


Body, Performance and Labor of Life Models in Hong Kong

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The thesis discusses the body, performance and labor of female life models in Hong Kong. It starts with the inadequacies of feminist critics of female nude in Western art and theory of the 'male gaze' in understanding life modeling work, which female models comprise most models in the West and in Hong Kong. It sees life modeling as a cultural practice instead of reducing it to a representational practice. Although representations of women in art have always been criticized as patriarchic, female life models cannot be seen as passive objects to be depicted and have little control and power over their bodies in the studios. By doing in-depth interviews with ten female models in Hong Kong and observing modeling sessions, the thesis aims at exploring if and how life modeling changes the way they see their bodies and live with hegemonic beauty standards. It also investigates how and why models discipline their bodies to manage sexuality and maintain modesty. Besides, there is discussion on how models try to assert their creativity and stay still to be professional models, and it further explores how upholding certain values of professionalism brings them intense satisfaction and potential exploitation at the same time. Using insights from the recent discussion of cultural work and creative workers, it explores the recent phenomenon of a high proportion of creative workers and aesthetically inclined people working as life models who see life modeling as a part of their aestheticized life projects. Seeing life modeling as an interactive process between life models and artists, the thesis investigates how models see life modeling as a work which they can express their aesthetic sensitivity through exploring bodily movements and gestures, and provide critical comments on the inherent values and practices of artists.



摘要

本論文討論香港女性人體模特兒的身體、表演和勞動。本文先回顧女性主義藝術評論家對西方藝術的批評，例如藝術中的男性凝視和女性裸體被物化的現象。雖然這些理論貢獻良多，但它們並不能解釋香港女性人體模特兒的權力位置和主體性。事實上，模特兒與藝術家的權力關係和互動是更為複雜的，因此本文分析人體素描作為文化實踐多於再現實踐，以彌補理論家在評論藝術的性別議題時過度注重文本分析的不足。人體模特兒看似是靜態及被動的被畫物，角色和地位似乎是靜物素描中的靜物。可是，與十個模特兒的訪談及模特兒工作的觀察卻發現她們往往強調在工作時的主體性以及與藝術家和互動和交流。第二章首先深入討論模特兒如何比較藝術家和主流社會對女性美的標準，產生對身體形象的反省。第三章著重分析模特兒如何監控自己的身體以達到工作室將模特兒身體非性化的標準。第四章本文研究她們如何看什麼是專業精神，以及不停從監控身體成為專門模特兒以達到工作的滿足感，以及因此被剝削的可能性。本文也會分析為何近年有不少文化工作者和藝術愛好者成為模特兒，以及她們如何將模特兒工作視為她們表達藝術修養的工作。模特兒和不同藝術家的互動如何影響她們的表演和自由度，也會在第五章一一闡述。

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Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Drawings of nude women are important in western art history¹, but the work of life modeling remains quite invisible to most of us. Artists are often given pre-sociological notions of “artist-as-genius”. Yet, artistic production is located in a framework of material and social conditions in a particular historical context, and modeling is no exception.² Feminist art historians reframe the encounter between artist and model in terms of social patterns of gender.³ Art historians like Lynda Nead,⁴ Helen McDonald,⁵ John Berger⁶ and Linda Nochlin⁷ offer convincing critique to the mechanism of the male gaze in female nude in art and male-dominated culture in art history. Berger argues that women are represented as subordinate, passive objects in art and popular culture. For him, as woman becomes an image, and man is the bearer of the look on that image. The former is passive, hence it lacks agency; the latter is active, hence it possesses agency.⁸ Carol Duncan argues in the art of the Fauves and German Expressionists, images of powerless, passive, available female nudes serve as evidence of sexual virility and the dominating will of the male artist.⁹

Yet, these feminist works assume a blindspot found in the general scholarship of the female nude in art. There is too much emphasis on the representations of women

¹ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 1-2.

² Anne Bowler, “Reviewed work: The Social Production of Art. by Janet Wolff,” *Social Forces*, 62(1984): 1123.

³ Susan Waller, *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), xiv.

