticity, and reproduction connected all eight artworks. In the discussion of Rowena Harris's *At the Edge of the Frame*, Helen Gorrill's *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and Lin Jingjing's *Dress*, I found that the artists use the absent female body, such as body fragments/parts or belongings to represent the existence of wholeness, thereby uncover the oppression and objectification of the female body. In *At the Edge of the Frame*, the 'non-toecap' shoes implicitly recorded the trace of the female body and women's body image in social media; in *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, the

reclaimed prosthetic limbs and the fishnet stockings were iconic to the figure of women, more specifically, those Eastern European girls/women who were trafficked; in *Dress*, the white lace wedding dress projected an image of the brides or women in marriage. Although this touchpoint was identified from these three artworks, it was also reflected in other artworks. For example, in *They Know Who They Are* and *Untitled*, the 'invisible' womb represented women's pregnancy and maternity; in *Women's River*, the artist painted women's portraits on the washboards to manifest the everyday life stories of a group of women who were present in this artwork but absent from history. The body fragments/parts might lose their original function when disarticulated from the whole, but they could act as a 'ghosting' to acquire new meanings and significances that 'slowly comes to reveal' themselves, as Rowena Harris described in her interview.

Alongside this ghosting presence of the female body, there is fetish represented in the artworks for the body parts, fetish usually imposed on women by the masculine gaze. In this reading, gender difference is a major factor in constituting the meaning of the female body parts. The female body parts and women's belongings carry strong connotations of lasciviousness and the objectification of women's bodies. This becomes evident in the women's shoes in *At the Edge of the Frame*, the limbs in *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and the vaginal figure in *Dress*. Women artists used

masculine fetishes in these artworks to express their opposition and to destabilise the objectification of the female body.

The artworks in Chapter 4 speak to the fantasy of the 'perfect woman'. The incomplete or imperfect figure of the female body challenges the stereotype of being the 'ideal woman'. In *At the Edge of the Frame*, the 'cutting off' gesture of the caps of the shoes implies that women's images in the digital realm were being photoshopped or edited to cater for standards of beauty, such as in advertisements and social media. This artwork makes visible the social pressure on women, and calls attention to their complexity and diversity by showing a ghosting presence, i.e. it could be any woman. This touchpoint is also represented in *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair* but in response to specific women. In this artwork, the broken prosthetic limbs suggest the dismemberment of the female body and imply the injuries suffered by trafficked women/girls from Moldova. In *Dress*, the figure of the female genitalia and the white dress are contrasted, suggesting the contradiction between a woman's virginity and the loss of it, and the changes in a woman's role in marriage.

This touchpoint is also represented across the selected artworks. In *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction* and *Women's River*, the dull ironing board and well-worn washboard indicated the woman's figure in the domestic sphere. These two artworks revealed the pressure and double burden women take on for the family and recollected

women's sacrifices in becoming wives and mothers. In the above artworks, the representation of the absent female body bears the form of deficiency and imperfection, which shows the struggle that many women go through in their lives. Moreover, the imperfections – the flaws, scars, and wounds – are recognised not as ugly or negative reminders of the past but as evidences of existence and marks of healing and surviving.

Additionally, in Chapter 5, a further touchpoint was identified as an underlying temporal gender inequity. This touchpoint is closely linked with domesticity where women's experience of time is different from that of men because of the 'responsibility' of doing domestic labour (Bittman and Wajcman 2000). Specifically, in *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, the laundry and childcare are endless and distract the woman from doing anything else. *Women's River* recorded some women's lifetime of domestic work and their dedication to their families. *Guangzhou Station* also recorded women's time, through transport as temporality in the station, as well as the time taken in the process of making this artwork. The embroidery techniques used to make this artwork are time-consuming and considered as a 'typical feminine' activity that is unpaid and largely performed by women in domestic places. These artworks restored the scene of women working in domesticity while there was no trace of the men in the family. They revealed a gender division in the family where the housework and childcare continued to be 'women's work' and 'women's

responsibility'. Families still exhibited a pattern of specialisation on the basis of gender and the concept of time thus emerged as a gap between genders.

In this chapter, I also noted the entanglement of matter, which was demonstrated throughout all the artworks considered in this thesis. This entanglement of matter is reflected in two ways. First, as shown in Chapter 5, I read the everyday objects in the selected artworks as vibrant things with a certain agency and an influence of their own. If we ignored these objects in favour of interrogating our human interpretations of the world, 'we risk losing sight of how the material of the world can both affect significant differences in people's lives and resist human attempts at interpretation' (McGregor 2020:507). This is because these taken-for-granted objects co-constitute human subjectivity: they have the lively power of material formations and actively engage with humans. Taking the concrete shoes in *At the Edge of the Frame* as an example, the material process of pressing the concrete against the human body (feet) to make the shoes record a particular moment of human interactivity with the non-human world. Similarly, the well-worn washboards in *Women's River* coincide with their owners' time-worn faces; becoming a mark of the life experiences of their owners. This point can also be found through the everyday objects in *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, *Dress*, *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, and *Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag*, where the mutual force between ojects and humans is part of the artworks' meanings.

Second, the entanglement of matter was demonstrated through the mutual affect of organisms in Chapter 6. In *They Know Who They Are*, the equal disposability of human and non-human animals indicates that human subjectivity is not isolated but is continually produced through relations with others. There was a mutual relationship between human and non-human animals in the environment, as this work represented the equal vulnerability and interdependence of human and non-human foetuses. This point was also represented in *Untitled*. The exchange of foetus and mother's fluid/nutrition in the maternal body suggests a mutual influence of cells as this exchange benefits both the foetus and the mother. These two strands converged into one and expanded to greater aspects in the world – all matters are lively and 'intra-active' (Barad 2003, 2007).

Finally, the politics of women's reproduction in relation to their bodily rights is another touchpoint. This is a topic that has been at the centre of feminist arguments on female oppression and emancipation where women's bodies become a political battleground. In the analysis of *At the Edge of the Frame*, *Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair*, and *Dress*, I focused on gender/power relations in these artworks to make visible the phenomenon of the objectification of women's bodies in society. In the discussion of *Our Lady of Perpetual Distraction*, *Women's River*, and *Guangzhou Station,* I paid attention to gender division in the domestic sphere and disputed the truth and validity of women's 'natural ability' or 'natural responsibility' for

performing domestic labour and childcare. In the interpretation of *They Know Who They Are* and *Untitled*, I looked into the maternal body and women's reproductive rights. The analysis of the foetus/infant figure in these artworks involved a discussion of women's pregnancy and reproduction. The (maternal) female body becomes a site of political action as both British and Chinese governments influence and direct women's bodily rights to different extents.

Taken together, this study has discussed three primary themes of the female body, domesticity, and reproduction that were associated with women's roles, positions, and their relations with others in society from my transcultural perspective. Based on this, I identified six touchpoints that connected the eight selected artworks from my situated position and knowledge. These touchpoints enable a greater understanding of sociocultural differences while, at the same time, respecting and valuing the uniqueness of different women's artistic productions. This endeavour helps to grasp the meanings of the selected installation works through tapping the edges between them, revealing gender/power relations embodied in these artworks, and questions the current sociocultural binaries of male/female, masculinity/femininity, absence/presence, subjectification/objectification, parts/whole, self/others, human/non-human, and nature/culture.

7.3 Contributions to knowledge

The significance of this research, in my opinion, is threefold. First of all, I have provided an original in-depth reading of the selected artworks through my situated transcultural lens. The analysis is guided by a phenomenological standpoint feminism that aims not to generalise a universal understanding of all women's art, but instead, to identify touchpoints between a small group that shows the compatibility of their similarities and differences. The touchpoints identified from the selected artworks are the implicit points of contact between British and Chinese women's art, but simultaneously, recognise and reserve the differences between them. This study will, therefore, contribute to the field of women's art studies as it has developed a new way of reading installation works. Furthermore, this endeavour may encourage a future communication between women artists from different backgrounds responding to the global context in the twentieth-first century.

Second, the methodological implications of a women's study in this research have challenged binary oppositions. The tendency to split all things into just two simple categories is essentialist and problematic, since one of the binary terms is always in a position of privilege, while also treating these binaries as natural and universal. This thesis takes gender division in hierarchical society as an outset and reflects on wider pairings. The methodological implications of the 'intra-active' phenomena reflected in the selected artworks has shown that all matters are co-constituting and entangled

in the world (Barad 2003, 2007). This 'relational ontology' rejects the fixed boundaries (Barad 2003:814), such as discussions of the relationship between the absence and presence of the female body in Chapter 4, the relationship between art and craft in Chapter 5, and the relationship between human and non-human in Chapter 6. All these matters do not exist in opposition, but instead are shaped by and with one another in an ongoing becoming.

Third, following the above point, the role of the researcher is also entangled in the process of a research. The researcher's subjectivity is never singular or individual (McGregor 2020). In this study, my situated position was shaped by my relationship with the selected artists/artworks within the social and cultural contexts, with myself becoming part of the research. Taking account of my own entanglement as a researcher has entailed a different approach to the studied data and opened up new possibilities for interpretation. When I analysed artworks in relation to the themes of the female body, domesticity, and reproduction, I was myself entangled. This intra-active engagement with/in the analysis of the selected artworks is therefore a part of the world's differential becoming.

Taken together, this research has shown one of the ways of reading and understanding the selected artworks produced by eight British and Chinese women artists in the twenty-first century. By applying a phenomenological feminist standpoint framework

to make meanings of the selected artworks, I have identified six touchpoints that reached across the themes of the female body, domesticity, and reproduction. These touchpoints show a connection between British and Chinese women's art – an entanglement between their similarities and differences. In addition, this study has provided one example of how the researcher is entangled with/in a research and shown how the researcher and the researched together shape the result of a research. These are the significant contributions to women's art studies. Moreover, each of the points demonstrated an original contribution to their specific field, and thus may be of use individually to other disciplines, such as in gender studies, material culture studies, and media studies.

7.4 Future research directions

In this research, I have drawn on a variety of topics that have been discussed and developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, such as installation art, studies about women of colour, and the materiality of objects. Research into contemporary British and Chinese women artists' installation works can be a starting point to wider discussions on women's art of other cultures or on other art forms. The potential of transcultural studies on women's art connects women artists and their artworks from different contexts without diluting their uniqueness. I suggest that the model I have proposed in this thesis can be applied in a variety of contexts and fields of women's

studies. It can also provide new possibilities of a transcultural understanding towards women's empowerment.

For me, the involvement of new materialism and its idea of entanglement in this research points to the entrance of understanding contemporary artworks. Specifically, new materialism as an approach shows a great potential in making meaning of art and objects, and demonstrates a significant shift in our understanding of ourselves and our relations with everything in the world. Instead of attempting a definition of art or objects, new materialism is principally concerned with stuff and thrives as an undisciplined substitute for disciplines: as Miller (2010:1) describes, it creates 'inclusive, embracing, original, sometimes quirky researches and observations'. This has the potential to reconceive established academic disciplines, from anthropology to psychology, from sociology to art and design, that requires theoretical frameworks and epistemologies on the material world. New materialism and its idea of entanglement challenge our common-sense opposition between things – subject and object, nature and culture, human and nonhuman, public and private, and male and female. The application of new materialism has constantly challenged the way we think about matters and the universe, such studies include Donna Haraway's (1991) and Karen Barad's (2007). Building on this foundation here, I am concerned with the developments in social science that feminism encounters with the diversity of people, art, and things.

This study is a starting point of applying a phenomenological feminist approach to investigate British and Chinese women's artworks in an entangled way. It has provided an original interpretation of the selected object-based installation works from my transcultural perspective and challenged the common-sense opposition in relation to gender issues. In future research, I will consider how material bodies, spaces, and conditions contribute to the formation of subjectivity, and take a non-essentialising approach to embrace the vitality of matter as it encompasses the nonhuman as well as the human. In addition, this approach articulates and gives agency to artistic processes, offers opportunities for new modes of artistic creation, and expands the interpretation of materials and objects and our relationships with them. Things have been rediscovered; they play a mediating role that help to shape our relationship with the world (Verbeek 2010). It is my future research direction to look into different art forms in an entangled way to emphasise the materiality of the universe and everything – social, cultural, and natural – within it.

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Appendix 1   Selected Artists' Biographies

Rowena Harris

Rowena Harris b.1985, is a London based artist, art researcher and educator. Through physical materiality, film work, and writing, her work unfolds at the intersection between the body, matter, and technology. Within this Harris is engaged with an exploration of perception, subjectivity, and sensory understanding, entangled with the everyday technological regime, and pursues what is stake for invisible disability and neurodiversity from a feminist perspective.

More information: http://rowenaharris.com

Helen Gorrill

Helen Gorrill b. 1969, is a British artist, author, and editor in the arts with a research interest in gendered transnational aesthetics. Gorrill's artistic practice takes many different forms of expression, including collage, textile, drawing, painting, and installation. Her artwork explores ideas about time, history, and reality. In paint, Gorrill's work is large-scale and fluid, ink pigments colliding with each other and giving the illusion or urbanism and spray paint depicting humans and animals, dissecting British prejudices or obsessions. In collage, her work often reappropriates and revives art historical subject matter through paint; and imagery taken from popular culture, Instagram and adult magazines.

More information: http://www.helengorrill.com

Jemima Brown

Jemima Brown b. 1971, is a British artist graduated with an MA in Fine Art from Chelsea College of Art. Brown's work explores the animate versus the inanimate, and the formation of the complex visual narratives involved in self-creation. Her work in sculpture, installation, drawing, and moving image has been widely exhibited in the UK and internationally. Recent exhibitions include *Familie/Family* at Stedelijk Schiedam in the Netherlands, and a solo exhibition *The Great Indoors* at Sidney Cooper Gallery in Canterbury, UK.

More information: https://www.jemimabrown.com

Lana Locke

Lana Locke b.1982, is a London based visual artist. Locke works with found and natural objects, cast metal and photography. Her work explores themes of mortality, procreation, abjection and transgression, seeking to make connections between human biology and natural and manmade structures; packing and waste. Locke's sculpture has expended towards installation-based work that carries visual language of the objects and images into the architectural environment, involving and temporarily altering the space to become part of the surreal and abject world of the work.

More information: www.lanalocke.com

Lin Jingjing

Lin Jingjing b. 1970, is a Shanghai born, Beijing and New York based conceptual artist with an interest in social-political themes. Lin's work spans painting, drawing, performance, installation, mixed media, sound, light, photography, and video. Her work explores the depths of social and personal identity in the context of modern society, often examining themes such as confusion and quest, existence and absence, constraint and resistance through a lens of paradox. Of particular focus is how individuals define themselves amongst the effects of the outside world, vis-à-vis culture, politics, history and the economy.

More information: https://www.linjingjing.org

Tao Aimin

Tao Aimin b. 1974, is a Beijing based visual artist. As a Hunan native who maintains an emotional distance towards her adopted home of Beijing, Tao particularly approaches the lives of rural Chinese women with a combination of empathy and anthropological curiosity through her artwork. Incorporating found objects, painting, calligraphy, printmaking, video, and installation, Tao's work moves fluently between elite and popular culture, between the languages of traditional and contemporary art, and explores issues of artistic authorship and self-representation, labour, embodied knowledge, and collective memory.

More information: https://www.inkstudio.com.cn/artists/68-tao-aimin/overview/

Gao Rong

Gao Rong b. 1986, is an Inner Mongolia born, Beijing based artist. Using needle and thread, Gao transforms domestic items into installations of visual language, referencing the traditionally feminine craft of folk embroidery. Her work often assimilates entire replicas of cars, tables, washing machines, and other household objects in fabrics that invite further inspection. The direction in her artwork is an expansion of her fine embroidery practice, where she weaves abstract shapes across wooden hoop frames, looking at the intersections between domestic and public spaces.

More information: http://www.galleryek.com/artists/gao-rong

Jiang Jie

Jiang Jie b. 1965, is a Beijing based artist and lecturer of sculpture in Central Academy of Fine Arts. Her work explores people, things, and objects in a state at the edge that is derived from Jiang's observation towards the vulnerability and decay of life existence. The theme of Jiang's work addresses the instinct of humanistic care, such as the involvement of embryo, children, women, medical care, and education. Jiang's artistic practice points to the weakness and the fragility as well as the contradiction and tension of life from an anthropological perspective and explores questions around human symbiosis.

More information: http://www.cafa.com.cn/en/figures/artists/details/8110512

Appendix 2 Interview Questions

1. What are you working on at the moment?
1. 目前您在准备什么作品？
Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art?
有没有什么事件或经验让您觉得以艺术的形式可以令人满意的表达出来？

2. Is being a woman important to your art?
2. 作为一个女性对您的艺术创作来说重要吗？
Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim?
您会使用'女性艺术家'这个标签自称吗？

To what extent do you think the art world is still male dominated?
您认为艺术世界仍然是被男性主导的程度如何？

3. Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?
3. 您认为自己是女性主义者吗？

4. Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?
4. 在您的任何作品中，有以表达女性主义为宗旨吗？
How would you most like those directly involved in the arts – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics – to define your work?
您会希望那些直接参与艺术的人 - 例如别的艺术家，合作者，策展人和评论家如何来定义您的作品？

Do you think that those not directly involved in the arts would have similar definitions?
您认为那些不直接参与艺术的观众们会有相同的定义吗？

5. Is installation art in danger of becoming irrelevant?
5. 装置艺术有可能变得无关紧要吗？
Can you think of any limitations that installation art might have? (e.g., too local, too specialist, too hard to preserve material integrity, hard to revisit and keep up-to-date)
您认为装置艺术可能有什么局限性？（例如：地点性限制，专业性限制，难以保持材料的完整性，难以调整和与时俱进）

Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?
您是否担心过观众可能会更多地关注具体的物品而忽略或忽视装置作品背后的意义？

6. Can installation art drive a feminist agenda?
6. 装置艺术能推动女性主义宗旨吗？

Do you think feminist installation art's agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework? If so, in what ways?

313

您是否认为某种共同的框架可以使女性主义装置艺术的宗旨受益？如果是，会以什么样的方式呢？

7. What might be the advantages and / or disadvantages of working with anyone else?
7. 与其他人合作的优势/劣势是什么？

Examples might be joint shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?
例如联合展览，共享资源和研究，跨学科活动，共同的表达目标，和共享工作室 - 其他任何形式？

Which artist/s have inspired you and how?
哪位艺术家曾启发您的创作，并且如何启发您的？

Has your work been influenced in any way by other cultures, and how?
您的作品是否曾受到其它文化的影响，并且如何影响您的？

Appendix 3   Interview Transcripts

Rowena Harris

19th March 2019, 10 am. Skype Interview

Yang – Virginia Yiqing Yang

Harris – Rowena Harris

1.

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

Harris: I am working on a new body of work, just a bit departure from the old. Hmm . . . not even old, it's only few months old. I am working . . . I guess it's in a particular type of frame, which is the certificate to my PhD project. So I am working on, uh . . . yeah, I am working on describing a particular point of view of people's ways of thinking, potentially at risk of being lost from the digital world. I am trying to describe certain modes of fact. One of them is to think about how it might feel, or for example the digital world might creating a kind of sensory, sometimes addressing uncomfortable to certain people that are sensitive. I am working on imprint, I am working on the idea of imprint, which is a kind of, not only literally, a kind of material process that uh, the idea of pressing something against the skin or against the body to kind catch up particular moment, it's kind like an indexical photograph that applying the idea to different materials. And then, I also find work through describing the sensibility, a kind of sensory sensibility, which is in the form of ceramics. And then I also want to talk about . . . find ways, um, to talk about . . . yeah . . . detritus as a positive term, that as these . . . kind of things that is full by the waste in life through time. They kind of like . . . uh . . . something about a society, and something about the people, through a kind of dropout, sort of everydayness. I am kind of finding the work with these ideas to describe what to think about, um...this kind of sensory sensibility in people I am trying to outline. Yeah . . . I am working on different ways come together in a space; um . . . I guess I thought about describing three or four modes and their relationships to the arena. And

that is what I am working on at the moment. I am not ready to show that body of work yet, so I am talking through where I am going other than turning something I got complete. I uh . . . need to make visual, how that comes together, but I don't yet have the work [laughing]. Yeah . . . I got to kind of framing the objects and bringing them together and get hold the space see how that relationship goes. And I will hopefully, you know, make the next movement, uh, forward in the body of work that kind of generative modes to go, to the next page.