⁴ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 1992).

⁵ Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: the Female Nude in Art*, (London: Routledge, 2001).

⁶ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972).

⁷ Linda Nochlin, *Women, Art, and Power: and Other Essays*, (London : Thames and Hudson, 1988).

⁸ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, (London: British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972).

⁹ Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: the Female Nude in Art*, (London: Routledge, 2001), 7.

in art and a lack of attention to the actual material bodies of models and their physical experiences and sensations. According to Davis, 'recent feminist theory on the body has displayed a marked ambivalence towards the material body and a tendency to privilege the body as metaphor.'¹⁰ Their lack of attention to concrete embodied experiences is something the thesis attempts to address.

The problematization of the female nude has led to the critique of the life drawing class. Nead believes that lessons of the life class basically amounted to an aesthetic endorsement of patriarchal power.¹¹ Yet, the critique based on the male gaze in art production and the objectification of women's bodies in life modeling is simplistic and ignores the micropolitics occurring in life drawing. While drawing has expanded as an area of critical research, scholarly writing and contemporary practice, there is almost no critical research on life drawing.¹² The process of life drawing, the subjectivity of models and artist-model relationship are explored to show that focusing too much on the study of representations of women in art criticism will lead to the exaggeration of the power of artists (who are largely male) in the art production process.

The above critics are correct to point out that the tradition of drawing the female nude was originally patriarchal. The popularity of female nude in art, hence the frequent use of female models since the 19th century, should not be seen as a natural taste for women's bodies. A widespread belief that the female body is naturally predisposed to the contours of art is problematized by feminist art historians.¹³ For example, the natural and unstructured female body represents something that is outside the proper field of art and aesthetic judgment in Western culture. The female body can only become an object of beauty suitable for art and aesthetic judgment

¹⁰ Kathy Davis, "Embodying Theory: Beyond Modernist and Postmodernist Readings of the Body," in *Embodied Practices: Feminist Perspectives on the Body*, ed. Kathy Davis, (London: Sage, 1997), 15.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹² Margaret Mayhew, "The Naked And The Blind; Exploring the Badness of Life Drawing," *TRACY*, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/wigd/mayhew.html>, accessed on 28 June 2010.

¹³ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 20.

through artistic representation which contains and regulates the body.¹⁴

Nevertheless, an analysis of embodied experience of female life models and the interaction between artists and models demonstrates that an art tradition influenced by male-dominated ideologies does not necessarily lead to the oppression of female life models during work. Modern life drawing has proliferated in a variety of settings which indicate an active desire on behalf of both artists and models to explore sexuality, desire, fantasy, as well as subjection, pain and suffering.¹⁵ Historical development of life drawing in recent decades and artist-model interactions in the studios show that the subjectivities of female models cannot be adequately explained by the objectified female nudes in paintings criticized by feminist art critics.

The aim of the thesis is to analyze how female life models perceive and create the meaning of life modeling and how their personal background influences the process. The thesis also discusses how the models attempt to infuse their bodily stylizations and artistic impulses during work. This leads to a critical enquiry of to what extent life models can be creative agents of art creation when the artist is traditionally seen as the sole creator of life drawing. The rise of the status of women in recent decades has resulted in higher acceptance of female models by both artists and the society in both Hong Kong and Western countries. The artist-model relationship became more equalitarian than the 18th and 19th centuries. Reduced stigma regarding life modeling attracted women who were curious about life modeling and/or eager to earn some money. There was also an increasing tendency for cultural workers and people who were aesthetically inclined, including students studying culture and theatre related subjects, art lovers, etc., to take part in life modeling as a way to satisfy their aesthetic impulses while working. This will be further explained in Chapter 4 and 5.

¹⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁵ Margaret Mayhew, "Modelling Subjectivities, Life Drawing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Art Education," (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2007), 197.

Drawing of the female nude in Hong Kong started in the 1930s. Life modeling was a highly stigmatized, exploitative and underground job, with a very low salary, poor working conditions and low social status. Some early models recalled their humiliating experience during work. ‘At last, I only got a reward of two dollars, I did not know that this is more inferior and insulting than prostitution!’ This made Lee Sai Chong, a person studying early Hong Kong art, concluded that models probably only worked for money due to the harsh treatment of models by artists.¹⁶ Although the victimization discourse is still popular in local mainstream media,¹⁷ reports in the Western media and the unprecedented study of life models in the US by Sarah R. Philips show that life modeling in recent decades has led to models reporting positive meanings. Philips found that female models reported being more powerful and seeing themselves as attractive through modeling. They also considered the experience of being looked at in the studio as empowering.¹⁸ Most models in my interviews expressed similar feelings (See Appendix 1). Why has the experience of life models changed so dramatically over the past 20 years? How does this reflect the inadequacy of theories of the male gaze and objectification of women’s bodies in shaping women’s experience of their bodies being looked at? How do the environment of the studio and the attitude of artists change models’ perception of life modeling?

Despite the fact that female models feel more comfortable with their bodies through realizing the broader aesthetics of the female body, they engage in intense discipline of their bodies to manage their sexuality, maintain modesty and stay still. The process desexualizes and objectifies the models. Margaret Mayhew found that

¹⁶ Lee Sai Chong, “Painting in Western Media in Early Twentieth century Hong Kong,” (MPhil diss., Hong Kong University, 1997), 130.

¹⁷ “Earning 200 An Hour to Feed the Family – Selling Nudes Cheap,” *Sun Daily*, July 26, 2002.

¹⁸ Sarah R. Philips, *Modeling Life: Art Models Speak About Nudity, Sexuality, and the Creative Process*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 83-85.

life models articulated the movements between the status of subject and object.¹⁹ For example, their silence during modeling and their tolerance of discomfort or pain show that they seem to be voluntarily objectifying themselves. However, they may emphasize on their importance in life drawing and assert themselves to be creative agents through striking unusual poses. To explain this complex phenomenon, it will be useful to explore how models identify with the dominant mode of seeing in life drawing, objective seeing, while realizing its ambiguity at the same time. This allows models to play the role of both subject and object.

The Euston Road approach, as an influential mode of life drawing, emphasizes the life room as a controlled site for the training of the eye with an emphasis on seeing as an objective process, and drawing as an objective record of what the eye saw.²⁰ Objective seeing requires that the artist in the studio detach not only from his or her own 'subjectivity' but from any connection or identification with the objects in the space in front of them.²¹ In this mode of seeing, models are not bodies of real women, but are inevitably reduced to forms, planes and masses and marked only in terms of mass, density and complexity of planes.²² Mayhew argues that models who identify with the artist and the legitimacy of objective seeing in life modeling could better endure the discomfort of posing as well as their objectification.²³ As artists are encouraged to detach from any identification with the model, it is sensible that they 'forget' models as sexual, gendered and feeling subjects while they are drawing. When the model's body is desexualized and objectified through objective seeing, even conventionally sexualized body parts like breasts and genitals become merely shapes and lines, and such desexualization reduces the embarrassment of models

¹⁹ Margaret Mayhew, "Modelling Subjectivities, Life Drawing, Popular Culture and Contemporary Art Education," (PhD diss., University of Sydney, 2007), 197.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

²¹ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 182.

²² Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 182.

²³ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 197.

when they are naked in public. As objectivity requires that the model be reduced to the status of an object, models who identify with the project of objective drawing justify their desexualization and objectification as such status leads to models' comfort with nudity and allows artists to record their bodies more conveniently. They prioritize the drawing tasks of the artists so that their pain will not 'disrupt' the creative process of the artists, e.g. they won't ask for too many breaks.²⁴