Yang: Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art?

Harris: Well, for me I . . . don't necessarily think of art as being able to succinctly describe something but as circling an idea. So it kinda . . . yeah . . . maps around the, kinda thing rather than going straight for the centre. I think the way I make art or what art does is finding out the spaces around ... and working around the ideas. Yeah, I mean . . . I don't know what to say. I think if I were to say, this is particularly for sculpture as well, a kind of like, opens out the spaces around ideas, and syncs things through in different ways rather than kind of writing an essay or a topic for something. Sometimes I find film, that medium, much more . . . about . . . for me, much more direct to express kind of . . . definable concerns, you know. Sometimes I use film as the starting point of new bodies of the work, where I kind of really go in there, and go boom with whatever this idea is, whatever this kind of field is. I am working on this kind of concern and then going back to sculpture, and unpack it, allow it to breath and come out with something. I mean I like film too, but the arena of sculpture somehow makes much more sense with being indirect.

Yang: Yes, sculpture and installation sometimes can be a very subtle form. It's like every time you revisit it, you might have different thoughts about it.

Harris: Yeah, I really enjoy sculpture and installation . . . I think particularly because it can engage with the idea of . . . like slowly coming to know, not knowing the thing is and slowly by spending time in

the space with artwork and come to know what it is or what you think about it. I really like that kind of engagement with . . . the audience; they are thinking about the object in front of them and their bodies are sensing reality and also sensing the art at the same time. It is somehow sometimes very fundamental about the objects, like what you had for breakfast [laughing]. For me, I guess the film is like entering a portal and you can get to another world quickly, entering a narrative. But sculpture for me always maintains a tug back to kind of [inaudible] which I quite like. I just fundamentally like, sitting and thinking about objects and things in the spaces. I could do a PhD on sitting on my comfortable chairs and I could do that [laughing].

2.

Yang: Is being a woman important to your art?

Harris: I mean . . . I cannot say it's not important because it's me [laughing]. But I . . . I am not sure uh . . . I don't know how to answer that question because I cannot think outside of that, you know. I don't know my uh . . . I would say my own female body is not necessarily at the centre of my concerns. Although my work is not directly put into a feminist canvas, the methods I use and the literature I associate with myself, the ideas come from a feminist perspective. Feminist is a methodology . . . rather a kind of literal visual representation of female, so I am quite informed by . . . yeah . . . at the moment I am quite informed by feminist new materialism. Uh . . . also the way I try to act in the world as artist, and as person comes from this feminist uh . . . place. I guess I do not respect sometimes the idea that there is feminine work and masculine work, or there is a distinction between crafts and art objects.

Yang: Do you think art world is still male dominated?

Harris: Yes, I think it is. Uh it is becoming less so obviously, but uh . . . I think it is, and more complex than ever was. Also, I think there are some values, things that the art world values which are male characteristics or some things males can do now. [pause] I don't know what to say . . . It's kinda hard, I . . . It is going to be hard to say because I really don't like drawing binary between kind of male and

female characteristics of which I think I have different characteristics of myself when I . . . anyway. I think the art world also kind values . . . a kind of . . . directness, you know, like a kind of self-confidence. But I also think that is complicated because particularly in digital media, social media, and advertising, uh, the distinction between male and female characteristic is much clearer. Like I was looking at glasses, to try on a pair of new glasses. And I don't really care whether it is man's or women's, I just buy whichever one I like, whichever one fits. The male glasses were sold as, sort of: ah these glasses are going to make you read extremely well; you will have the perfect vision and superb eyes and stuff like this. And like, women's glasses were sold on: oh, you know, poor you, your eyes are bad. These glasses will help you; they will support your life, you should carry on well, and you will look lovely. It is just the utter split between, probably advertising, women and men that women are allowed to fail.

Yang: Is it like showing women are meant to be weak and men are supposed to be strong?

Harris: Exactly. I think those two things are . . . both negative towards each other because it is a big weight for men not be able to fail. And it is a big, fucking annoying thing for women always seen as weak or sold on weakness. Um . . . there is also, I got noticed somewhere around that there seems to be a kind of funny and weird movement in the last five to ten years that men are allowed to be depressed [sneering]. I am talking about in art world, like Ed Atkins, uh . . . I don't know who else, uh . . . Benedict Drew, basically talking about a few London and Berlin based contemporary male artists are allowed to talk about depression, you know, straightforward depression. But I don't see any women talking about depression [laughing], I don't see any woman is able to talk about this, or like, having a kind of tone that it is an issue we can talk about. It seems weird because in society, I know that . . . men are more difficult to talk about depression. But in the art world, it seems they still playing this trope of, like, the melancholic male and the hysteric female. That . . . sort of this area is not rich yet because it is still really really difficult to have that in artwork or to talk about the subject in artwork. You know, I mean, in art, not necessarily saying that the male artist isn't self-depressed, I don't know, whatever, maybe, but the artwork is able to talk about it seems to be a legitimate, kind of subject for men, male artists, but not for female artists to deliver. I don't know, [laughing] seems strange. I think I am kind, noticing obviously there is like pay gaps, kind of . . . far more, still far more male artists than female

artists be in the show. They are also kind of the gender binary problems that are still not solved yet. These are the big topics that I know about, I am also noticing the smaller topics, these weird subtleties are like, what!? [laughing], for male and female, what seems to be we are allowed to do and not allowed to do.

3.

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

Harris: Yes. Yes, uh . . . I will probably say I come from . . . a kind of idea ethics, non-essentialist feminism or gender fluidity rather than essentialist feminism.

4.

Yang: Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

Harris: Implicitly not explicitly, like, embodied the way I make work. Like the fluidity between . . . between things, but I don't necessarily set out with the feminist . . . it is feminist agenda, but I am not talking about . . . women, you know what I mean, feminism in a much border sense, a kind of equality and so. I don't necessarily set out with the image of women and men in my work explicitly.

Yang: In some of your work it is just about the body . . . the unisex body, is it?

Harris: Uh . . . yeah, a lot of my work is to do with the body and technology. My work talks both of those things in a kind of ghosting presents mostly. So they are something that aid of you brings to the space with the body. I mean the body is always a very present concern of mine, and it is the key for me

to imagine, participant, and understand the work. I never ... directly make, draw, or build a concrete body in the space.

Yang: Is it more like the trace of the body in your work？

Harris: Yeah, exactly the trace or the ghost of the body.

Yang: How would you most like those directly involved in the art – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics . . . to define your work?

Harris: I don't know if I need definitions anyway [laughing]. I think I am just . . . I think I would like people to understand the complexity and also not to feel pin down to some kinds of tropes. I know my work sometimes can be complex, but I would like them to find ways, you know, to unpack ideas. Uh . . . maybe the slower view, might be that . . . I could give that a word when I would like to understand through . . . slower view I think.

Yang: Do you think that those not directly involved in the arts would have similar definitions?

Harris: Um . . . I think I accept that not everybody understands everything like the way I understand it. And I am really ok with that [laughing]. So I think there are many levels of engagements, and I don't really think that . . . that should be done. As an artist, you should be generous that people can come, can appreciate and enjoy something from the work that without knowing anything that you want to get to them, without knowing anything about theories or, you know, any training in art. They should be able to come to experience and take something away even those are not what you intended to give them. And . . . I think that's also why I enjoy objects, sculptures and installations, cause it is a real experience [laughing] of somebody's, sort of physical placing of themselves in front of your work and

the world, no one brings to them what they have, you know, like the work will get to them, like I don't lead them anywhere. I think it is like equalizing space. However, the art world is superior-lead and even to enter a gallery is not at all equal.

5.

Yang: Is installation art in danger of becoming irrelevant? Can you think of any limitation that installation art might have?

Harris: I think it is relaying on the space as an artist. I guess other forms, distribute forms like film, audio or performance, they can kind of, cross different thresholds that installation art cannot. And I will say it does not transparent itself to photographs or documentations too well. Uh . . . and it can be difficult in that sense of space not being used to distribute. Uh . . . there are lots of other programmatic difficulties like living with the objects that you make [laughing], looking after them, sending them overseas, and building crates. All of these things are seemed to be more and more excessive as we move, like into the digital world. But I kind enjoy this rudimentary like sending a block of concretes in a crate like Germany [laughing]. It just seems more and more absurd when, a lot of, you know, film work, and other artists are simply sending files and you have to like . . . build and ship crates [laughing] to get this on. Uh . . . there is also a kind of rootedness in the world that you kinda have to work with. For example, it is a lot harder to move if you work with the medium of fluid material and objects. You will have to decide to like, let go at the end of the residency or ship them because they are useful; you will have to begin that approach knowing that they are going to be dissolved afterwards.

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

Harris: Yeah, yeah, that's like a primary concern. Yeah, I guess because I am working in sex relations, building things between objects, and also pointing to the senses with lots of very subtle gestures.

That . . . I have to work very hard to build that kind of relationship between one thing and the next thing so that things are not always taking as sculptures alone.

Yang: Is that the reason you do not like to use metaphors in your work, as it is easy for people to put more focus on the objects?

Harris: Yeah, I also don't use those types of signalized strategies when set up things. I try to work ways to arrange them. For example, put things on the floor, things are off the space or flowing with the space as much as I can.

Yang: Can installation art drive a feminist agenda?

Harris: Yes, fundamentally. I think, uh, on the feminist agenda that I am concerned of - thinking about things that are assembled, the relationship between things, and things are always affecting other things that they cannot be separated. And . . . to think about impact, so you know, how one thing impacts the other thing, impacts the other thing, impacts the other thing. Like . . . a kind of situated approach of thinking rather than a singular identity that somehow contained. That is what I mean by method, and, uh . . . that is what you will find in my work: gentled and packed with feminist agenda; it does not say it on the front of it.

6.

Yang: Do you think feminist installation art's agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework? If so, in what ways?

Harris: No. Uh . . . I think feminism is not one singular idea. And I will leave them claiming many aspects together under a bigger concept of feminism rather than a common framework that talks only one aspect and excludes others. It is an inclusive goal and, inclusive ways of thinking.

7.

Yang: What might be the advantages and/ or disadvantages of working with anyone else? Examples might be joint shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?

Harris: Well I will just talk a couple of them. I tend to not share my studio with others so that I have free space to explore with my work and find myself, and without a kind of expectation because no one is looking [laughing]. I mean if the thing is stupid, I don't have to show it, so nobody sees it, nobody knows anything. I find it difficult to work with other people in the space, but I know some people work really well with others. So although I do not like to share the studio, I do enjoy installing with other people in group shows. I like to extend the meaning making with other people's work, like play with the space and how things working together. And if it is a solo show, I will work with gallery or the curator who knows the space well. I really enjoy those moments; it can be really difficult because shows are very stressful [laughing]. But when it works well, it works really well. Uh . . . I worked some collaboration before in an artists' project that used to be a part of the collective called, uh, *Misery Connoisseur*, which was an artist publication. That worked really well when me and other people made some artwork together. But the work we did for the publication was quite distinct from my practice. It is like a new space to explore something a bit weird [laughing]. Uh, and I really like working with people in that way, but I would not part my sculptures and installations practice into that because it is kind of personal. I enjoy collaboration on new and specific projects rather than opening my studio to that. I also enjoy other parts of my practice like the reading groups in college because . . . writing is a form to share and discuss creative ideas. It is a very productive and generative way that really extends my thoughts.

Yang: Which artist/s have inspired you and how?

Harris: I guess when I was very young, when I was an early teenage about 12, uh . . . in the UK, it was this YBA period, Young British Artists period. I remember going to the first Saatchi Gallery to see . . . Rachel Whiteread's concrete house, and I think that's my first love. The processes of these castings and traces, the kind of . . . ghost stories of materials and objects you can tell in her work were really incredible stuff. And then I guess I have, umm . . . another artist that I really enjoy is Jason Dodge, he is an America artist and he is one of my favourites. I like his work; he is just beyond my abilities. Dodge is like a poetic sculptor. And also he does this slower view very well by using his titles of work to allow the idea to come to you. He purchases on the metaphor, but he does not quite you know. It's quite . . . it's a poem. These artists . . . allow gentle gestures to happen and their work is beautiful to see, but in the same breath the work is just so rich. Uh... other sculptors and installation artists I like are Nina Canell, [pause] Marie Lund . . . and Philip Lai. These are kind of sculpture and installation artists, but I am not always only inspired by this arena. I spend a lot of time with others, like [inaudible], and I also my peer group that I involve. I am super fascinated of what is very contemporary and what is very like . . . press things to younger artists.

Yang: Has your work been influenced in any way by other cultures, and how?

Harris: Yes, in many ways that you will not necessarily be able to decide for that in a physical manifestation, I think. I lived in Roma for years and might be obvious in the work [laughing]. But that is not too distinctive from British culture. And I guess I am looking at ideas from uh, Asia-Polynesian culture, which has a very different understanding of the tacit knowledges. They look at the kind of ocean theory and wayfinding techniques, which will be a thematic understanding of the landscape and environment. I am kind of exploring this kind of environmental, uh . . . situatedness as a responsive way of ... knowing things. I do not really use direct images but the ideas.

Helen Gorrill

13th March 2018, Email Interview.

Yang – Virginia Yiqing Yang

Gorrill – Helen Gorrill

1.

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

- Did any event or experience contribute to you becoming an artist?

Gorrill: I was a victim of domestic violence in my first marriage and this led to me exploring my experiences through art practice. I didn't have the chance to go to university when I was younger, and went aged 37 starting on Access (as I had no previous qualifications) then onto Fine Art and Contemporary Applied Arts degrees, my MRes in Gender and Art, and then PhD. Most of my work has revolved around gender issues, ie, the role of women in society, and repression through religion etc. My ex-husband was a Jehovah's witness, so I have worked a lot with issues surrounding the repression of women through religion, and also the conflicting ideology it presents to men in today's society. For example, there was a JW pamphlet delivered to my house that asked 'Would she make a good wife?'. It asked questions (with tick boxes) like 'Does she dress like a good wife?', 'Does she demonstrate submissiveness to her family and the congregation?' etc. So I would say largely my own personal circumstances/personal life were the driving force behind me becoming an artist, in my late thirties, and I have always worked with issues that are really important to me (and that I have experienced). I don't think I was very good at art when I was younger, or at least I wasn't encouraged in any way. I had a strange upbringing, my parents were obsessed with being seen to be respectable and with what the neighbours might say about this or that, so I was brought up to be as beige and average as possible in order not to stand out and draw attention to my parents. I think this has backfired on them now though (haha). They are mortified about most of the work I do, and never said 'well done' or anything when I got a PhD because they think it is in a subject not to be proud of, there's almost a sense of shame around the work I do and my education (in my family) both my writing and my art. So this is probably why I didn't do anything when I was younger because of my (odd) upbringing.

2.

Yang: Is being a woman important to your art?

- Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim?
- Do you think the art world is still male dominated?

Gorrill: I have written about this in my book, which is coming out this year (Women Can't Paint: Gender, the Glass Ceiling and Values in Contemporary Art) with I.B. Tauris. I could talk about this indefinitely so am being as brief as possible, but please let me know if you need any clarification on this. I don't like being called a woman artist because back in the day, we referred to women lawyers as 'women lawyers' and now we would say 'lawyer', and not genderise it in any way. Even actresses now tend to be termed as an actor. I think artists shouldn't be labelled according to sex/gender. There is a massive problem with feminist theory, in that Griselda Pollock's huge influence on the academy has really confused things for those teaching art students because rather than just looking at an artist's work, before you can look at the work of a woman you have to wade through a whole bunch of conflicting feminist theory before you can do so (so you have Pollock who says you cannot analyse the work of men and women side by side, that women's work has to be judged differently to that of men; then you have Nochlin who says that women and men's work is no different, then you have Butler who says you cannot see women as women and men as men). I think one of the biggest problems in feminist theory is that Pollock's influence has meant that people have started to see women and men differently, when really artwork can be judged and displayed alongside one and other, the feminine and masculine. Pollock sees the word feminine as a 'sneer word' when I see it as a word we might celebrate. I think we should be celebrated for what we are (male or female), and that women should not be doctrined to hate men or to dismiss men for being male (if that makes sense), as Pollock seems to have done. Too much feminist theory has indoctrinated women into wanting more than equality, and I think Pollock is to blame for much of this, her influence has been huge, and so far nobody has stood up to her. My book to an extent is very critical about some of her theories, namely differencing (I believe that we should not judge men and women's art work differently). There is no wonder most art lecturers (in seminars) discuss the work of male artists because it is much simpler to read, you read the artwork for what it is rather than first having to wade through the conflicting feminist theory and then read the artwork. I don't think feminist theory has done female artists that much good in the long term, although it has sold influential academics (Pollock) a huge amount of books! I think it's time for a change and to go back to basics again although in the 1970s I do think the step was necessary, ie, to stand up to lack of equality. The problem is that the second wave feminist movement seems to seek more than equality, ie, a revenge for the lack of equality in the past and I would never align myself with that; I have a son and would hate to think that he was being discriminated against for being male as a result of the feminist movement…

The artworld is definitely still male dominated. The problem is that it is the gatekeepers, even female gatekeepers want to stand out as lone gatekeepers in a male dominated environment and this can lead to 'queen bees' or women who want to stand out as supporting a male dominated environment. Women are very afraid of being seen as feminists (or feminazis as my much adored step son would say!). Museums contain over 70% of the work of men, and this affects the marketability and market value of women's artwork, despite 74% of fine art graduates being female. Until museums change their collection equality policies to include the category of gender, then this won't change. Much research still assumes gender is a neutral category when it isn't, and we still see men's artwork fetching up to 80% more than women's. As a lecturer it is really hard to contain the knowledge that my female majority students are going to have to work five times harder than the male student to succeed, and that most of these will drop out, if they don't drop out they will have to accept their work will be worth significantly less than their male counterparts. So the museum system needs to change and this could then have a knock on effect on the market. Having said that we are a saturated market and it is difficult for men to succeed too, particularly if they are expected to be the main breadwinner and support a family etc.

3.

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

Gorrill: Yes, I am a feminist (in that I agree with equality) but this is a label I don't like being labelled with. Many people think that feminists are 'men haters' and want more than equality, ie, want to usurp the male population, which I definitely don't agree with. I have heard a lot of people (including my stepson, lol) describe feminists as 'feminazis' which isn't a very flattering label to be given although I can understand why it is used because many strong feminists come across as being anti-men, requiring to be in female only spaces etc.

4.

Yang: Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

- How would you most like your audience to define your work?

Gorrill: I think the UK is really narrow minded when it comes to art compared to other countries. For example, my degree show got censored by the police for containing an installation of drawings of scantily clad men in submissive positions (this was reported in The Guardian 'Britain is not radical enough'. It was ridiculous to have police wasting their time on this, given that the billboards outside the art school were advertising push-up bras with scantily clad women on them (so why not men?). I had problems at more shows after that, some people kicked off at my London solo (2011) but when I exhibited in the Middle East (I couldn't afford to go but the gallery sent pictures…) there were photographs of Sheikhs and women in burkhas looking at the pictures and understanding the concept, no complaints were made. I was surprised by this because I would have imagined the Middle East to be more repressed than here in the UK, but in my case it didn't appear to be. Also my postdoc research has shown that the Middle East is the only country where women's art sells for more or less the same price as men's (a 2% gap only), and their art prizes are more or less gender equal. Having said that I think a lot of artists in the UK enjoy the attention of scandalous work and some I know have deliberately created provocative work for attention. I think the audience for my work have tried to pigeon-hole me into an anti-religious feminist artist, which I am not (see Wikipedia page someone has set up!). I'm working with animal imagery currently as a result from moving from one of the most deprived areas of Newcastle city centre to the middle of nowhere, and I'm interested in the encroach of the urban on the rural areas as our populations grow. I'm struggling with this because people can't place me as an environmental artist, rather a feminist artist. Perhaps that is my USP? (although feminist art is very difficult to sell, whereas environmental work isn't, I have found). I haven't really stepped outside the box to wonder how people might define me, because I don't involve myself in networking and social circles relating to artists (probably to my eventual demise because in order to be very successful you need to be involved in social currency…), I am quite reclusive as a person so I tend to look inwards rather than outwards on this and don't think about it too much.

5.

Yang: Do you think installation art is in danger of becoming irrelevant?

- Is there any limitation of installation in your view / experience?
  (e.g., too local, too specialist, too hard to preserve material integrity, hard to revisit and keep up-to-date)
- Have you ever been concerned that an audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

Gorrill: Going back to my solo show in London (2011), I exhibited supersized (2 to 3 meters tall) drawings of women towering above paintings of submissive men on the floor, I also had my prosthetic limb installations hanging from chains from the ceiling and furniture made from prosthetic limbs and

male sex toys. It sounds crazy now because what I'm doing now is much tamer, much more commercial, but installation art doesn't really sell, so unless you are Arts Council funded or have a rich husband/wife/parents to support you, it is impossible to continue. So whilst the installation drew more attention and was taken to an international level, at the minute I couldn't practice because I have to make 2d work that sells through galleries and pays the bills. I think if there were more artist funding or government support for this kind of work that it would be much more widely practiced. I don't see any limitation of installation other than for me the storage of 40-50 prosthetic legs (my neighbours think I am bonkers!). I haven't worried about the audience reaction focusing on the physical object, because in my case the installation is very direct and shocking to some people so I'd say most people have immediately understood the concept. Also, the titles behind the works have caused a lot of people to understand the concept, at least the titles have been very direct, for example one of the chairs I made was called 'Sex Café Chair' and was created from prosthetic legs, an embroidered vulva, male sex toys, and related to sex trafficking of women and girls into prostitution from eastern block countries. I think work that is less direct may have audiences focusing more on the object, and one of the problems with art schools is that they often instruct students not to be direct and to create work for an intellectual audience that is difficult to interpret, almost like a cryptic puzzle. I disagree with that because art should be for everyone, for everyone to understand and I think that ultimately you leave art school and realistically need to make a living.

6.

Yang: Can installation art drive a feminist agenda?

- How can installation art help feminist agenda in your view / experience?
- Why would you choose installation as a medium?

Gorrill: I work with 2d and 3d medias and I'm trying to answer the question from the perspective of material. I would say that installation is a very direct form of communication. People want to become involved in it. I set up a full size embroidered confession chamber in one of my shows and people queued up to go in and leave a confession. Many people came out crying because the small dark space forced them to come face to face with other people's confessions and thus confront their own fears and secrets. For example someone had written 'I know that one day I will take my own life', 'I like to hit my girlfriend and sometimes I really enjoy it even though I'm female'. I have never had people stand in front of a painting for longer than a couple of minutes but I think installation has the power to command the audience's attention in a way that a painting can't, and particularly so when it is interactive installation art, which can be very powerful way of promoting a feminist agenda. You can live with a painting, on the wall, and look at it everyday, a slowburn response. I don't think you could live with an installation in the same way but the impact is perhaps more direct and immediate.

7.

Yang: What might be the advantages and / or disadvantages of working with anyone else?

- Examples might be collaboration, joint shows / galleries, sharing resources, sharing audience reactions and analysis, research, combined performances, cross-disciplinary activities, sharing results, sharing influences, interests and goals, sharing expertise, sharing studios – anything else?

- Which artist/s have inspired you and how?
- Has your work been influenced in anyway by other cultures?
- What are your views on art globalization?

Gorrill: I have only collaborated with my partner Paul in that he is brilliant at installing work. For example, I was fine making the furniture (with some instruction) but couldn't have created the hanging legs because they're extremely heavy and I haven't got the knowledge or engineering know-how behind what works and what doesn't. The legs need to be hung very specifically. They were installed by a London gallery (in their window) in Notting Hill once and they looked weak when they were hung by a team who didn't understand that they needed to be placed precise millimeters and angles apart in order to give the illusion of real legs being forced apart. They went to Paris too to a gallery and I worried about how they might look as I hadn't hung them myself (or my collaborator should I say).

I'm not sure how I would feel collaborating, but am open to this in the future, never say never. I've done lots of group shows but they have been hung by the galleries and very often I haven't attended the exhibitions, just sent my work down. I'm a very private person, I think, and enjoy very much working alone and doing my own thing.

In my early days I have been very much inspired by mainly female artists, Tracey Emin, Louise Bourgeois, etc. I became obsessed with looking at exhibitions a while back and it stopped me from making work because of a loss of confidence as opposed to inspiration, so more recently I have been working on a bit of an island to create new work, and just focusing on what I am doing rather than what everybody else is doing. This probably isn't a good thing in the long run, and hopefully just a phase I am going through… My work fairly recently has been influenced by Japanese street culture, but I became obsessed by that as well, so one of the reasons I have dropped out of influences (for the time being). I think I've got a lot of ideas stored up from the past three/four years (my PhD was not practice-led so I think I have dropped behind in practice for a while due to lack of time, but I am slowly beginning to find my feet again).

14th May 2019, 11 am. Sidney Cooper Gallery, Canterbury, UK.

Yang – Virginia Yiqing Yang

Brown – Jemima Brown

1.

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

Brown: Um, I am working on a catalogue for the exhibition *The Great Indoors*. Um . . . because the scale of some of the work in the show, um . . . it wouldn't be possible to photograph in my domestic environment where I make my work [laughing]. The large tower pieces, they couldn't, couldn't kind of even really finish making before I install them in the show. Um . . . I wanted to do the catalogue to accompany the project at the end of the show rather than beginning. You know, that means I can conclude the installation. So, yeah, I am working on the catalogue.

Yang: Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art?

Brown: In terms of experience . . . that's a great question [laughing]. It might be a cumulative, a cumulative kind of, um . . . series of events or experiences that then feed into the work. But about whether it's satisfactory, I think that . . . for me, part of the practice in the process of making art or just living is about it being unsatisfactory [laughing]. And constantly, um, negotiating my way through, if anything manages to exist in the real world then it's always in some way unsatisfactory, and that's kind of the point of it. Some of the things take time to sort of . . . cook for a while, I am thinking about the sculptures that use the ironing boards. I have to call them found objects because I think they are quite chosen, like they either choose me or I choose them. They are quite considered as found / chosen objects. But I have to have them, to live with them for a while before they became parts of the work. So things happen in different speeds.

Yang: Are those found objects all from your own?

Brown: Yeah, the ironing boards, probably a couple of years ago. In 2017, I made, I found a small ironing board and I switched its legs around and stood it up, put a cardigan on it to give it a wave. I felt it's a very good size for a woman. That's the blue one, I kind changed that one a little bit, so I kind consider that was the first one I started making.

2.

Yang: Is being a woman important to your art?

Brown: [laughing] Your question, this is great! Hahahaha. Yes! Being a woman is definitely important to my art. I think that's absolutely undeniable.

Yang: Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim?

Brown: Well [laughing].

Yang: Well, for this question, I have noticed that some of the exhibitions, group exhibitions, they were kind of, titled with, or emphasised on women artists rather than what the artwork were about.

Brown: Yeah, I think it's a really good question because, um . . . the fact that we still need to be talked about as women artists is just acknowledgment of the fact that the . . . kind of patriarchal system is so deeply embedded. The way we lived, we have to think ourselves in this, even though we hold half of the sky. So, I don't know, it's not a comfortably claim, no. I guess, inevitably, the work is, you know, is defined by lived experience and the structure and qualities that are absolutely part of the way we live.

Yang: To what extent do you think the art world is still male dominated?

Brown: I think there is work need to be done [laughing]. I do think it is still male dominated because, you know, feminist, feminism is being allowed to have a sort of moment. But it almost likes the moment puts it in a box and seals it up, and the box is over there. So yeah, I do think the art world is still male dominated, definitely.

3.

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

Brown: Absolutely.

Yang: Very straightforward [laughing].

Brown: Yeah, that is.

4.

Yang: Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

Brown: Um . . . it probably does. Even if not, I mean sometimes in the work . . . um . . . the work can be quite savage towards its portrayal of some women. It's not necessarily always flattery. So in making, I am aware that some feminists might look at the work and be angry with me because they would say that the internalised misogyny is really part of me, you know, I am portraying some women but not celebrating them. In terms of feminist agenda, I think there is, but I don't know how much the agenda I have in the work. The work is just the work, and my making of it is what I do. Maybe that comes out more in a kind of political element of it. Politically in the work, I don't know, it's not exactly to do with the kind of feminist angle, but I tend to point myself stepping back a little bit and perhaps thinking more like a journalist. Say it's the political element of it and not taking as much the political position as I would personally. So . . . you know I am active politics on the left and I am clear about my position when I am doing that. But I think I can compartmentalise and so in the work, I perhaps got less of the agenda and I stepped back. In terms of the feminist agenda, I think it's the similar thing happened. In my day-to-day life, the conversations I have, probably, um . . . more definite about my feminist agenda in that than I am actually in the work. The work is just the work, and then my agenda, yeah, maybe pops into that.

Yang: It's kind of like . . . I found it hard to define what feminist artwork is.

Brown: Yeah.

Yang: Like I can say I am a feminist, but different people have different opinions about feminism so that their views and definitions about feminist artwork would be very different as well.

Brown: Mm-hmm, yes. I think so. I think it probably does have a feminist agenda even if it's not. When there's a kind of, a very resolved or clear position on feminism . . . I think it does.

Yang: How would you most like those directly involved in the arts – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics – to define your work?

Brown: Um . . . I tend to feel that once the work's out there, it has to find its own life. Sometimes people will come up with unexpected reads of the work. Someone's writing a text for the catalogue I mentioned earlier. And my initial, sort of impulse and intention with the tower pieces was to make a . . . very clear reference to Brâncuși and I was talking about the domesticity and a monumental . . . there're various things going on with that. Somebody, who knows my work quite well and knows me quite well in that kind of separated identity, they have read the outcome of those towers as, um . . . a subconscious memorial to the fire of Grenfell Tower, they have seen that as a kind of rage against the thing that's like of the tower. I think I can totally understand that where their read is coming from. But it wasn't, not in any way, my outset of making the work. But, you know, they come to it with that reading, and the work kind has to stand there and say: ok [laughing], you know, I can see how you read it. I kind of, I am happy for people to read the work different. When people engage with art, they bring their own experiences into it, to their own, kind of readings to what's going on in the world. I think it's particularly with the piece that the white plastic baskets rather than the wicker one. I think they not so much the Grenfell Tower but with the white one that's how they read it. It's really interesting to me they would read it in that way, quite shocking in a way. So I think that's the thing, once work is out there, it does take on lives.

Yang: Yeah, a kind of, unpredictable feedbacks.

Brown: Yeah, that's fine. I think people do read me as a feminist artist, I think I do define my work in that way. And I am not uncomfortable with that, that's fine, that's good.

Yang: Do you think that those not directly involved in the arts would have similar definitions?

Brown: Um . . . again I think they gonna bring some different things into that, if they do not have regularly, have that kind of conversation, they might bring different things. I think quite a lot of the work quite, um . . . accessible. I think people sort of look at it in different levels depending upon whether they coming from art or not. So I think they probably would have some similar definitions they might go into as much depth as somebody, you know, kind of living and breathing those questions all the time.

5.

Yang: Is installation art in danger of becoming irrelevant?

Brown: I think anything that in a physical base is in danger, not necessary becoming irrelevant but it's in danger species, just if it's not super easily accessible or globally worldwide, if it doesn't work like swiping the screen, then yes, it's probably in danger.

Yang: Can you think of any limitations that installation art might have?
(e.g., too local, too specialist, too hard to preserve material integrity, hard to revisit and keep up-to-date)

Brown: There are certainly limitations of installations, but I think there are ways around the limitations and potentially take the work of another directions.

Yang: Did you install the work yourself at the exhibition?

Brown: Yes, I mean I participated heavily in that. I make work at the studio at home, in the living room of my house. It was based in London and it's just not working for me any more, so I moved out to the coast searching for more space. I had help with the newest work about the plan and scale, but mostly I work on my own.

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

Brown: Not really, because I feel like they are kind of tied up with each other, they are not mutually exclusive; they are parts of the same thing. So I don't think it's so much of a danger for me.

6.

Yang: Can installation art drive a feminist agenda? Do you think feminist installation art's agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework?

Brown: I think artists to do what they want [laughing]. And I don't think installation art would particularly drive feminist agenda any more than other kind of media. It's going to be different if I exhibit the installation work in a different location. It will become something slightly different, it will be a different moment for it.

Yang: Yeah, I mean even for the same person who visit the gallery and experience the artwork at a different time, they would have different feelings.

Brown: Yeah, exactly. Different moments of it.

Yang: It's just so much depending on the current situation, the location, or even the mood of the audience.

Brown: Yeah, if it were raining outside [laughing], it would make so much difference.

7.

Yang: What might be the advantages and / or disadvantages of working with anyone else?
(Examples might be joint shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?)

Brown: I mean my practice is mostly about working in my studio on my own. When I first graduated from art college, sharing studios was important for having the help to build up kind of dialogue with people. It has both advantages and disadvantages working with other people. I think the advantage of showing with other artists is that the artwork has a conversation with other work.

Yang: Which artist/s have inspired you and how?

Brown: It is such a difficult question.

Yang: I mean I understand in different stage you would have different inspirations.

Brown: Yeah, exactly. There are too many to say [laughing]. So many people, at so many different points, and different meanings. I found it really hard to pin down.

Yang: For example, who have influenced you the most? Or it could be a movement or an idea.

Brown: I think for a long time, the Arte Povera Movement. And a Belgium artist, Berlinde De Bruyckere, I was very excited about seeing her work. I was very much recommended in her, she is pretty fabulous. Um . . . there are lots of taxidermy horse forms and parts, they are quite extraordinary [pause]. In terms of what I read around and think about, I tend to be more interested in . . . either fiction or um . . . some other writing fits into the work, Margaret Atwood. She is a big big thing for me, a touchpoint for me in the work. Yeah, Margaret Atwood is probably more than any other visual artists.

With the recent work, um . . . reading around political and sociological, there is a book about the British class system (Social Class in the 21ˢᵗ Century by Mike Savage). So I would say that more than particular artists. Oh I need to see it again cause I really loved it, Dorothea Tanning at Tate, it's amazing. I definitely recommend to see that, the hotel room.

Yang: Has your work been influenced in anyway by other cultures, and how?

Brown: I would say, I mean in a way, one of the big things embedded in my work is about . . . being very very embedded in the culture that I live in. The wallpaper, the kind of what the work is about, is definitely about the culture that I am in. I don't know if it is that much, um . . . beyond, I mean I think, perhaps it's implicitly by . . . if I visit other places, that would feed into my work in a way that I don't necessarily know. I don't think it is a very direct way at all, so no, I wouldn't say that so much.

<u>Lana Locke</u>

2nd April 2019, 3 am. Telephone Interview

Yang – Virginia Yiqing Yang

Locke – Lana Locke

1.

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

Locke: . . . Um, I mean, I don't know if it is very helpful to you because I am actually most working on paintings rather than object. But I do like . . . I am treating the paintings like installations in a way, um . . . it is a bit like it becomes a kind of landscape, um . . . that I am engaging with, a kind of very . . . very thick, jute material I am working on rather than fine canvas. So I am still kind of treating it as object and tacking it in that way. I think a lot of . . . the kind of body themes are similar to the objects that I've been working with. Um . . . I felt that the lasts year I've been working in paintings and some videos as well. So the exhibition next month is gonna mostly be paintings. Although the . . . these is this installation which I was kind reimagining, this installation: *Material, Social, Tidal ___Drift*, I called it which I installed in Margate last year. Um . . . and then I reimagine this again in Wimbledon alongside other practise based PhD students in the Autumn. And then there's an exhibition of research in Kingston Museum, called Another Land, which is about . . . art in relation to place. But this time it's just kind of . . . like objects fragments from this wider installation, and it's in . . . like a museum glass cabinet, so it's all completely different, almost like tiny little slides from this larger installation. Um . . . so that's something I was working on last week.

Yang: That's really interesting! So the paintings are like landscape, and there are materials objects on them that more than just 2 dimensional paintings?

Locke: Yeah . . . it is still two dimensional but . . . I suppose, I mean I am adding up, some of them are got other, like foreign elements on it so I've got one which is, there is paint but also found material, just because I've been using found material in the sculptures. So there is a kind of continuation of that. And also this kind of graininess of the material I am working on. It's part of the appeal, um . . . of . . . working on paintings, and you know, with the actual roughness of the surface material has been particularly appealing to me. So that kind of, makes me feel as much as the material that I am working on as about, um . . . making an image. So it still feels very material.

2.

Yang: Is being a woman important to your art?

Locke: Yeah . . . I mean, I think a lot of the themes, um, are around motherhood and procreation, and even before becoming a mother about, um, kind of fears around be able to procreate, um . . . worries about kind of sexual dysfunction, and then I suppose having become mother then, it's also childbirth and childcare, having to split one's time between work and looking after the children, being pulled to different directions. So I think, place quite clearly in my work.

Yang: Do you think the female perspective would be reflected in the art making while male might not have in some aspects?

Locke: Um . . . I mean it's hard to . . . say. Personally, I don't want to make it too much, too black and white, male and female. Although I appreciate your kind of . . . you got difficult to, um . . . with the word Feminism and how broad that is, at the same time I suppose . . . the category of women is very broad as well, and it's . . . because . . . um . . . gender fluidity is now much more apparent in our current discourse and it makes one question, a kind of essential point of view, this is essentially a woman's perspective or this is essentially a man's perspective. I think in terms of gender roles, it does, unfortunately tend to be, um, still women who bare the brunt of childcare and . . . obviously, giving birth, that's kind of unavoidable at the moment [laughing].

Yang: Unfortunately, yes.

Locke: And you know, like . . . um, when you got, say as famous artists like Tracey Emin and Marina Abramovic talking about the abortions that they have had, how that places someone like myself, an artist mother, um. . . those are all . . . fairly directly issues for women. Um . . . But I think the kind of wider issues of gender and gender roles which isn't necessarily just women but it's part of, the kind of the labour, the kind of way that, you know, we split childcaring and going to work between parents. Um . . . so there is definitely a kind of gendered perspective that I bring to my art practice. But I wouldn't want to say that there is only a perspective that could come to women. Um . . . I can only say, it might a perspective that partly related to which I experience other women. And there is, obviously,

Yang: Yeah, it's just like one element or factor among all the others in the art making.

Locke: Yeah, and obviously female artists are still being . . . uh, underrepresented compare to male artists.

Yang: Yeah, that actually relates to the next question: to what extend do you think the art world is still male dominated?

Locke: . . . I mean it doesn't always appear to be so, but once you scratch the surface, and . . . you know, like Guerrilla Girls and others have demonstrated how dominated it still is. Um . . . it feels like there is certainly a lot of female art students in terms of who's being shown by high profile galleries and museums, and being sold at auctions these sorts of things it's still very male. And I think in art academia as well, it feels more male, and you know, someone like myself, if you got parental responsibilities and they tend to . . . towards women, and obviously that's a contributing factor but that's also . . . um, because there is kind of social aspect as well, how, um . . . how artists are chosen

and become represented, the say is the men. But I think . . . um . . . I think that's not the only aspects. Um . . . hopefully the more it's highlighted, you know, the more we can address it.

Yang: Yeah, I feel like there are more and more female students in art schools, but those successful artists, mostly are still male. I wondered where these female students go; they might get other jobs, give up on artistic careers, because they have to make a living first.

Locke: Yeah.

Yang: And also, I don't know, for example for you, if the maternity leave and childcare thing would have influence on women's art practice?

Locke: I mean . . . I think it kind of restricts, obviously it restricts the hours I been able to work on the artistic practice. But I think it also restricts . . . um . . . exhibitions, or the time I can go to exhibitions. You know, there is a sort of compromise that has been made. It's kind of a negotiation with . . . in my case, my husband, you know, someone else can look after the children. There is a sort of trade in terms of time, and time becomes costed in a different way. Yeah, simple things like, this kind of social art situation so I can't attend because I need to look after my children, things like that. Um . . . I wouldn't say it has stopped me practicing my art, but it just becomes more negotiated, and more kind of, uh, more complicated, [laughing], because it's not like a salaried job. For myself, I felt like I wanted to keep working. I think probably, I wouldn't be worried to stop working; it felt better for me be able to be in touch with, uh, my practice. When I looked after the birth of my first child particularly, it was kind of very creative, because I was doing my PhD, then I had 4 months of maternity leave, from that, from the study, but then during that period I was able to, kind of return to my practice, and bring the baby to the studio, she's kind of being part of it. I made sculptures that relate to things like changing nappies, breast feedings, so that it became source and material for the practice. So I think it can be quite rich. The kind of circumstances became part of the work, so my own circumstances bringing up baby became part of the work.

Yang: I always feel . . . imagine that taking your baby to the graduation ceremony, it's brilliant.

Locke: Yeah, yeah, that's true [laughing].

3.

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

Locke: Yeah, I do, I do. And I think that became more apparent during, like, partly when I was doing the PhD and partly having children. And um . . . you know, I am still involved in a feminism and subjectivities working group at Chelsea, Camberwell and Wimbledon College of Arts. And I think there is still a lot of gendered issued that we face in the world, you know, pay gap and these career problems we were just talking about. It's just so much that needs to be addressed. Even just very simple things like reading stories to my three-year-old, and, like 70% of the characters are male. I am kind of anger, my anger that just things I won't pick up on with just how male-oriented our culture is, and obviously, in films, mainstream TV, that you will notice. These kind of, like the token female characters; it's always the male racial that seems to be higher. I am sort of frustrated with that. And I suppose there is a sort of feminist perspective as well, thinking to challenge that until actually, it's . . . you know, somewhere we've got it all wrong that kind focus on achievement and focus on . . . sometimes career, sometimes having house and family.

4.

Yang: Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

Locke: Yeah, um . . . I think it's particularly in my video work, that's my film *Mother's Milk*, which is about the experience of having to express milk whilst studying at colleague. And a newer video called *Making (Babies)*, which is me . . . uh . . . I cast my second daughter's placenta into different materials,

and I filmed myself kind of working with these different materials. And with thinking about the placenta, thinking about the meditating object, the work between a child and a parent, and try to think about . . . um, the space of practice . . . uh, that comes quite clearly. I think even the objects, if you kinda . . . analyse them, to get to them a little bit, there are a lot of feminist message that encoded in the objects. From the found objects, seem quite throw away that they might be kind of aging, or . . . looking quite decrepit, but I find some beauty in them. Its kind of feminist messages in that, and some of the sculptures as well, they relate to motherhood. Like the breasts, which are functional breasts rather aesthetic objects. Or sculptures of nappies, these nappies are kind of wrapping up, and turning into a kind of creatures or something. Um . . . these are kind of bodily things that I continue with the paintings as well. These kinds of negotiations around motherhood and childbirth.

Yang: How would you most like your audience to define your work?

Locke: . . . I mean I'll be happy if feminism is part of it. Um . . . um . . . I suppose it's kind of . . . um . . . it's this kind of battling between treasure and trash, try to break down boundaries and hierarchies. Um . . . as also been strong interests in anti-judgefication, which is . . . I suppose place that in the objects . . . where I kind of refuse to let the sculpture be just decorative. It's partly beautiful, partly a kind of . . . um . . . antagonistic, or a part of it kind of fighting against just being an object. But it's hard to sum up; maybe they don't want to be [inaudible], maybe part of the characters of the work because it becomes quite spoiling in different media and to some degree anti-commercial.

5.

Yang: Do you think installation art is in danger of becoming irrelevant? For example, can you think any limitations that installation art might have?

Locke: Um . . . it can be difficult negotiating with . . . in an institutional context. And . . . like with this exhibition in Kingston Museum, it's a group exhibition and, I was reimagining this installation . . . um, that has been displayed in single room spaces before it occupied the whole room. And it had been

selected for this group context but it didn't fit with curating of the rest of the exhibition, or the health and safety concerns . . . like been able to get around, small-based objects for example. But I think, I mean for myself I've kind of installing process context as well, where it's being making un-authorised installations on outside space, like community space. Um . . . I mean it presents different challenges. I guess with the . . . sounds or paintings, um . . . single, multiple sculptures, you know, obviously, have quite so many issues to contain with, it will be hard to . . . predict, you know, what directions installation art will . . . I mean I'm sure it will carry on, growing and evolving. And people want to be involved in physical environment.

Yang: There are lots of new media, video installations recently, which can be viewed online that audience don't have to be physical at the site. But I guess it's still very different when seeing a piece of installation work in person and seeing it online as 2D images.

Locke: Yeah, I mean there is a danger but I still feel there must be a place for experiencing . . . experiencing art in person in a physical space. I can't imagine that we'll be satisfied only experiencing art virtually, for myself anyway.

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

Locke: Um . . . I'm not . . . I don't really want to describe how it's interpreted or experienced. So that's not something I've been so worried about. Actually, when I was working, making on a protest context, I kind of originally with adding text, and then I wanted to step back from that and only use objects and only make installations. And be more elusive about exactly what I was saying. I am not necessarily to make a statement to lead the viewer to what to think.

6.

Yang: Can installation art drive a feminist agenda?

Locke: . . . Yeah, I think it can because some of, there some very interesting issues in terms of how we experience space and about ownership of the space, and argues about patriarchy, it's quite fun to play around with this space and to bring up feminist to the status to that which is a kind of anti-hierarchical. So yeah, absolutely [laughing]. Also, if you take, a kind of male installation artists, like Gordon Matta-Clark that you can say it's particularly male, to kind of broke through space, you know, like physically hammer through space where there is a kind of feminist opposite or similarity to that which is overlaying space or like revealing space in a different way that equally challenging. So yeah, absolutely.

7.

Yang: What might be the advantages and / or disadvantages of working with anyone else? Examples might be joints shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?

Locke: . . . Um . . . I mean the exhibition I was talking about, that was myself and 3 other artists. The advantage is discovering common themes, and sharing different approaches to looking at the space and different relationships in contents, inspirations and forms between the practices. The disadvantages can be, in terms of sharing space, um . . . if there is a conflict. And there can be a freedom in working alone with one's own restrictions. So there are obviously disadvantages and advantages in either.

Yang: Which artist/s have inspired you, and how?

Locke: Um . . . I find that . . . feminist filmmaker Agnès Varda very inspiring. She works on video, um . . . for example, her film *The Gleaners and I*, a film deals with . . . finding treasure and trash. Um . . . Mary Kelly has been a clear kind of inspiration and also kind of person to question against my

practices cuz her approach is very different, but a lot of the content and inspiration is similar, especially the motherhood.

Yang: Has your work been influenced in any way by other cultures, and how?

Locke: . . . Um, [pause], um, I've been reading towards the end of my PhD, reading um, Monique Allewaert, whose work is kind of anti-colonial. It's focused on the Caribbean slaves, she looks at . . . her book *Ariel's Ecology* describes this position of being parahuman, um . . . of the slaves in Caribbean, which I find very rich because she kind of claim that not just the disadvantage position but something full of possibilities between, um . . . objects and environment and person. So that's been a particular source of inspiration towards last stage of my PhD, and the way of thinking how I am working and the thinking beyond, like feminist concerns towards other minority positions that we can reach out to think about together.

陶艾民 Tao Aimin

2018 年 8 月 6 日，16:00，于中国北京 798 艺术区

6th August 2018, 16:00, at 798 Art District, Beijing, China

杨 — 杨逸清

Yang —Virginia Yiqing Yang

陶— 陶艾民

Tao —Tao Aimin

1.

杨：您目前在准备什么作品？

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

陶：呃。。目前来说，我是想更深入的研究之前做过的*女书*这个作品。2008 年创作的*女书*是一个比较大型的装置作品，主要是使用了旧的搓衣板来印印的手法，然后，呃。。。借用了一些江永女书的文字。然后我现在想从女书的文字出发，再做一系列的作品。女书的文字是一种只有女人能够读懂的女性文字，它产生于我们湖南，是女人创造的属于自己的文字，我觉得这非常的厉害。

Tao: Uh . . . at the moment, I want to do more in-depth study of the *Nvshu* project that I have done before. *Nvshu* is a large piece of installation work created in 2008 that mainly uses washboards to rub the prints, and uh . . . borrows some text from Nvshu in Jiangyong, Hunan. And now I want to start from the text in Nvshu, and create a series of works. The text from Nvshu is a kind of specialised characters that can be read by women only. It original came from our Hunan province, women created the text for themselves. I think this is very impressive.

杨：有没有什么事件或经验让您觉得以艺术的形式可以令人满意的表达出来？

Yang: Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art?

陶：艺术家肯定是以艺术的形式；作家可能以文字的形式。对我来说，这个可能就说来话长了[笑]。就是。。那个。。比如我上初中的时候，就对绘画感兴趣，然后。。。恩。。。大家都叫我小画家。我也喜欢写诗，还做了一本自己的诗集。那是十五六岁的时候的梦想，现在想起来，其实很多梦想都是在很小的时候就萌发了。所以后来自然而然地，我就考进了美术大学。我还是很喜欢这个东西的，我觉得在一种放松的状态下创作作品会做得更好。

Tao: Artists certainly use the form of art; writers might use the form of text. For me, this might be a long story [laughing]. Then . . . that . . . I was interested in painting when I was in junior high school and then . . . um . . .everyone called me the little painter. I also liked to write poetry and I made a collection of my own poems. That was like a dream when I was fifteen or sixteen. In fact, many dreams sprouted at a very young age when I think of it now. After that, I went to the art university naturally. I am quite into this, I feel that it is better to create work under a relaxed condition.

2.

杨：作为一个女性对您的艺术创作来说重要吗？

Yang: Do you think that being a woman is important to your art?

陶：做作品的时候，我并没有考虑女性的性别。但是我觉得作品会有女性的视角，还有女性的一种敏感和，呃。。。细腻的。。。直觉。作为女性的话，自然她就会看到跟男性不一样的东西。

Tao: I did not really consider the female gender when creating works. But I think there would be female perspective, as well as a kind of female sensitivity and, uh . . . dedicate instinct in work. As a woman, she will see something different from male naturally.

杨：您会使用'女性艺术家'这个标签自称吗？

Yang: Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim?

陶：我觉得我不会刻意的去使用这个标签。

Tao: I think I would not use this label deliberately.

杨：您认为艺术世界仍然是被男性主导的程度如何？

Yang: To what extent do you think the art world is still male dominated?

陶：还是。。。大部分还是被男性主导的，尤其是在中国。女性艺术家还是处于弱势，需要一个集体来发声，比如女性的展览或活动。

Tao: Still . . . to a large extent, it is still dominated by men, especially in China. Women artists are still in a weak position and need a union to speak for them, such as women's exhibitions or events.

杨：您会不会认为有些关于女性的展览或活动，会在题目强调性别，从而使侧重点偏离了作品本身？

Yang: Do you think that some exhibitions or events about women artists would emphasize gender in the topic, so that deviates the focus from their works?

陶：呃。。。这个展览或活动的名字用'女性'，参加也都是女性，本身就会引人关注。目前来说，因为我们还没有达到男女平等的程度，女性艺术家如果聚在一起，组成一个集体，也是会对这个现状有一些帮助吧。但最重要的还是作品本身。

Tao: Uh . . . it would attract attention anyway as it is called 'women's' exhibition or event, and the participants are also women. At present, we have not yet reached the same level of rights as men. If women artists get together as a union, that would also help with the situation. However, the most important thing is the work for sure.

3.

杨：您认为自己是女性主义者吗？

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

陶：女性艺术和女性主义者有什么区别？

Tao: What is the difference between women's art and feminist?

杨：女性艺术的话，不一定是女性主义者做的艺术。女性主义者，则并不局限于艺术的领域，他们为社会上存在的一切对女性不平等的现象发声。

Yang: Women's art are not necessary made by feminists. Feminists are not limited to the realm of art; they speak for all the phenomena of inequality to women in society.

陶：这个应该叫女权主义了吧？

Tao: Is this should be called Feminism (Nv Quan Zhu Yi)?

杨：其实女权主义和女性主义其实是一个意思；只是翻译的中文不同。

Yang: Actually, both Nv Xing Zhu Yi and Nv Quan Zhu Yi means Feminism; it is just different versions of translations into Chinese.

陶：我觉得我还没用达到女性主义者的程度，我还没有涉及到社会的方面，但我觉得我可以努力。。。如果我有一定的力量和影响力，我愿意为女性平等做一些事情。

Tao: I do not think I have reached the level of a feminist, I haven't involved in social aspects, but I would like to make effects . . . If I have a certain strength and influence, I am willing to do something for women's equality.

4.

杨：在您的任何作品中，有以表达女性主义为宗旨的吗？

Yang: Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

陶：呃。。。我没有刻意的去表达女性主义宗旨。我觉得我是作为女性艺术家，自然是关注女性更多一些。比如说自己的母亲，女性朋友等等。因为。。。我们的身份，身体和感受是一样的，更容易产生一种同情和理解。。。但是我更关注的是，不管是男性还是女性，其实都是人，一种人类学的东西。

Tao: Uh . . . I did not express feminist agenda on purpose. I think, as a woman artist, I put more focus on women naturally. For example, my mother and female friends, et cetera. Because . . . we have the same identity, body, and feeling that make it easier to produce a kind of sympathy and understanding . . . But what I focus more, whether male or female, it's actually about human, something about anthropology.

杨：您会希望那些直接参与艺术的人 – 例如别的艺术家，合作者，策展人和评论家如何来定义您的作品？

Yang: How would you most like those directly involved in the arts – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics – to define your work?

陶：如何定义。。。每个人定义都不太一样。国内的一些评论家和策展人，他们认为我的作品。。。表现的是过去中国女性的一种生活状态，跟历史，文化和女性身份的建构都有一些直接的联系。呃。。。因为我的关注对象是很普通的女性，一辈子默默无闻，有些甚至连名字也没有。所以我。。。在用我的方式在关注她们，我把她们用一种艺术作品的方式呈现出来，让更多的人能关注这些女性的生活和家庭，以及她们的故事。

Tao: How to define . . . everyone has different definitions. Some Chinese commentators and curators think my work . . . shows a living condition of Chinese women in the past, and has some direct links with history, culture and the construction of women's identity. Uh . . .because the objects of my interests are those ordinary women, who work hard for their entire lives; some of them do not even have names. So I . . . use my way to show solicitude for them, I present them in the way of art, so that more people could pay attention to the lives and families of these women, as well as their stories.

杨：您认为那些不直接参与艺术的观众们会有相同的定义吗？

Yang: Do you think that those not directly involved in the arts would have similar definitions?

陶: 我觉得中国的观众会对我的作品会。。。很感动，因为他们熟悉这个材料。他们会惊讶于我为什么使用这种材料来创作，但同时会觉得很有意思, 就是用现成品来做艺术。对于国外的观众的话。。。可能会和中国的观众有不一样的感受。虽然美国早期也有搓衣板，但他们的搓衣板是装饰性比较强的，很漂亮，非常工艺，中国的搓衣板实用性比较强。

Tao: I think the Chinese audience would be . . . very touched by my work, as they are familiar with this material. They would be amazed why I use this material to create, but find it very interesting at the same time, that is make art by ready-mades. For foreign audiences . . . they might have different feelings from Chinese audiences. Although there were also washboards in United States in the early days, their washboards were more decorative, very pretty, and crafty while China's were more practical.

5.

杨：您认为装置艺术可能变得无关紧要吗？

Yang: Do you think installation art is in danger of becoming irrelevant?

陶：装置艺术作为艺术的一种类型。。。我觉得不会消亡。因为艺术史的风潮是一阵阵的，装置艺术可能在艺术史的某一个阶段，它是主流的或者非主流的。我觉得装置艺术会随着时代而发展下去。

Tao: Installation art, as a type of art . . . I do not think it would be extinct. Because the trend in art history is bursting, installation art might a mainstream or not at a certain stage of art history. I believe installation art will develop with the times.

杨：您认为装置艺术可能有什么局限性？比如地点性限制，专业性限制，难以保持材料的完整性，难以调节和与时俱进？

Yang: Can you think of any limitations that installation art might have? For instance, too local, too specialist, too hard to preserve material integrity, and hard to revisit and keep up-to-date?

陶：呃。。。它的确有一些局限性。比如展出的空间和材料的保存确实是个问题。我倒不觉得难以调节是个限制，因为装置作品根据不同的空间设计，可以有不同的造型和展现方式，作品的内涵还是会在那的。

Tao: Uh . . . it does have some limitations. For example, the preservation of displaying space and materials is indeed a problem. I do not see hard to revisit and keep up-to-date is a limitation; because installation work could have different shapes and presentations according to different space design, the meaning of the work would still be there.

杨：您是否担心过观众可能会更多地关注具体的物品而忽略或忽视装置作品背后的意义？

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

陶：也会有这种问题。一般的观众，他们对装置艺术的了解不够多，有时候会觉得材料更吸引人。一些有水准的观众他们就会更深入思考这个装置艺术的意义。所以。。。呃。。。我觉得艺术家发现一种材料的艺术性，本身就是一个创造的过程。在此基础上，艺术家可以发掘出作品的。。。很多种可能性。我也做了很多实验，比如说用水墨和印印，以此来挖掘各种材料的特性。

Tao: It may happen. The average audience, they do not know enough about installation art, sometimes they feel the materials are more attractive. Some audience with higher levels would think more deeply about the meaning of installation art. So . . . uh . . . I think it is, itself a process of creation when an artist discovers the artistry of a material. On the basis of this, the artist could dig out . . . many possibilities of the work. I also did a lot of experiments, such as using ink and rubbing, to explore the characteristics of various materials.

杨：您怎么看待一些装置作品只是外表吸引人而没有更深层次的含义？

Yang: What do you think about some installation works that are only attractive in appearance yet have no deeper meaning?

陶：对，也有这种假大空的作品。其实。。。一个作品，就算它的尺寸很小，它只要有观念和思想，也会非常好；一个特别大的作品，如果表达很空洞的话，也是。。。不成为艺术品的我想。当然观众的水平不一样，一些人可能更容易欣赏一张画，不管是抽象的还是具象的，他们更能感受一张画。但是装置作品，除非是观众很熟悉的材料，一般很多人是看不懂的。根据观众的审美，文化和经历，我觉得他们会有不同的解释和理解。艺术本来就是超前的，有些人能理解，有些人不能。但我想好的东西，还是能经得起时间的考验的。

Tao: Yes, those exaggerated work do exist. In fact, . . . even a work is in a small scale, it would be fantastic as long as it has ideas and concepts; a particularly large work . . . could not become an artwork if the expression was empty I think. Of course, audience' level is different. Some people might be more likely to appreciate a painting, whether it is abstract or figurative, they are more likely to feel a painting. However, many people generally could not understand installation works unless they were

familiar with the materials. Based on their aesthetic, culture and experiences, I think audience will have different interpretations and understandings. Art is of course ahead of us, some people can understand it, some people can't. But I think that good things can still stand the test of time.

6.

杨：装置艺术能推动女性主义宗旨吗？比如某种共同的框架可以使女性主义装置艺术的宗旨受益，如果是，会以什么样的方式呢？

Yang: Can installation art drive a feminist agenda? For example, feminist installation art's agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework, if so, in what ways?

陶：我觉得没有一个特定的框架吧。世界各地的艺术家都带着不同的身份做作品，是非常自由的的表达。我觉得相比于框架来说，艺术家的表达更像分成了几个阶段或层次：从个人，到别人，到所有人，最后上升到整个社会，即从小我到大我的过程。

Tao: I do not think there is a specific framework. Artists from all over the world are working with different identities by free expressions. I think that compared to a framework, an artist's expression is more like going through a few stages or levels: from individual, to others, to everyone, and finally to the whole society; that is the process from the small self to the big universe.

7.

杨：您觉得以其他人合作的优势/劣势是什么？例如联合展览，共享资源和研究，跨学科活动，共同的表达目标，和共享工作室等等任何形式的合作。

Yang: What do you think might be the advantages and/ or disadvantages of working with anyone else? Examples might be joint shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?

陶：我觉得能跨学科合作是很好的，现在艺术不单纯只是关于材料，还跟科技，多媒体相关。我觉得这也是艺术未来的一个趋势吧，比如说跟文学，戏剧和音乐的结合等等。但这也是要根据艺术品的具体需要来寻找合适的技术支持，而不是为了看上去前卫才与高科技结合。

Tao: I think it is good to have cross-disciplinary collaborations. Art is not just about materials nowadays; it is also related to technology and multimedia. I believe it would be a trend in art in the future, such as a combination with literature, drama, and music. However, the technical support is required according to the specific needs of the artwork, rather than for the purpose of looking avant-garde.

杨：哪位艺术家曾启发您的创作，并且如何启发您的？

Yang: Which artist/artists has/have inspired you, and how?

陶：对我来说每个阶段不太一样。早期我画油画的时候，特别喜欢，呃。。。 Gabriele Münter，还有 Pierre Bonnard 作品的色彩。后来使用材料的时候，我受到了 Anselm Kiefer 和 Marcel Duchamp 的启发。装置艺术在国内刚起步，所以我还是受国外艺术家的影响比较大。

Tao: Each stage is different for me. When I started oil painting, I especially liked, uh . . . Gabriele Münter and the colour in Pierre Bonnard's work. Later when I began to use materials, I was inspired by Anselm Kiefer and Marcel Duchamp a lot. I am influenced greatly by foreign artists as the development of installation art is still at an early stage in China.

杨：您的作品是否曾受到其他文化的影响，并且如何影响您的？

Yang: Has your work been influenced in anyway by other cultures, and how?

陶：主要还是中国文化更多一些，我骨子里是个中国人。艺术其实表达的是很个人的东西，个性和地域性是个很重要和独特的因素。如果艺术全球化了，大家做出来的都是十分相似的东

西，那就没什么意思了。比如在美国的伊朗艺术家 Shirin Neshat 将伊朗文字写在身体上来反映一些社会问题。她的作品非常独特，带有很强的地域特征。

Tao: As a Chinese, I have been influenced by Chinese culture mostly. The expression of art is actually very personal; personality and regionality are important and unique factors. It does not make much sense if art globalization makes everyone produce very similar work. For example, Iranian artist Shirin Neshat who lives in the United States, she reflects some social problems by writing Iranian characters on her body. Her work is very unique and has strong regional characteristics.

杨：可是我们并看不懂那些伊朗文字，您认为地域性会产生一些限制吗？

Yang: But we could not understand Iranian characters. Do you think there would be some limitations on regionality?

陶：看得懂当然更好，看不懂也没关系，从视觉上也能理解她表达的含义。我做的*女书*系列也是比较看不懂的，女书是世界上流传的唯一女性文字，但可以很多的方式来表达我的观点。我觉得好的艺术作品是有一些共通性的。

Tao: It is not so necessary to read the text; we can understand the meaning of her expression visually. It is also not easy to understand the text from my previous work *Nvshu,* which uses the only female characters circulating in the world; however, I could express my ideas through many ways. I think good artworks share some commonalities.

2018 年 8 月 17 日，17:00，电话采访

17th August 2018, 17:00, Telephone Interview

杨 — 杨逸清

Yang — Virginia Yiqing Yang

林 — 林菁菁

Lin — Lin Jingjing

1.

杨：您目前在准备什么作品吗？

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

林：嗯。。。我目前在做一个跟人的感情，人和人之间的关系这样一个系列的作品。就是在讨论人性，特别是科技对人类的影响，还有对情绪需求。。。产生的影响。就是我们现在所要推动的科技的发展会往哪个方向去，用一种比较悖论的方式来探讨这个问题。

Lin: Um . . . I am currently working on a series of work, which is about people's feelings, and the relationships between each other. It discusses human nature, especially the impact of technology on human beings and the impact of . . . emotional needs. It also explores in which direction the science and technology we are promoting will lead us to by using a paradoxical approach.

杨：悖论的方式？

Yang: A paradoxical approach?

林：对对，我可能会展示一个。。。如果按照我们现在的社会需求来说，在金钱和人类需求的，呃。。。推动之下，科技的发展方向，可能会往哪些方向走。那这些方向可能会带来的一系列的问题，那么我会把这些问题，用一种比较夸张的方式在作品里展现出来。那么用这样的方式来提出一个问题：这是不是我们希望的科技发展的方向？就好像目前已经发生的，比如说有关社交媒体的问题。社交媒体它一方面它可能带来了很多便利，但同时也制造了一部分社会问题，比如使人们更，更。。。更倾向于虚拟世界的交流这样。

Lin: Yes, yes. I may demonstrate a . . . if talking about our current society needs, driven by uh . . . money and human needs, the directions of the development of technology will possibly lead to. These directions might bring a series of problems; so then I will present these problems in my work by using an exaggerated technique. Thus, pose a question in this way: Is this the direction we expect of the technological development? It is like the problem of social media that has already occurred for example. On the one hand, social media do brings a lot of convenience; but at the same time causes some social problems, for example makes people more, more . . . addicted into communicating in the virtual world

杨：是关于高科技带来的利弊这样的主题？

Yang: Is it about the pros and cons of high technology?

林：对对，就是有关这样一个主题的系列。

Lin: Yes, yes. It is a series of work about such a theme.

杨：有没有什么事件或经验让您觉得以艺术的形式可以令人满意的表达出来？

Yang: Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art?

林：呃。。。艺术的形式可以从很多方面让大家有一种，呃。。。比较特别的感受。比如说特别是视觉艺术，给人视觉的影响和冲击往往会让人产生一个，比如说相对的真实感或者是能够通过作品来感受到某种问题，感受到某种现状。那么在现实生活中人们可能熟视无睹的事情，一放到艺术品里面的时候，他们可能会觉得这个好像很荒唐。但实际上仔细一想，其实我们的生活就是这么荒唐[笑]。用这样的方式来展示和描述问题，会比以语言或者其他材质或媒介更有特殊性和直接性。

Lin: Uh . . . the form of art could offer us a . . . special feeling in many ways. For example, particularly visual art, it gives people the visual impact that often leads to, for example, a relative realism, or makes people acknowledge certain problems or certain status quo through the work. So then the things that people would not even pay attention to in the real life, when placed in artwork, people might think this seems absurd. But in fact, if you think twice, our lives are just like this absurd [laughing]. I feel that presenting and describing problems in the form of art is more special and direct than using text or other material and media.

杨：艺术的形式更直观是吗？

Yang: Is the form of art more straightforward?

林：对，比如说装置作品，不像传统的雕塑或是，呃。。。架上绘画等等，它往往使用的材料都是现实生活中人人都比较熟悉的物品。那么把这个材料转换了之后，用艺术的形式展现出来，人们会从材料本身和原有的用途上面联想到这个物体和生活本来的关系。艺术家改变了这个物体本来的作用和与人的关系之后，它产生的意义就更容易触发人们去思考或者是对比，那么这样会。。。产生一些不一样的东西。

Lin: Yes. Take installation art as an example, it uses the object that we are familiar with in daily lives compared to traditional sculpture or, uh . . . easel painting. After transforming the object, and presenting in an artistic way, people would associate the object with its relationship to life from the object itself and its original usage. It is more likely to trigger people to think or contrast after artist changes the original function of the object and its relationship with people. In this way . . . it produces something different.

杨：对，因为这些现成品或日常用品对观众来说都比较熟悉，但是艺术家又赋予它们另外一种信息，从而可能会产生一种冲击感。

Yang: I agree. It might generate a sense of shock to the audience as artists endow ready-mades and daily objects with completely different messages.

林：对，和一个对比性。而且从观众的角度来说，他们同时会有一种，呃。。。新鲜感和熟悉感。这样两种感受同时混合在一起，往往会产生一个比较有意思的。。。效果。我觉得这就是我之所以比较喜欢装置的原因，它相较于别的媒介来说，有它的独特性和优势。

Lin: Yes, and a sense of contrast. In addition, from the perspective of the audience, they would have a sense of . . . freshness and familiarity at the same time. It would often bring an interesting . . . reaction when mixing these two feelings together. I think this is the reason why I enjoy installation so much. Compared with other media, installation has its uniqueness and advantages.

2.

杨：作为一个女性对您的艺术创作来说重要吗？

Yang: Is being a woman important to your art?

林：呃。。。对我来说我觉得特别重要。我觉得从我的角度来说，它不止是一个工作，事业或是生存方式，对我来说，它基本上是我生活的一个部分。所以我觉得它对我的意义应该是很大的。

Lin: uh . . . I think it is extremely important to me. I think from my perspective, it is more than a job, a career or a lifestyle; for me, fundamentally, it is a part of my life. So I think it is very important to me.

杨：您会使用'女性艺术家'这个标签自称吗？

Yang: Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim?

林：嗯。。。我觉得。。。我不太会使用这个标签，但是我也不回避。比如面对面跟别人介绍我的职业，那我是一个艺术家。我并不会当着别人的面说我是一个女性艺术家，我觉得这是一个很多余的解释，是吧[笑]。所以它是一个很显然的问题，我不会去因此去解释。但是如果别人好奇我是不是从女性视角或者角度出发，我觉得我也不会去回避这个问题。因为确实思考方式，角度或是关注点都有可能因为性别造成差异。这就好像我们的文化背景和社会背景，我们来自于，比如说中国，那一张亚洲的脸已经很明白了。除非有人辨别不出日本人或者是韩国人，但这已经很明白了这是一个亚洲人。我们血液里就有亚洲的文化。不会说你当着别人的面介绍自己的时候，你会说你是一个亚洲艺术家。这是一个很明显的事实，我们就是这样一个 identity, 也不需要去回避。

Lin: Um . . . I think. . . I do not really use this label, but I would not avoid it. For example, when introduce my occupation to somebody face to face, then I am an artist. It is an unnecessary explanation when I introduce myself as a woman artist to others face to face, right? [laughing] So it's a very obvious problem, I won't go to explain it. But I think will not hold back if people are curious about whether I stand from a female perspective, because the differences of angles, concerns, or ways of thinking might be caused by gender. This is like our culture and social background; we come from, for example, China, which is told by the Asian face. Unless someone can't tell the difference between a Japanese or a Korean, but it is already clear that this is an Asian. We have Asian culture in our blood that is a very obvious fact and there is no need to avoid our identity.

杨：对，但是比如一些展览，特别是群展，会以'女性艺术家'作为一个标题。这样的方式，或许不是我们所希望的分类的标准。换句话说，我们更希望策展人和观众更关注艺术家的作品而不是性别。

Yang: Yes. For example, some exhibitions, especially group exhibitions, would be titled and underlined 'Women Artists'. Perhaps it is not the standard of categorizing that we expect. In other words, we expect curators and audience to pay more attention to artists' works than their gender.

林：对。我觉得比如从个体研究来说，A 和 B 的观念，成长背景或者生活经验影响了他们做作品的方式以及选择的材料等等。这个差异就跟比如说女性艺术家和男性艺术家，亚洲艺术家和北美艺术家是一样的，就是说所有的艺术家之间都是有差异的。那么我们不会去回避这个差

异，差异也是我们的个性特色。从这个角度去比较是有意义的，但是如果光是把某一个，呃。。。项目抽出来，并且在上面做文章，我觉得这是一个比较狭隘的分类方式。

Lin: Yes. I think, for example, from the perspective of individual research, the concept, background of growth, or experience of life affect the way A and B work and the material they choose. The differences are just like that between male artists and female artists, or Asian artists and North American artists. That is to say, there are differences among all artists and that are also our personalities and characteristics, we will not evade these differences. It makes sense to compare from this perspective, but if just taking one, uh . . . catalogue out and making a fuss about it, I think that would be very narrow minded.

杨：您认为艺术世界仍然是被男性主导的程度如何？

Yang: To what extent do you think the art world is still male dominated?

林：我觉得 [笑] 特别在中国，那肯定还是男性艺术家主导的。包括展馆，杂志社等艺术机构，掌握权利的人大多是男性。所以女性艺术家的机会肯定要少。就比如最近的，呃。。。#MeToo 运动，在中国这种男性权利被扩大的情况下，女性艺术家也有很多遭受#MeToo 这个问题的，这就是一个很不公平的现状。但是我觉得在西方社会，现在有这个趋势，女性在策展人，展馆工作人员，和艺术类学生中占了更大的比例。

Lin: I think that [laughing] art world is definitely dominated by male especially in China. There are certainly fewer opportunities for women artists because in art institutions, such as galleries and magazines, male have the initiatives under most circumstances. For example, uh . . . the recent #MeToo movement, under the circumstance of the expansion of male rights in China, women artists are also suffering from this problem, which is a very unfair situation. However, I think in Western society, there is now a trend that women account for larger proportions of curators, pavilion staff, and art students.

杨：对，比如刚上任的泰特美术馆馆长等等。这种不公平的现状也在慢慢改善吧。

Yang: Yes, like the newly appointed director of Tate, et cetera. This unfair status is slowly improving.

林：对。我觉得这个在将来应该是会改变的，但是在中国来说，比起西方，速度可能会比较慢。

Lin: Right. I think this should be changed in the future, but in China, the pace may be slower compare to the West.

3.

杨：您认为自己是女性主义者吗？

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

林：[笑] 我觉得我。。。我对自己的定位是一个观念艺术家，倒没觉得是个强烈的女性主义者。我觉得当遇到一些问题，比如女性受到歧视的问题，我肯定是会去反对这种行为的。那么，呃。。。我觉得一方面我们要去抗拒这种不公平的待遇，另一方面女性也需要对自我的能力有一个清醒的认识。你不能够。。。使用性别去要求公平，不能够在你自身没有任何建树或思想的情况下去要求公平。这也是很困难的事情。

Lin: [laughing] I think I . . . I consider myself as a conceptual artist rather than a strong feminist. I think I will definitely against the behaviour if I encounter problems such as women being discriminated. So, uh . . . I feel that on the one hand we have to resist this unfair treatment; on the other hand, women also need to have a clear understanding of their own abilities. You cannot . . . use gender as a tool for equality, you cannot ask for equality if you do not have any achievements or thoughts. This is also a very difficult thing.

杨：就是我们常说的'双标'吧。身为呼吁平权的女性，如果通过依赖女性身份轻松获得利益的性别平等是不合理的。

Yang: It is the 'double standard' that we have been heard a lot. It is unreasonable to ask for gender equality of getting easy benefits by relying on female identity.

林：对，如果你争取平等的权利是为了获得更多轻易的好处的话，那也是有问题的。我觉得在很多的作品中，或是所谓的女性主义宣言中，女性主义宗旨做的很表面。就是它所展现的只是一个口号而已，没有实际的行动去支持，也没有一个长远的计划去改善这种状况。仅仅是为了口号，我觉得是意义不大的。

Lin: Right, it is problematic if you are fighting for the equal rights in order to get more easy benefits. I think the feminist purpose is very superficial in some works or so-called feminist declarations. It is just a slogan, there is no actual action to support, and there is no long-term plan to improve this situation. I do not see it is working if just for the sake of slogans.

杨：有一些自称是女性主义者的人，他们一方面呼吁平等，一方面又要求获得更多。

Yang: There are some people who claim to be feminists asking for a lot more than equality.

林：是的，对。而且是相对容易的获取。。。可能连男性都得不到的 [笑] 一种机会。这也是一个很不公平的要求。但是相对来说，呃。。。尤其在中国社会，无论是在艺术，或者其他的行业，女性确实还是处在一个比较弱势的地位。所以这也是我们确实应该要重视的问题。但是可能我们更需要的是。。。循序渐进的计划和具体能够实施的行动，而不仅仅是口号。因为如果只停留在口号的话，能从中获得的东西是非常有限的。就比如国家也支持性别平等，所以我们有三八妇女节，但是妇女节又能解决什么问题呢？

Lin: That is true, yes. Moreover, to get something relatively easy . . . a kind of opportunity that even men can't get [laughing]. This is also a very unfair requirement. But generally speaking, uh . . . especially in Chinese society, women are still in a relatively weak position whether in art or other industries. So that is why we should pay attention to this problem. But maybe we need more are . . . progressively plans and specific actions instead of just slogans. Because we can achieve very limited things if stay with the slogans only. For example, we have International Women's Day that is supported by our country, but what problems can be solved by Women's Day?

杨：更像是一种形式主义。

Yang: It is more like formalism.

林：对，所以一年之中我们有了妇女节，却没有男士节，就仿佛女性占了什么优势。可是从一个社会的角度来说，我们获得了一个三八妇女节，到底对这个社会的影响是什么？就算那一天女性放半天假，或者有人送一朵花，这个对社会现状改变的意义在哪里？我没有从这么一个简单的行为中看到任何意义。所以当平权落实到实处的时候，我们还有很长的路要走，不是光有口号就可以

Lin: Yes, it seems that women have advantages because we have Women's Day while there is no Men's Day in a year. However, from a social perspective, what is the significance of changing the status quo of this society if women have half day off, or get free flowers on Women's Day? I do not see any meaning from such a simple action. We still have a long way to go for gender equality; it is more than just slogans or claims.

杨：也有一些我们刚刚提到的，打着女性主义旗帜要求更多便利的人，他们会使那些不了解女性主义的人产生一种误解。就比如，给他们一种女性主义就是不劳而获或者是占男性的便宜的印象。

Yang: There are some people we have just mentioned, asking for more conveniences under the name of feminist, and they would possibly mislead those who do not familiar with feminism. For example, giving them the impression that feminism means reaping without sowing and taking advantages from men.

林：对对，这也是一个很大的误区。我觉得也是我们需要反对的东西。

Lin: Exactly. This is also a big misunderstanding and something we need to oppose.

杨：我觉得现在在中国，只要一谈到女性主义或者女权主义，其实是一个单词只是翻译的不同，大家就会觉得这是非常的极端，想要凌驾于男权之上的行为，而并不是平等的概念。

Yang: I feel that in China, as long as we talk about Nv Xing Zhu Yi or Nv Quan Zhu Yi, which are both feminism, just different versions of translation, people would think that means extreme behaviours above the patriarchy instead of the concept of equality.

林：对，所以社会会有很多误读，也是因为这种观念和口号传递的方式是有误差的。本身这种行动就不是很容易被理解或是引起共鸣，因为从大众的角度来说，他们并不清楚女性主义到底是什么，很多人不知道这是什么意思，这对他们来说是个很抽象的东西。

Lin: Yes, there will be a lot of misunderstandings in society; part of the reason is there are deviations in delivering concepts and slogans. This kind of action is not easy to be understood or resonated, because from the public's point of view, they do not know what feminism is, a lot of people have no idea what it stands for, and feminism is a very abstract to them.

杨：所以大众在他们不理解的事物上很容易被误导。

Yang: So the public would get lost or misled easily on the things that they don't know.

林：对，就像一些引起很多负面评价的女性主义团体，他们没有任何超越口号以外的东西，那么他们又是以一种抗拒社会文明的方式来展示。但是也不是说所有抗拒社会文明的事情都是错误的，也有人做的很好的。他/她从一个很真诚的角度去做一件事，使人受到触动，引起了思考，这样是可以理解的。但如果造成一个新闻事件只是为了引起关注，那是毫无意义的，而且反而会把女性主义的概念搞得支离破碎，误导了大众。

Lin: Yes, like some feminist groups, they do not have anything beyond slogans and protest in a way that resist social civilization, which would bring them lots of negative comments. But that is not to say everything that against civilization is wrong, some might work well. It is understandable if one raises awareness by doing something from a very sincere perspective and makes people touch and think. But it is meaningless if one creates an event just to get people's attention, it would make the concept of feminism fragmented, and mislead the general public.

杨：这点我非常同意您。那您会怎么区分那些以比较偏激的方式，比如说在裸体或身体艺术中，有一些艺术家是以此方式来传递自己真实的感受，还有一些则是为了搏出名？

Yang: I agree with you on this. How do you distinguish those radical arts, for example nude or body arts, some artists use this way to express their true feelings, while some just want to get famous?

林：拿 Marina Abramovic 举例，她是一个来自社会主义国家的艺术家，而且她所感受到的政治背景和她所受到的极其严厉的家庭教育，造成了她的反叛，使她的作品里有一种力量。。。她也做非传统的行为艺术，但是我觉得她的东西做的很好。他的作品是有观念的，而且她的作品做的很极致。她有的作品越出了人的局限性，等于她在测试人 limit 到底在哪里。从这一点上来说，她有一种非常无畏的精神，就是她决定承担任何可能发生的后果。这个时候她是全身心的投入这个行为艺术的，她有一种很强烈的观念在后面，并不是为了获取某种轻易的利益。你理解这个意思吗？所以用她的这个方式来对比那些为求出名的作品或人的话，你就能看到一个很大的差别。我完全不反对用身体来做作品，因为我觉得它是一种非常特殊的媒介，而且它能达到其他媒介达不到的部分。可是不能滥用它。。。要想清楚这是不是必要的一种媒介。如果说我要传达的观念用其他的媒介也可以做到的话，我是不是还要坚持用身体这个媒介？我认为真正好的，使用身体作为媒介的作品，是只有在用身体这个媒介才能够最好的传递你的信息的情况下才去使用的。而不是说，这个媒介，我脱了衣服，很容易引起轰动才用的，这个差别是很大的。

Lin: Take Marina Abramovic as an example; she is an artist from a socialist country, the political background and extremely strict family education caused her rebellion and made her work very powerful . . . She also does non-traditional performance art, and I think she did it very well because her work was conceptual and precise. She has a very fearless spirit as some of her work breaks human limitations, and she decides to take on any possible consequences. At this time, she is fully engaged in the performance art. She has a strong concept behind, and she would not do art for some kind of easy profits. You know what I mean? So that you can see a big difference compared with Marina Abramovic's art and those who just ask for attention. I am not opposed to use bodies in artworks at all, as I believe it is a very special medium, which could do things other media could not do. But you cannot abuse it; you have to figure out if this is the necessary medium. Should I insist on using body as a medium if my idea could be well delivered by other media? I believe good body art is only when this

medium could deliver your message best. This is very different from, by using this medium, taking

clothes off, can cause uproar easily.

4.

杨：对。那在您的任何作品中，有以表达女性主义为宗旨的吗？

Yang: Right. Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

林：呃。。。也有啊，在。。。大概 2008 年的时候，我做过一个叫*玫瑰物语*的系列作品。它是关于玫瑰和女性的衣物的。另外还有一个就叫作*物语*的系列作品，它是使用婚纱作为材料，然后上面缝了一些人偶的照片。这些是很典型的跟女性主义有关的作品。从性别的 identity 来说，就是女性从社会上来说，被放置在的位置，被定义的身份，我对这个提出了一个问题。

Lin: Um . . . Some of them, yes. In . . . around 2008, I made a series of work called *Dress of Roses*. It is about roses and women's clothes. Other series of work called *Dress,* it uses wedding dresses as materials with some photos of human figures sewed on them. These are typical feminism related works. From the gender identity, that is to say women in the society, where are they placed, how are they identified? I pose a question about that.

杨：您会希望那些直接参与艺术的人 – 比如别的艺术家，合作者，策展人和评论家如何来定义您的作品呢？

Yang: How would you most like those directly involved in the arts – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics – to define your work?

林：这我倒没有希望他们具体如何来定义我的作品，我觉得他们每个人的出发点不一样，他们会从他们的角度来观看吧。我觉得特别是来自不同的文化背景和政治背景的人，他们能够理解和关联的东西是不一样的。我觉得这也可能是艺术特别宝贵和有意思的部分。我倒不会去拘泥于这种定义。但是我觉得从另一个角度来说，尽管我们, 人跟人之间在文化，性格或是生活经验

上有差异，但是抛开这些标签，只是作为人，从情感需求和对世界的理解和互动上来说，其实非常多的地方是非常非常相似的。

Lin: I do not really expect them to define my work specifically. I think they have different standing points and perspectives. I think especially those from different cultural backgrounds and political backgrounds, what they could understand and relate to are different. This might be a particularly valuable and interesting part of art. I would not stick to this kind of definition. But I think from another perspective, although we, between people and people, have differences in culture, personality or life experience, we have lots of similarities in lots of aspects in terms of emotional needs, the knowledge and interaction with the world as human beings if we get rid of these labels.

杨：就是在差异中找到一种和谐吧？

Yang: That is to find a kind of harmony in the differences?

林：对，在差异中找到一种很共同的东西。

Lin: Yes, to find something in common in the differences.

杨：是否发生过那些直接参与艺术的人，不能够理解或者误解您透过作品想表达的意思呢？

Yang: Has it happened that those who are directly involved in the arts could not able to understand or misread your message behind your work?

林：这个经常会发生，但是我觉得我是很珍惜这种误解的。因为我觉得它往往会给我提供另外一种角度来看同一件事情，或者追溯到观看者的个体经验，政治背景和文化背景，这三个部分我觉得都是特别值得研究的。

Lin: It happens a lot, but I think I cherish these misunderstandings very much. As I think it would often provide me with another perspective on the same thing, or be tracing back to the viewer's individual

experience, political background and cultural background. I think these three aspects are particularly worthy of study.

杨：您认为那些不直接参与艺术的观众们会与直接参与艺术的人有相同的定义吗？

Yang: Do you think that those not directly involved in the arts would have similar definitions?

林：呃。。。会有一些差别，但是我觉得。。。我更希望每个人都可以理解这个作品，并且进入到这个艺术环境的。我觉得尤其是当代艺术，它的观念性更强一些。。。而且它往往是提出了一个问题或者分享了一种思路。从这个角度来说，很多个体能够根据自己的生活经验对这个作品提出问题，表达情感，引出思考或作出评价。我觉得这个都是特别有意思的地方。而且从一个横向的角度来说。。。艺术建构了一个使参与的人们从不同的文化背景，职业背景甚至是年龄背景来谈论同一个问题的平台，让人们有机会能够获得更多的理解，听到更多的观点和角度。我也比较提倡艺术应该跳出一个仅供专业人士欣赏的圈子，它应该更多的介入到。。。特别是。。。非艺术行业的群体里面，这样意义才更大一些。

Lin: Uh . . . there will be some differences. But I think . . . I hope that everyone could understand the work and enter into the artistic environment. I think that especially in contemporary art, it is more conceptual . . . it often asks a question or shares a thought. From this perspective, many individuals could be able to ask questions, express emotions, draw conclusions or make evaluations based on their own life experiences. I think it is very interesting. And from a horizontal perspective . . . art constructs a platform that allows participants to talk about the same issue from different cultural backgrounds, professional backgrounds and even age ranges, gives people a chance to gain more understanding and hear more opinions and perspectives. I advocate that art should jump out of a circle that it could only be appreciated by professionals. It makes more meaning if art could be involved in . . . particularly . . .non-art industries.

杨：像现在有很多装置艺术不局限于仅在美术馆展出，它们有些出现在公共空间，我觉得也是一种使大众有机会去了解装置艺术的很好的机会。

Yang: I think it is a good opportunity for public to understand installation art that some installations are shown in public space rather than just in art galleries.

林：对，我也很支持这种。我觉得装置艺术是不应该被禁锢于。。。某个特定的场合，供特定的人选去观看的，它应该是社会的一个部分。

Lin: Yes, I am very supportive of this. I believe installations should not be detained in . . . certain specific locations for specific audience; it should be part of the society.

5.

杨：您认为装置艺术可能会变得无关紧要吗？

Yang: Do you think installation art is in danger of becoming irrelevant?

林：我不觉得，我觉得它的潜力该是很大的。而且我觉得装置艺术的发展，在未来可能会跟科学产生关系。

Lin: I do not think so. I think it is still very potential. Moreover, I think in the future, the development of installation art would likely to relate to science in my opinion.

杨：您觉得装置艺术可能有什么局限性？

Yang: Can you think of any limitations that installation art might have？

林：局限性肯定有，比如说。。。运输方式和展示地点。比如说是一个三维的作品，你在网上看和现场看差别还是很大的，尤其它会与它所在的空间产生联系。如果在网上看一个装置作品，它的局限性就非常大了。观众可能就没有办法感受到艺术家设计出来的某种特定的情境和效果。其他有一些媒体可能在这方面就占优势了。装置艺术的现场感很重要，跟行为作品也是一样，在现场跟不在现场完全不是一回事。

Lin: There certainly are limitations. For example, . . . modes of transport and places of display. For example, . . . it is very different if you watch a 3D work in person or online, particularly because the work would make connections with its displayed environment. If you look at an installation on the Internet, there will be huge limitations. Audience might not be able to perceive the specific situations and effects that the artist has designed. Some other media may have advantages in this regard. The sense of presence is crucial to installation art and performance art.

杨：可能还有一种装置艺术或是行为艺术带来的互动感吧？

Yang: Maybe installation art or performance art brings interaction with audience as well?

林：对，观众对于现场的感受非常重要。尤其是大型的装置作品，和空间的大小，安装的距离，灯光等等都有影响。哪怕是与现场的声音，观众的心情都有联系。这些东西是线上的作品所取代不了的。

Lin: Yes, the audience's feelings about the scene are extremely important. Especially when installing large works, the size of the space, the distance of installation, and the lightings would make big differences. It is also connected to the sound of the scene and the mood of the audience. These feelings cannot be replaced by online works.

杨：您是否会担心观众可能更多地关注具体的物品而忽略或忽视装置作品背后的意义？

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

林：我觉得。。。我不是很担心这个，因为这个物品是大家司空见惯的东西。比如说有的艺术家用杯子做了装置，而杯子在日常生活中是很普通的东西，观众怎么会去更多地去关注杯子而不是这背后的意义呢？[笑] 他们可能更会好奇为什么杯子可以在艺术馆展出？为什么十五个杯子可以创造出一个艺术作品？我自己家也有十五个杯子，为什么那个不是艺术作品？艺术实际上是把我们从日常生活里脱离出来，所以即使用了日常用品，我们也不会更关注物品本身而忽略了更深层次的含义。

Lin: I think . . . I do not worry too much about that, because the object is very common to everyone. For example, some artist makes installation by cups, how could the audience pay more attention to the cups instead of the meaning behind them, as cups are very ordinary in daily lives? [laughing] The audience might be more curious about why these cups could be exhibited in an art gallery? Why fifteen cups could form an artwork? I have fifteen cups at home too, why that is not an artwork? Art actually separates us from our daily lives. Even if artworks were made by everyday objects, we would not focus more on the objects and neglect the deeper meanings.

杨：您如何看待有些艺术作品以本身非常庞大的特点来吸引观众，给人一种视觉震撼，从而使人们忽略了除此以外的东西？

Yang: What is your view about those enormous artworks that shock people but nothing else?

林：我觉得这个跟观念也有关系，如果你的目的就是通过'大'来吸引眼球，观众看完就忘记了的话，就和一些好莱坞大片是同样的性质 [笑]。可能有一个成本很低的，呃。。。独立电影，视觉上也没那么震撼，但是能使观众看完之后久久不能忘怀，一直回忆里面的细节。可能看好莱坞大片，观众会觉得很一时很刺激，但之后永远也想不起来这个故事了。电影跟装置艺术是同样的道理，有不同的种类。有的人喜欢做好莱坞电影，可也有人喜欢看好莱坞大片，不想去思考，只需要视觉上的刺激。这个是。。。我们社会的现实 [笑]。

Lin: I think it has something to do with the concept and has the same nature as some Hollywood movies [laughing], which catch people's eyes by the 'enormous' effects, but people would forget it when they left. There might be a low-cost, uh . . . independent movie and not so shocking visually, but it could make the audience think about the details in the movie for a long time. Hollywood movies might make audience feel very excited at one moment, but they would never think about the stories afterwards. There are different types of installation arts just like different types of movies. Some people like to make Hollywood movies and there are people who enjoy watching them without thinking too much, because all they need is the visual stimulation. This is . . . the reality of our society [laughing].

杨：我觉得这个比喻很有意思。就像有的人去美术馆不是为了思考，而是为了自拍。

Yang: This is a very interesting metaphor. Like some people go to art galleries for taking selfies rather than appreciating artworks.

林：对，对他们来说这只是消耗时间的一种方式。

Lin: Indeed, this is just a way of consuming time for them.

6.

杨：您觉得装置艺术能推动或帮助女性主义宗旨吗？

Yang: Do you think installation art can drive a feminist agenda?

林：我觉得这跟材料关系不大，而是跟观念有关。不见得光是装置艺术能够推动女性主义宗旨，其他的作品，哪怕是一篇文章，一张画，一张照片或者是。。。声音和行为，很多材料都能达到这个效果。我觉得材料不是一个。。。来衡量一个作品是否能推动女性主义宗旨的。。。标准和唯一的方式。

Lin: I think this has little to do with materials, but relates to concepts. It does not have to be only installation art that could drive a feminist agenda. Other forms of work, such as an article, a painting, a photo . . . or sounds or behaviours could achieve the same effect. I think material is not . . . the standard and the only way to . . . measure whether a work could promote feminist purposes.

杨：您是否认为某种共同的框架可以使女性主义的宗旨受益？如果有，会以怎样的方式呢？

Yang: Do you think feminist agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework? If so, in what ways?

林：我觉得这个框架不是绝对的，比如在西方社会，非洲社会和亚洲社会的背景之下，女性主义的概念都是有差异的。所以一个共同的框架是不能够解决所有问题的。

Lin: I think this framework is not absolute. For example, in the context of Western society, African society, and Asian society, the concept of feminism is different. Thereby, a common framework is not able to solve all the problems.

杨：但是全球的女性主义，归根到底是为了同一个目标，即平等和尊重。

Yang: But in the end, we all share the same goal - equality and respect.

林：对，是这样一个目标，但是针对具体的问题的时候，它不能停留在文字的表面。如果说有某种共同的框架的话，它是有很多需要调整的地方的。

Lin: That is true. However, when it comes to specific problems, it cannot remain on the surface of the texts. It would need a lot of adjustments if there were any kind of common framework.

杨：您的意思是这样一种框架并不一定适用于所有的国家和国情？

Yang: Do you mean this kind of common framework is not necessarily suitable for all the countries and national conditions?

林：对，我觉得这样一种框架是不合适的，肯定要做很多调整。因为女性主义对于一个社会的良性影响，在每个地区的衡量标准和面对的问题都是不一样的。

Lin: Yes, I feel that such a framework is not suitable and have to make a lot of adjustments about it. Because in each region, about the positive influences of feminism, the metrics and facing problems are different.

杨：其实我提出这种框架并不是来衡量女性主义的标准，而是在这个框架内，使观众和艺术家能够对女性主义的内涵有一种全面的认识。

Yang: In fact, this kind of framework I proposed is not to measure the standards of feminism. It would enable audience and artists to have comprehensive understandings of feminism within the framework.

林：我觉得这个议题要更倾向于我们提出的女性主义的目的是什么？。。。这个观念在现状之下，我们面对的问题是什么？从这个角度去谈论女性主义，那就比提出一种框架容易的多，就能谈论到比较实质的问题。

Lin: I think this topic is more inclined to what is the purpose of feminism we proposed? . . . What is the problem we are facing under current situation? It would be easier to talk about more substantive issues than to propose a framework from this perspective.

杨：我觉得如果使某种框架真的发生作用，就需要根据各个国家的国情和社会的背景来进行调整，产生实际的意义。

Yang: I feel that it is necessary to adjust the framework according to the national conditions and social backgrounds of each country, and therefore, produce practical significances.

林：对，对社会要产生一个积极的意义。会改变一代人的生活，或者说是使第二代人的生活不再重蹈上一代的悲剧。这是非常有意义的。

Lin: Yes, it needs to generate positive social significance. This would be very meaningful to change the life of a generation, or to make the life of second generation no longer repeat the tragedy of the previous one.

7.

杨：您认为与其他人合作的优势和劣势是什么？

Yang: What do you think might be the advantages and/ or disadvantages of working with anyone else?

林：我觉得优势可能是大家。。。所拥有的能力，所擅长的领域不一样，通过合作，会有一种互补的作用，能够吸收和发扬双方的优势。在合作过程中的沟通和交流，我觉得也是一个特别有益的东西，可以增进双方的理解和思考能力。如果说劣势的话，可能会在。。。合作的过程中产生分歧，因为大家常年都是独立工作的，比如大家的观点和希望作品产生的效果如果没有办法统一，就比较容易产生冲突。

Lin: I think the advantage is there would be . . . a complementary effect by working together as the ability everyone has and the area one is good at is different. It is also particularly beneficial when communicating during the process; it could enhance the ability of understanding and thinking mutually. The disadvantages could be . . . disagreements during collaborations as people work independently all year around, for example, it is more likely to cause conflict if there is no way to unify both sides' ideas and expected outcomes.

杨：哪位艺术家曾经启发您的创作，并是如何启发您的？

Yang: Which artist/artists has/have inspired you, and how?

林：我觉得有很多，不是说特定的哪位。我觉得从很多不同的艺术家身上，常常会有很多多触动我的地方。这些地方，不一定是做作品的方式，也可能是艺术家所思考的问题，提出问题的方式，或者是材料等等。另外从我自己创作的角度来说，不止是艺术家，一些哲学家和作家他们所表达的东西对我影响也很大。因为我最初是从文字开始创作的，对语言很敏感，所以有时候阅读哲学，甚至是心理学也会对我产生很大的影响。

Lin: I think there are many artists who inspired me, not specific ones. I think there are often many aspects that touch me from different artists. These aspects could be the ways artists making works and asking questions, the problems they think, or the materials, et cetera. In addition, from the perspective of my own creation, some philosophers and writers have great influences on me as well. I started creation from writing, and I am sensitive to languages, thus reading philosophy, even psychology has a great impact on me.

杨：相对于具体的艺术家而言，您觉得一种抽象的想法或思路更启发您？

Yang: Compared to a specific artist, do you think an abstract idea or thought is more inspiring?

林：我觉得更多的是一种思考方式吧。比如说我去读一本有故事情节的书，故事本身的发展是一个很重要的因素，但对我来说最重要的因素是通过描绘这个故事，所建立起来的人与人之间，人与社会之间的关系。很多作家能够将故事情节描述地很好，但是能够通过描述故事来分享他/她的思考，表达他/她的观念，这种智慧的作家是很少的。这种作家就是我特别喜欢的，而且也是对我影响最大的。

Lin: I think it is more about the way of thinking. For example, when reading a storybook, the most important element for me is the relationship between people and between people and society instead the development of the story itself. There are many writers who could describe the story plots very well, but there are very few who could share their ideas and thoughts through that. This kind of writers are what I particularly like, and have the most influential to me.

杨：您的作品是否曾受到其他文化的影响，并且是如何影响您的？

Yang: Has your work been influenced in anyway by other cultures, and how?

林：我觉得有，我大学的时候学绘画和视觉艺术，我们一开始是受到苏联的影响。那个时候，苏联的教学方式在中国是非常普及的。很快的，有很多西方的当代艺术进入中国。实际上最初我所接触的西方的东西比东方的更多。所以我的艺术创作是从对西方艺术的理解作为基础，然后才去研究东方的文化以及东方的哲学对文化的影响。实际上外来的文化和我们本土的文化，从一开始就一直在影响我们。我觉得可能和中国的人也有关系，中国人对外来文化很好奇。。。但是根据我的经验我发现西方人对中国的了解非常的少。西方国家的人或许好奇中国的文化，但是他们的好奇没有达到中国人对他们好奇的程度[笑]。中国人会深入地琢磨和学习这些外来的东西，一方面我觉得是文化大革命之后，包括，呃。。。邓小平开放政策之后，中国人丧失了自信，对自己的文化产生了怀疑；另一方面可能跟经济有关系，我们会觉得西方是我们的未来，所以西方什么都是好的，因此要好好琢磨西方的各种模式。有个特别有意思的[笑] 广告说。。。'一直被模仿，从未被超越'，是中国很长时间处于的状态。资本积累到一定的程度以后，情况就不一样了，这个时候中国就开始建立起自己的标准了。从经济的角度来

说，中国是这样的情况，从文化来说也是一样的。通过这个模仿的过程，中国才慢慢地建立起自己的身份意识和在世界中的位置。超越了这个阶段，才能够开始独立思考。从个体和国家都有这样一个发展过程。所以我觉得从中国的文化发展来说，西方的影响是非常大的。

Lin: I think so, yes. We were influenced by Soviet Union from the beginning when I was studying painting and visual art in university. At that time, the teaching methods of the Soviet Union were very popular in China. Shortly after, there were many contemporary arts entering China from the West. Actually, I was more familiar with Western art then Eastern. Therefore, my artistic creation was based on the understanding of Western art, and then I would study Eastern culture and influences of Eastern philosophy on culture. In fact, foreign cultures and our local culture have been influencing us from the very beginning. I think it might have something to do with the people in China. Chinese people are very curious about foreign culture . . . but to my experience, I find that Westerners have very limited understanding about China. People in Western countries might be curious about Chinese culture, but their curiosity has not as much as Chinese people [laughing]. Chinese people would delve into and learn these foreign things in depth. On the one hand, I think it was because Chinese people lost confidence and doubted about their own culture after the, uh . . . Cultural Revolution and Deng Xiaoping's open policy; on the other hand, Chinese people would feel that the West was their future, so they must ponder over various modes of the West. There was a particularly interesting advertisement [laughing] saying that . . . 'has been imitated but never been beyond', China was in such a status for a long time. The situation was different after the capital has accumulated to a certain extent. At this time, China had begun to establish its own standards. It was same from both economic and culture perspectives in China. Through this process of imitation, China slowly built its own identity consciousness and its position in the world. Beyond the stage of imitation, one could begin to think independently. It was such a development process for both individuals and countries. Therefore, I think from the perspective of the development of Chinese cultural, the influence of the West was tremendous.

杨：对，包括当代艺术，比如装置艺术很大程度上也受西方的影响，归根结底它是来自于西方的。

Yang: Yes. Contemporary art, for example, installation art was influenced by the West to a large extent. After all, it comes from the West originally.

林：对，首先我们去学习什么是装置艺术，然后开始经历有一些模仿的阶段，慢慢发展成为具有东方特质的艺术作品。

Lin: Yes. We need to learn what is installation art first, then begin to experience some stages of imitation, and finally, slowly develop into artworks with oriental characteristics.

杨：您怎么看待艺术全球化？

Yang: What do you think about art globalization?

林：我觉得艺术全球化是非常难免的。它有两个方面的原因，一个是现代人的生活非常的接近，互联网时代大家接收到的信息都很相似。也在经济全球化的影响下，各地的食品，建筑，百姓的生活状态都趋于相似。这个时候，人们面临的问题也是相近的，所以艺术家的作品必然会模糊了地域性特征。这也是可以理解的，我们不可能为了差异性而去改变社会的体系；第二个原因，是文化殖民，西方的扶持和喜好影响了被殖民地的文化发展。

Lin: I think art globalization is inevitable. It has two reasons; the first one is because modern people's lives are very close, and the information we received in the Internet age is very similar. Also under the influence of economic globalization, the food, architecture, and people's living conditions in various places tend to be similar. At this time, we are facing similar problems, so that artist's work would inevitably blur the regional characteristics. It is understandable that we cannot change the system of society for the sake of difference; the second reason is cultural colonization, Western's support and preferences have affected the cultural development of the colonies.

杨：您认为中国艺术家相比于其他国家艺术家的优势和限制是什么？

Yang: What do you think are the advantages and limitations of Chinese artists compared to artists from other countries?

林：我觉得是本土环境，比如有些中国的当代艺术品带有很强的地方特色和现象，只有中国的观众才能理解，而别人是无法复制的。同样的道理，西方也有它的地方特色而我们是无法理解和复制的。这也会产生一种限制，但不一定会对所有的艺术作品产生这种限制。从总体来说，文化和艺术是需要沟通的，如果因为地方主义而无法进行沟通，那就会是一个限制。

Lin: I think it is about local characteristics. For example, some Chinese contemporary artworks have strong local characteristics and phenomena that could only be understood by Chinese audiences, which cannot be imitated by others. Vice versa, the West also has its own local aspects that we could not understand and copy. This also creates a limitation, although might not for all artworks. In general, it would become a limitation if parochialism stops us from communicating in culture and art.

2018 年 8 月 7 日，16：00 于中国北京 798 艺术区

7th August 2018, 16:00pm at 798 Art District, Beijing, China

杨 — 杨逸清

Yang —Virginia Yiqing Yang

高 — 高蓉

Gao—Gao Rong

1.

杨：您目前在准备什么作品？

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

高：嗯。。。我有一段时间没有做作品了。因为之前的作品主要是以写实为主，然后现在我想让自己更放松一点。就是这样的的形式可能会继续，但是我想让作品。。。脱离具体的形象，然后传达更多精神层面的感受。当然也不会太脱离这种架上，因为我也不是特别擅长于用一些[笑]其他的手段。我比较擅长手工性的创作。。。但是想在形式上能够更纯粹一点，更抽象一点。这会让观众更加注重于材料本身，以及材料跟我个人的关系。

Gao: Um . . . I have not worked for a while. My previous work is mainly based on realism, now I want to make myself more relaxed. That is the form may continue, but I want my work . . . to detach the concrete image, and then to convey more spiritual feelings. Of course, it won't be too far off the Easel, because I am not particularly good at using other means [laughing]. I am good at handcrafted

creation . . . but I want it to be more pure and abstract in the form. This will allow the audience to focus more on the material itself and the relationship between material and me.

杨：有没有什么事件或经验让您觉得以艺术的形式可以令人满意的表达出来，而其他形式可能做不到呢？

Yang: Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art, while others may not?

高；我觉得还是从视觉上吧。。。这个是艺术不可替代的一部分吧我觉得。嗯。。。如果没有视觉，也就没有艺术存在的必要了。像很多的展览，你去看它和去看一些图片还是有很大的差别的，你会从视觉上有一种更直观的感受我觉得。

Gao: I think visuality . . . is an irreplaceable part of art. Um. . . if there is no visual, there is no art. For instance, there is still a big difference between going to an exhibition in person and just looking at some pictures; I think you will have a more intuitive feeling visually.

杨：或是从听觉和触觉上？

Yang: Or from the sense of hearing and touch?

高：对，各种各样的类型的直观的感受。

Gao: Yes, variety types of intuitive feelings.

2.

杨：您觉得作为一个女性对您的艺术创作来说重要吗？

Yang: Do you think that being a woman is important to your art?

高：嗯。。。我觉得。。。肯定还是有很大的关系，即使我没有特意的去。

Gao: Um . . . I think . . . certainly it is heavily related, although I did not specifically emphasize.

杨：是否是因为您从女性视角出发，所以多多少少会渗透到您的作品中？

Yang: Was that because you stand from a female perspective, it would more or less penetrates into your work?

高：对。

Gao: Yes.

杨：您会使用"女性艺术家"这个标签自称吗？比如一些展览会强调，并以"女性艺术家"为标题。

Yang: Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim? For example, some exhibitions are titled and underlined 'Women Artists'.

高：我觉得无所谓，都可以。我以前会有一点排斥，但现在觉得无所谓了。

Gao: I do not think it matters, either way works. I used to have a bit rejection about that, but I do not care anymore now.

杨：您认为艺术世界仍是被男性主导的程度如何？

Yang: To what extent do you think the art world is still male dominated?

高：我觉得还是很大程度的，确实是很强 [笑]。我不知道国外是什么的，但在中国艺术圈，女性还是挺难立足的。到了一定的年龄[笑] 就要考虑一些个人问题。

Gao: To a large extent I think, indeed very much [laughing]. I do not know the situation overseas, but in Chinese art circle, it is quite difficult for women to have a foothold; you would need to consider some personal problems when you reach a certain age [laughing].

杨：结婚生子吗？

Yang: Like get married and have children?

高：对，结婚生子。然后在经济状况上也是，我觉得如果你的作品不能给你带来一定经济收益的话，那么你还要去考虑生存问题，我觉得压力还是蛮大的。嗯。。。我觉得在精神层面女性还是没有男性那么强大，多少有点。

Gao: Yes, get married and have children. Then in a financial situation, I think that if your work cannot bring you certain economic benefits, you will have to consider the survival problem, the pressure is still relatively heavy . . . Um . . . I think women are still not as strong as men at the spiritual level, more or less.

杨：可能家庭和事业还是比较难兼顾？

Yang: Possibly because it is difficult to balance family and career?

高：对，女性确实是处在弱势的。你可以不去。。。特意地强调这个东西，但比如说在力量，身体等方面上，就是没有办法去抗衡。到了一定的年龄，的确是觉得身体不如从前了。

Gao: Yes, women are indeed vulnerable groups. You do not need to . . . emphasize this deliberately, but in terms of strength and body, women have no way to contend. At a certain age, I really feel that my body is not as good as it used to be.

杨：您还很年轻啊！

Yang: You are still very young!

高：确实是感觉不如以前那么有活力了，不过也许不同年龄段有不同的力量来源。

Gao: It really does not feel as energetic as before, but there may be different sources of strength form different age range.

3.

杨：您认为自己是女性主义者吗？

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

高：女性主义者啊？我觉得不是。

Gao: Feminist? I don't think so.

4.

杨：那在您的任何作品里，有以表达女性主义作为宗旨的吗？

Yang: Does any of your work have a feminist agenda?

高：嗯。。。其实一开始我的作品中有一些，因为我的作品是用女红这种方式。女红是一种很女性化的创作方式，尤其有一种男权对女性的束缚的象征性。所以我想用这种方式，来体现出女性的一种力量吧。虽然我是用女红，但是我想把它做的有。。。力量感，尤其是*姥姥家的房子*那个作品。

Gao: Um . . . in fact, at the beginning, there were some feminist thoughts in my work since I use needlework as a method. Needlework is a very feminine way of creating, especially as a symbolicity of the bondage to women by patriarchy. So I wanted to show the empowerment of women in this way.

Although I use needlework, I wanted to make it . . . powerful, particularly in my work *Grandparent's Home.*

杨：您会希望那些直接参与艺术的人，比如说别的艺术家，合作者，或者是策展人如何来定义您的作品？

Yang: How would you most like those directly involved in the arts – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics – to define your work?

高：嗯。。。我觉得就是以装置艺术来定义吧。强调女性的身份也可以，反正我的作品的确很女性化 [笑]。

Gao: Um . . . I prefer defining my work as installation art. It is ok if they emphasize women identity; my work is quite feminine anyway [laughing].

杨：那您认为那些不直接参与艺术创作的人，比如观众会有相同的定义吗？

Yang: Do you think that those not directly involved in the arts would have similar definitions?

高：我觉得我的作品还是比较容易理解的，比较直观的。

Gao: I think my work is relatively easy to be understood and quite straightforward.

5.

杨：您认为装置艺术有可能会变得无关紧要吗？

Yang: Do you think installation art is in danger of becoming irrelevant?

高：无关紧要？

Gao: Irrelevant?

杨：对，比如因为装置艺术的局限性 – 地点性的限制，专业性的限制，难以保持作品的完整性，或者难以调整和与时俱进？

Yang: Yes, for instance, the limitation of installation art – too local, too specialist, too hard to preserve material integrity, and hard to revisit and keep up-to-date?

高：嗯。。。我觉得它如果想要再突破确实还是挺难的，因为它。。。确实是太没有范围了 [笑]，太广泛了。太广泛了就是无，越复杂反而就是。。。可能会缺乏一种创新的可能性我觉得。

Gao: Um . . . I feel that it is very difficult to break through the limitations of installation art, because . . . there is no scope [laughing] and too broad to do installations. Too vague means nothing; the more complex it is, the more ... it would likely to lack a possibility of innovation I think.

杨：您是否会担心您的观众可能会更多的关注具体的物品而忽略了您想表达的装置作品背后的意义？

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

高：我觉得。。。其实每个人的感受都不一样，我不会局限观众的。。。思考。我觉得他们如果只关注物品也可以；他们如果能感受到我想表达的东西那更好，如果感受不到也可以。我觉得。。。不要去局限于观众的反应或是体验吧 [笑]。。。因为你不可能让每个人都理解你。

Gao: I think . . . I will not limit audience . . . thinking as everyone has different feelings. It is better if they could understand what I wanted to express in the work; it is also acceptable if they just focus on the objects. I think . . . I do not think we should limit audience's reactions or experiences [laughing]... because you cannot make everyone understand you.

杨：就是说您创作一个作品是为了您自己而不是为了取悦观众？

Yang: In other words, you create a work for yourself, not for pleasing the audience?

高：对对。

Gao: Exactly.

6.

杨：您觉得装置艺术能推动女性主义宗旨吗？

Yang: Do you think installation art can drive a feminist agenda?

高：为什么必须是装置艺术呢？我觉得别的艺术形式也可以。比如一些行为艺术更能帮助大家去理解女性主义。。。我觉得现在很多装置已经模糊了这种性别概念，就是你根本看不出来这是男性或女性的作品。

Gao: Why it has to be installation art? I think other art forms also work. For example, some performance art can help the public to understand feminism better . . . I feel that the concept of gender has been blurred in many installations, that is, you cannot tell the works were made by male artists or female artists.

杨：这其实也在一定程度上帮助了女性主义宗旨，因为观众可能就不会从艺术家性别的角度去分析这个作品想表达什么，而是更关注作品本身。

Yang: This actually helps with feminist agenda to certain extent, as audience might not try to analyse what the work wants to express from the perspective of artist's gender, but pay more attention to the work itself.

高：对。

Gao: That is right.

杨：您是否认为某种共同的框架有可能使女性主义宗旨受益吗？比如一套准则？

Yang: Do you think feminist installation art's agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework? For example, a set of disciplines?

高：恩。。。我觉得有个框架肯定是会帮助理解的。因为很多观众对装置艺术的理解可能会有一些困难的。如果给出了这样的一个框架，对于， 呃。。不是特别懂装置的人会有一定的帮助。

Gao: Um . . . I think if there is a framework that will definitely help understand. The audience might find it difficult to understand installation art. It would help those uh . . . who were not familiar with installations to have better understandings if a framework was provided.

杨：也就是说这样一个框架更受益的是观众？

Yang: That is to say, a framework is more beneficial to the audience?

高：对。

Gao: Yes.

杨：您是否会觉得对于艺术家的创作来说，这种框架会是一种限制？

Yang: Do you think the framework would be a limitation for artists' creation?

高：嗯。。。我觉得是先有了作品再去总结归纳某种框架的。从作品中提炼出它们的相同性，看是否适应于别的作品。

Gao: Um . . . I think the framework would be summed up based on works. Then bring together the similarities from different works and see whether they could adapt to other works.

7.

杨：您觉得和其他人合作的优势或者劣势是什么？比如说联合展览，共享资源，跨学科活动，有共同表达目标，共享工作室或其他任何形式的合作。

Yang: What do you think might be the advantages and/ or disadvantages of working with anyone else? Examples might be joint shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?

高：我觉得优势就是。。。可以打开你自己思维的局限性，因为一个人长期独立创作，可能容易走入一个，呃。。。固定模式，跟其他人去合作，可以看到新的视角，然后对你作品的创作也会有一些新的碰撞。劣势就是。。。如果你没有一个强大的自我的判断，那你就很容易受到其他人的影响，呃。。。自己的思路就会乱。

Gao: I think the advantage is that ... you can break the limits of your own thinking, because it might easy to enter uh . . . a fixed mode if a person who works independently for a long time. Working with other people, one can find new perspectives and new impacts with creations. The disadvantage is . . . that if you do not have a powerful self-judgment, you could be influenced by others very easily, and uh . . . your own ideas would be chaotic.

杨：有哪位艺术家曾经启发过您的创作吗？并且是怎样启发您的？

Yang: Which artist/artists has/have inspired you, and how?

高：呃。。。比如尹秀珍，我还挺喜欢她的创作的，尤其是她的*行李箱*，是用衣服手工制作的，作品中有一种。。。女性的敏感和巧妙。还有。。。呃。。。Tracey Emin。

Gao: Uh . . . for example, Yin Xiuzhen. I quite like her work, particularly *Portable City. S*he made a suitcase with clothes by handcraft; there is a kind of . . . sensitive and ingenious of woman in her work. And . . . uh . . . Tracey Emin too.

杨：是因为你们都是使用相似的材料和刺绣的手法吗？

Yang: Is that because you use similar materials and embroidery?

高：其实我是先确定材料的，再去关注别的艺术家的作品的，看他们是怎么通过这种材料去创作的，然后我怎么跟他们有所区别。一开始先确定我比较喜欢这种材料，刺绣的语言也是从一个偶然的机会。。。想到它可以跟布料结合，创造出新的作品。然后再去关注用这种相同的材料，比如说林天苗，研究了一下他们的作品。一开始我还有一点点避讳，因为大家的材料是一样的，后来我觉得无所谓，每个人的感受是不一样的。

Gao: In fact, I started to determine the materials, then did research on works of other artists, see how they created by using this material, and finally distinguished from them. At first, I decided that I like using fabrics; it was an accidental opportunity for me to . . . combine fabrics with the language of embroidery, and to create new works. And then paid attention to those using the same material, for example Lin Tianmiao, researched about their works. At the beginning, I had a little avoidance because we use the same kind of materials. And then later on, I don't care about it anymore, as everyone's feelings are different.

杨：也不可能做出两件一样的作品来。

Yang: It is impossible to make two identical works.

高：对对。

Gao: Exactly.

杨：您的作品有没有曾经受到过某种文化的影响？是被怎样影响的？

Yang: Has your work been influenced in anyway by other cultures, and how?

高：嗯。。。还是中国文化比较多。。。以及刺绣的历史和门类，包括苏绣，粤绣。。。我一开始是想研究刺绣的手工传统工艺的，研究这种历史文化的传承性。后来我觉得这好像不是我创作的主要目的。我只是借鉴了这样一个语言，我在制作的时候其实也并没有强调这种技艺。

Gao: Um . . . I have been influenced by Chinese culture mostly . . . including the history and categories of embroidery, including Su embroidery, Yue embroidery ... At the beginning, I wanted to study the traditional crafts of embroidery, study the inheritance of history and culture. Later I realised that this was not the main purpose of my creation. I just used the language of embroidery for a reference and did not emphasize this skill when creating.

杨：刺绣在您的作品中是作为一种元素？

Yang: Is embroidery an element in your work?

高：对，作为一种元素，也是受我姥姥的影响。

Gao: Yes, as a kind of element; I am influenced by my grandmother too.

<u>姜杰 Jiang Jie</u>

2018 年 8 月 8 日，11:00，于中国北京

8th August 2018, 11:00, in Beijing, China

杨 — 杨逸清

Yang — Virginia Yiqing Yang

姜— 姜杰

Jiang — Jiang Jie

1.

杨：目前您在准备什么作品？

Yang: What are you working on at the moment?

姜：一直在准备吧，除了参加展览以外，大部分时间都在自己做东西。

Jiang: I am preparing all the time. I spend most of my time doing things on my own apart from attending exhibitions.

杨：有没有什么事件或经验让您觉得以艺术的形式可以令人满意的表达出来？

Yang: Was there any event or experience that you particularly felt that you could express satisfactorily in the form of art?

姜：其实不管是。。。哪种学科或者专业，每一个人都会用自己熟悉的语言。每个人是不同的，他/她用的语言也不一样。其实表达方式的不同是因为每个人对生活的感受是不一样的，不见得是某个具体的事件。有的时候，有些作品可能是针对某一些问题提出来的；有些作品可能是表达在人生命中出现的东西。其实是。。。每一个作品里面肯定有个人经验的存在，但是怎么样找到一种独特的方式去表达个人经验，可能是。。。每一个艺术家追求的吧，包括艺术的形式，材料，观念的独特性。

Jiang: In fact, everyone will use the language they are familiar with no matter in . . . which subject or profession. Every individual is different, thus, the language he/she uses would be different. Actually, the difference in expression is because every individual feels different about life, not necessarily a specific event. Sometimes, some work might be proposed for certain problems; some might express something happened in life. In fact . . . there certainly are personal experience in each work, but how to find a unique way to express personal experience might be . . . what every artist pursues, including the uniqueness of art form, material and concept.

2.

杨：作为一个女性对您的艺术创作来说重要吗？

Yang: Is being a woman important to your art?

姜：我觉得其实性别没那么重要吧，重要的是人性。我觉得每一种类别的艺术家都能呈现出好的作品。也没有人说必须要用什么性别去做什么作品，性别不是衡量一个作品好坏的标准。重要的是这个作品是否能直接反映问题，是否有新意，是否能使人思考。就像比如说美国的艺术家用美国的方式，英国的艺术家用英国的方式。这个问题提的太多了，太久了。

Jiang: I think as a matter of fact, gender is not so important while humanity is. I think that artists of every category can present good works. Nobody said it is necessary to use gender to create; gender is not a standard to measure the quality of any work. What important is, whether the work directly reflects problem, whether there is new idea, and whether it makes people think? Just like, for example, American artists use American way, British artists use British way. This question has been raised too much for a long time.

杨：您会使用'女性艺术家'这个标签自称吗？

Yang: Is being a 'woman artist' a label you would comfortably claim?

姜：肯定不会吧。

Jiang: Definitely not.

杨：那您如何看待一些标题强调'女性艺术家'的展览？

Yang: What is your view on those exhibitions that are titled and underlined 'Women Artists'?

姜：我觉得这些都是策展人的问题，跟艺术和艺术家本身没有什么关系。

Jiang: I think these are curators' problems and have nothing to do with art and artists.

杨：您认为艺术世界仍然是被男性主导的程度如何？

Yang: To what extent do you think the art world is still male dominated?

姜：其实我觉得这些事情都不是我们艺术家管的。就算是一个男性艺术家，他也不会去考虑其中的关系和比例。比如一个展览里，男女艺术家占多少比例，这也不是艺术家来控制和决定的。这可能是个问题，但是每个人的侧重点不同，这不是每一个艺术家必须关注的问题。有太多的问题值得关注了，这个对我来讲，没有那么重要，因为你不能够左右这个事情。你可以在有的时候发出一点些声音，但它不是一个你能左右的问题。男权主导这个问题其实存在于各个职业领域，这是个问题，但不是我最关注的问题。

Jiang: Actually, I don't think we artists can manage these things. Even for a male artist, he won't think about the relationship and proportion of it. For example, artists cannot control and decide the proportion of male and female artists in an exhibition. This might be a problem, but everyone's focus is different. This is not a problem that every artist must pay attention to. There are too many problems

worthy of attention, and this one is not so important to me because you can't control this. You could make some voices at some time, but it's really not a problem you can control. Patriarchy actually exists in various career fields; this is a problem, but not my biggest concern.

杨：您怎么看待在艺术市场或拍卖行，女性艺术家的作品还是处于劣势的现象？

Yang: What is your view on women artists' disadvantage situation in art markets or auction houses?

姜：首先我就不去拍卖行，我根本不关注这个。卖不卖艺术品不是我思考的问题，我根本没有想过这个问题，我不在乎男性或女性的喜好。其实在八十，九十年代的中国，艺术没那么商业的时候，大家考虑的都是艺术本身的问题，而不是如何把作品卖出去。我不是不希望自己的作品能卖出去，但我不会为了卖作品而创作。

Jiang: Firstly, I do not go to auction houses; I don't pay attention to this at all. Selling work of art is not what I concern; I haven't even thought about it, I don't care about male or female's preferences. In fact, in the 1980s and 1990s in China, when art was not so commercial, everyone was considering the matter of art itself instead of how to sell it. I hope that my work could be sold, but I would never create it for the purpose of selling.

3.

杨：您认为自己是女性主义者吗？

Yang: Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?

姜：。。。我可以用女性主义中一些有意思的方式去思考一些问题，但我不是女性主义者。

Jiang: . . . I could think about some issues in some interesting ways of feminism, but I am not a feminist.

4.

杨：在您的任何作品中，有以表达女性主义为宗旨的吗？

Yang: Does any of you work have a feminist agenda?

姜：那肯定没有，我都不是女性主义者[笑]。但我不能否认性别决定了很多东西，可能男性和女性的思维方式就是不同的。但是我觉得这不是一个分水岭。

Jiang: Definitely not. I am not even a feminist [laughing]. But I cannot deny that gender determines a lot of things, maybe men and women think differently. However, I don't think this is a dividing ridge.

杨：您会希望那些直接参与艺术的人 – 例如别的艺术家，合作者，策展人和评论家如何来定义您的作品？

Yang: How would you most like those directly involved in the arts – for example other artists, collaborators, curators and critics – to define your work?

姜：那这个我怎么知道？这个我不会去想。我不会套用成功学的模式，因为别人需要什么，这个社会需要什么而去做什么。有人按照这个模式，那它就可能成立。但我觉得真正的艺术家做的作品应该打破所有的模式。

Jiang: How could I know about this? I would not think about this. I would not apply the model of success to do whatever other people or the society needs. Someone follows this model, and it might work. But I think that the works of real artists should break all the patterns.

杨；您是指有一类作品是根据观众和市场的喜好而去做的吗？

Yang: Were you referring to a type of work that is made based on the preferences of audience and market?

姜：艺术家应该是作为一种引领作用，而不是说。。。去迎合大众。其实这是一个创作的问题，比如说在创作当中，不能没有熟悉感，除此之外作品还要给予思想和观念。作品如果没有任何功能和作用的话，那和普通的。。。那个家庭装饰品也就没有差别了。

Jiang: Artist should play leading roles, not to . . . ingratiate the public. In fact, this is a question of creation. For example, during creation, there must be a sense of familiarity. In addition, the work must provide thoughts and ideas. If the work does not have any function, it would be no difference from . . . sort of ordinary home decorations.

5.

杨：您认为装置艺术可能会变得无关紧要吗？

Yang: Is installation art in danger of becoming irrelevant?

姜：什么都可能变得无关紧要 [笑]。

Jiang: Everything could become irrelevant [laughing].

杨：装置艺术相较于别的艺术形式呢？

Yang: Specifically installation art that compare to other forms of art?

姜：那我不知道呀。每一个东西都会可能变得无关紧要，它有它存在的时间，或者别的可能性。绘画也好，雕塑也好，到了别的学科也好，最后可能会变成别的非艺术形式的东西。

Jiang: Then I do not know about that. Everything can become irrelevant; it has its time of existence or other possibilities. No matter painting, sculpture, or other disciplines, at the end, might become something else other than art.

杨：您认为装置艺术可能有什么局限性？

Yang: Can you think of any limitations that installation art might have?

姜：这些包括收藏和运输上都有局限性。但有一些艺术家就喜欢破碎的，不完整的物品，那就是另外一回事了；有些艺术家比如那个。。。英国的 Marc Quinn 用自己的血铸了一个头，那个必须保存在特定的温度和湿度下，那他就要十分精心的保护这个作品。

Jiang: There are limitations in collection and transportation. However, some artists prefer broken and incomplete items and that would be another story; others, like . . . Marc Quinn from Britain, he casted a head by his blood, and that must be preserved at a specific temperature and humidity, so he had to conserve this work with extreme care.

杨：您是否担心过观众可能会更多的关注具体的物品而忽略或忽视装置作品背后的意义？

Yang: Have you ever been concerned that the audience might focus more on the physical object and neglect, overlook or otherwise miss the meaning behind the installation work?

姜：呃。。。这个很难讲。有的时候可能是。。。艺术家没有将信息传达到位；有的时候可能是，比如说观众的差异性，包括他们的地域，思维方式和教育水平的不同等等。比如现在有一些作品非常的炫，它们不需要大众去深入地理解，只要觉得好玩就可以了。

Jiang: Uh . . . this is hard to say. Sometimes it might be that . . . the artist does not convey the information in place; sometimes it might be, for example, the difference of the audience, including their geographical locations, ways of thinking and educational level, et cetera. For example, there are some works looking very dazzling, they do not require the public to have in-depth understandings as long as they have fun.

6.

杨：您认为装置艺术是否能推动女性主义宗旨？

Yang: Do you think installation art can drive a feminist agenda?

姜：具体是？

Jiang: What does it mean?

杨：比如您是否认为某种共同的框架可以使女性主义装置艺术的宗旨受益？

Yang: For instance, do you think feminist installation art's agenda would benefit from any kind of common framework?

姜：这个问题太大了[笑]，其实什么艺术做好了都能推动社会的进步。我也是没有太过考虑过这个问题。我不知道国内和国外的区别，比如你们学习和研究艺术，是不是有某种方式可以套入。但我作为艺术家，其实。。。很少先确定框架。这可能属于知识理论，我还是以实践和创作为主的。在创作的过程中，有一些因素可能是先被考虑的，比如说材料，观念，或某个细节，并没有某个模式。如果先有某种模式的话，这样的思考太理性了。虽然也有一类艺术家，他们会先分析，但是我不属于这一类。艺术家的独特性在于找到他/她自己的模式和方法，比如有的人会使用垃圾，但不管使用什么材料都有它的时代意义。新的标准或者准则通常是不被接受的，而且创立一个新标准是因为以前没有，它可能看着没有那么舒服；应用它需要一个过程。

Jiang: This question is too broad [laughing]. In fact, any type of art can support social development as long as it is functional. I did not really consider about this question. I do not know the difference between China and other countries, if there is any mode that you could adapt into when doing art study and research. But as an artist, I rarely . . . define a framework first. This might belong to the theory of knowledge, yet my focus is on practice and creation. In the process of creation, there are some factors that might be considered first, such as materials, ideas, or a certain detail, and there is no pattern to follow. It is too rational if you have some types of patterns beforehand. Although there are some artists who would analyse in advance, I don't belong to them. The uniqueness of an artist lies in finding his/her own patterns and methods. For example, some artists use rubbish as material, but no matter what material they use, it has its significance of the times. New standards or disciplines are often

unacceptable, and the reason why they are created is because they were not there before, it might not so pleasant to look at; moreover, It requires a process to be applied.

7.

杨：您觉得与其他人合作的优势/劣势是什么？

Yang: What do you think might be the advantages and/ or disadvantages of working with anyone else?

姜：和谁合作？

Jiang: Whom to work with?

杨：例如联合展览，共享资源和研究，跨学科活动，共同的表达目标，和共享工作室 – 其他任何形式。

Yang: Examples might be joint shows, sharing resources and research, cross-disciplinary activities, common expressive aims, and sharing studios – anything else?

姜：我仅仅跨学科合作过，但还是艺术相关的领域，比如与产品设计类的合作。偶尔参与一些这种的合作，呃。。主要是跟现代科技或者时尚有关系的，你可以有一个机会去了解一些不属于你的创作习惯的，新的东西，并可能提供给你一种新的，呃。。思路吧。

Jiang: I only worked across disciplines, and that was still in an art-related field, like collaborating with product design. Occasionally taking part in some collaborations, uh . . . which are mainly related to modern technology or fashion, you could have the chance to understand some new things that are not part of your creative habits, and may provide you with some new, uh . . . ideas.

杨：哪位艺术家曾启发您的创作，并且是如何启发您的？

Yang: Which artist/artists has/have inspired you, and how?

403

姜：那有太多了！我特别喜欢的有现代舞表演家 Pina Bausch 还有 Louise Bourgeois。还有那个，呃。。。Marina Abramovic 有一个对视的行为系列我也是非常喜欢的。

Jiang: There have been too many! I particularly like modern dance performer Pina Bausch, and Louise Bourgeois. And that, uh . . . I like Marina Abramovic's staring performance series a lot as well.

杨：您的作品是否曾受到其他文化的影响，并且是如何影响您的？

Yang: Has your work been influenced in anyway by other cultures, and how?

姜：肯定会受到影响！这个影响是来自各个方面的。我们现在是信息化时代，没有观看的障碍，来源非常的多，可以通过各种渠道了解各种资讯。

Jiang: It has definitely been affected! The influence came from all aspects. We are now living in an information age; there is no obstacle for seeing, there are so many sources, and we could get to know all kinds of information through various channels.

Appendix 4 Initial Selection of Artworks

Rowena Harris

From Outstretched Wrists, 2016. Cyanotype on blackout fabric and folding chair

(83 x 41 x 53 cm).

Golden Brown Texture Like Sun, 2017. Used sun tanning bulbs*, aluminium, eye-protectors,

and towel (180 x 75 x 60 cm).

*The sun tanning bulbs are sourced from recycling repositories, that receive bulbs from

tanning salons nationwide, after 500-1000 hours of commercial use.

At the Edge of The Frame, 2017 (series of 10 unique). Polished Concrete, dimensions variable, shoe to scale women's UK size 6.5.

Just Past the Frame, 2017. Polished concrete, dimensions variable.

Golden Brown Texture Like Sun, 2017. Used sun tanning bulbs, aluminium, eye-protectors,

and towel (53 x 178 x 56 cm).

Extend/Compress Part 2, 2013. Cement and chewing gum, dimensions variable (shirt 30 x18

x11 cm/button 3 x 3 x 1 cm).

Haul, 2013. Cement and polystyrene, dimensions variable (each 35 x 35 x 35 cm).

Selenium, 2012. Cement and collared shirts, dimensions variable (each 28 x18 x 5cm).

Fingers Scrolling Fingers Scrolling Fingers Scrolling Fingers, 2015. Photographic print (Instagram) and aluminium (74 x 44 cm).

Prehension Act 1, 2015. Plaster (each 15 x 14 x 6 cm). Shown alongside *Fractured,*

Multiplied and Distributed through Time and Space, 2015.

Fractured, Multiplied and Distributed through Time and Space, 2015. Plaster, concrete, and

floor paint installation, dimensions variable.

Walking Around Looking for My Soul, 2015. Audio on multiple cordless headphones and

cushions (5'09"), dimensions variable.

Becoming Somewhat Aware of My Digitopalmer Complex, 2015. Concrete, armature, iPhone

4s and short animation, and 3D printed hand bones, dimensions variable.

Helen Gorrill

Fushë Kosovë Sex Café Chair, 2010*.* Reclaimed prosthetic limbs, steel, leather, fishnet, nylon, resins

(male sex toys, Moldovan coins, children's toys, and sweets), and cushion (machine and hand

embroidered silk with beading, wire, and leather straps) (83 x 93 x 74 cm).

Jemima Brown

Mother and Child, 2017. Metal, fabric, hair, and acrylic (152 x 36 x 36 cm).

Occasional Woman, 2017. Oil on canvas, wood, fabric, hair, jesmonite, and acrylic (158 x 150 x 70 cm).

Top Table, 2017. Watercolour and acrylic on paper, wood, fabric, glass, metal, polystyrene, clay, hair,

acrylic, plastic, silicone rubber, and ceramic (163 x 150 x 150 cm).

Right Leaning Woman, 2017. Glass, polystyrene, clay, wood, acrylic, and plastic (53 x 15 x 15 cm).

Drinks Before Dinner, 2017. Glass, metal, jesmonite, hair, acrylic, and fabric (140 x 53 x 53 cm).

Tabletop Sculpture, 2011. Mixed media assemblage.

Headless Woman, 2011. Mixed media assemblage.

Family, 2005-2008. Plastics, fabric, clothing, hair, and jesmonite.

Lana Locke

Pant vessel (i), 2018. Underwear and framing tape (26 x 24 x 26 cm).

Grenfell Flowers (i), 2017**.** Patinated bronze direct burnout.

Pasty Boobs, 2017. Aluminium direct burnout.

Pierced Daddy-Fruit Boat, 2017. Patinated bronze direct burnout.

In and Out Box, 2017. Found objects and salt dough.

Nippled Nappy Boobs, 2017. Partially glazed terracotta.

Scratched Womb Form, 2017. Partially glazed terracotta.

Milk Boob and Tights, 2016. Condom, plaster, and tights.

Milk Bomb (ii), 2016. Plaster, condom, and plastic cup.

Violent Womb Form (i), 2015. Wax, Latex, unfired terracotta, and salt dough.

Violent Womb Form (v), 2015. Partially glazed fired terracotta.

Violent Womb Form (vi), 2015. Partially glazed fired terracotta.

Little Hook, 2015. Plaster, domestic gloss paint, and found metal.

Untitled (Sex Bomb), 2015.

Untitled, 2015.

Untitled, 2006-2015. Self-drying clay, plaster, and condoms.

Empty Womb, 2015. Condom, string, and glass wax.

Bridal Piece (i), 2014.

Bridal Piece (ii), 2014. Found fabric and wooden frame, roofing mastic, papier-mache, string, glass

wax, and dried flowers.

Condoms and Balloons, 2013. Found glass, glass wax, condoms, balloons, and plaster.

Tin Can Man and Woman, 2012. Found objects, tin cans, and papier-mache (90 x 75 x 20 cm).

Tao Aimin

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Untitled 1, 2015. 29 wooden washboards (172 x 128 x 16 cm).

Untitled 2, 2015. 33 wooden washboards (229 x 118 x 11 cm).

Untitled 3, 2015. 26 wooden washboards (170 x 127 x 14 cm)

High Mountains and Flowing Water, 2007. Ink on paper, black linen cloth, hemp rope, and 23

washboards (320 x 300 x 600 cm).

The Secret Language of Women, 2008. Ink on paper, acrylic cover, washboards, and video (320 x 320 x

80 cm).

Women's River, 2005.

Women's Book, 2005.

Lin jingjing

We are Free to Choose but We are not Free from the Consequences of Our Choices: Arrival, 2017.

LED display panels, acrylic, and aluminium-plastic panel (200 x 200 cm) (Left).

We are Free to Choose but We are not Free from the Consequences of Our Choices: Departure, 2017.

LED display panels, acrylic, and aluminium-plastic panel (200 x 200 cm) (Right).

This is the Beginning of My Desperation, 2017. Laser cut on acrylic (each 80 x 60 x20 cm).

Username or Password Incorrect, 2017. Laser cut on marble (12.5 x 9 x 1.5 cm).

Zoom in Find My Digital Soul in This Cruel World, 2018. Engraved marble stone (30 x 30 cm).

I Have Yearned for Something I Cannot Afford, 2015. Electronic device cables and coloured thread.

Everything is Going to be Fine, 2015. (78 x 46 x 24 cm).

Whatever Survives, 2015. (26 x 11 x 10 cm).

I Heard All Truth are Red and Expensive, 2015. (37 x 65 x 13 cm).

One Hundred Percent, 2015.

There was Nothing Except Everything, 2015.

Silence, 2015.

Tomorrow was Wonderful, 2015.

So

Rose Rose, 2008-2009.

Dress, 2008-2009.

Insecure security 1, 2011.

I Want to be with You Forever, 2008-2009.

I Want to Fly, 2006-2008.

Never Apart, 2009.

CCTV News, 2008.

Private Memory, Beijing, 2009.

Private Memory, Chile, 2009.

My Promise for Your Happiness, 2013.

Gao Rong

Guangzhou Station – Things in the Bag, 2013. Copy bags, cloth, embroidery, and sponge.

Communicate by Phone 1, 2012. Sponge, cloth, wire, and board (20 x 48 x 28 cm).

Communicate by Phone 2, 2012. Sponge, cloth, wire, and board (20 x 23 x 12 cm).

Station, 2011. Fabric, threads, sponge, and metal frame (255 x 100 x 3 cm).

Some Days Later, 2014. Cloth, thread, sponge, and steel.

Gemstone, 2015. Wood and thread (100 × 100 × 3.5 cm).

Untitled, 2015. Wood and thread (110 × 110 × 3.5 cm).

After July 21st, Box No. 1, Edition 3 of 3, 2013. Embroidery, cloth, and foam (32 × 43 × 26 cm).

After July 21ˢᵗ, Sofa, 2013. Embroidery, cloth, wooden board, and foam (89.9 × 189.9 × 85.1 cm).

Blocked Scenery, no.1-4, 2013. Embroidery, wooden board, and cloth (185.7 × 77.2 × 9.8 cm).

What Type of Car Can a Motor Tricycle be Exchanged for? 2013. Embroidery, wood, iron shelf, sponge, cloth, leather, and plastic (180 × 194.9 × 94.9 cm).

Winter Bathroom Wall, 2013. Wall, embroidery, cloth, and sponge (120 × 154.9 × 154.9 cm).

Level ½, Unit 8, Building 5, Hua Jiadi North Village, 2010. Cloth, thread, sponge, and steel.

The Static Eternity, 2012. Cloth, thread, sponge, and steel.

Fragile Products, 1994. Gauze, wax, and plastic film.

A Red Child, 2006. Resin, paint, and synthetic hair..

Zai, 2001. Resin and paint glass.

They Know Who They Are, 2007.

Ready Go, 2009.

Above and Below, 2006. Wax tiles.

Entertainment, 2006. Resin and paint.

The Emperor Have Never Been to the Place, 2006..

Pink Utopia, 2009-2010. Tiles and silk bags.

March Forward, March Forward, 2012. Video, voice, steel frames, and ballet shoes.

More Than One and Half Tons, 2014. Resin, cloth, and iron.

Appendix 5   Identifying Touchpoints in British and Chinese Women's Art in the Twenty-First Century

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Appendix 6 Ethics Documentation

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