Objective seeing is the assumed way of seeing in studios doing observational drawing in Hong Kong, especially among artists drawing along pose, whose task is to draw the nude 'accurately' through meticulous and detached observation. Notwithstanding, it is being challenged by scholars, artists and models and is never perfectly practiced in the studio. Nicolaides' book, *The Natural Way to Draw*, endorses a humanist and empathic approach to drawing as a form of feeling and connection as a critique to rigid objective seeing, and it has considerable influence among many artists and teachers internationally. It promotes a form of observational drawing where perception is intimately tied in with the experience of the artist's own body and feelings.²⁵ Such influence can be seen in the interviews of some artists who claim that the emotions and energy of the models during posing contribute considerably to drawing, especially among artists drawing short pose. Besides, some artists and models realize that objective seeing cannot be achieved totally as nude bodies of human bodies undeniably trigger feelings in the viewers and may foster creation. Artists in my interviews reported how the bodies and posing of models stimulated their feelings and creation. Their embodied response like excited facial expressions and praise makes models understand that seeing is also affective and embodied. It can be argued that objective seeing and affective seeing often occur

²⁴ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 197.

²⁵ Kimon Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw: a Working Plan for Art Study*, (Boston : Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969)

simultaneously with more emphasis on affective seeing among artists drawing short pose, and more emphasis on objective seeing among artists drawing long pose. The coexistence of two contradictory ways of seeing leads to the shifting of models shifting between seeing themselves as objects and subjects. Knowing objective seeing in the studio is not as rigid as it seems, models may test out the attitude of artists towards sexuality and modesty through differentiating their bodily discipline in different studios. However, affective seeing cannot be too exaggerated or too sexual as it undermines the legitimacy of nudity in the studio. This leads to the oscillation between rigid management of sexuality and the loosening of it among models. Life drawing in modern times is a complex and even conflicting field of encounters and attitudes towards drawing and seeing, which leads to both subject and object status of the model.

Finally, an emphasis on life modeling as a performance which models and artists engage interactively refutes the simplified notion of life modeling being seen by artists in the studio as a passive process. Models often experience life modeling as ‘what I choose to give artists in a particular situation,’. When artists accept a wider range of poses and respect models, models are more willing to devote themselves to modeling by doing more interesting poses and talking to artists. However, when artists hold rigid gender stereotyping regarding poses and/or treat models as unthinking dummies, models emphasize on monetary gain more than artistic exchange between artists and models.

This thesis focuses only on life models posing for drawings and paintings (and occasionally for sculptures), as other types of media like photography deal with different problems, and very few nude models work for photographers in Hong Kong. It only studies female life models in Hong Kong. The higher proportion of creative workers and aesthetically inclined people in the interviews represents the demography

of life models in Hong Kong. Women are more influenced by hegemonic beauty ideals in the mainstream society and are constantly under the pressure to beautify themselves to fulfill the norm. By focusing on female models, the thesis attempts to explore how successful life modeling is in helping models criticize such norms and empower themselves. If life modeling has considerable success in achieving a better body image and self reflection regarding how they are being looked at among female life models, it serves as a powerful tool to critically review the influential theories by feminist critics, who propose that women's bodies are easily objectified by the male gaze when they are seen, women internalize the normalizing gaze. The history of the female nude in Western art and the life drawing class as largely a mechanism of how the male gaze penetrates the female body and decides how women's bodies are represented. By exploring the subjectivities of female models, the thesis attempts to criticize the popular victimization discourse of women in Hong Kong who earn money through displaying their naked bodies. To avoid romanticizing female models, the thesis also explores the potential exploitation of female models due to marginalization of life models in the art creation process, the disrespectful and objectifying attitude of a few artists towards models and the female body, and self exploitation among devoted models.

The thesis also explores the recent phenomenon that life modeling has become popular among creative workers and the aesthetically inclined people.²⁶ Although they do not constitute all life models in Hong Kong, such tendency is worthy of discussion. Many models in Hong Kong and Western countries are creative workers like art teachers, freelance designers and performance artists, or aesthetically inclined people who support their devotion to art and culture by doing a more mundane part time or full time job. They are generally more devoted to modeling than average

²⁶ Ibid.

models. They also report fairly positive feelings, which included a better body image, higher comfort with nudity, getting to know creative people and artistic self-expression.²⁷ Such phenomenon is similar to the findings in my interviews.

While most models claim to have better body image and higher comfort with nudity, creative workers and aesthetically people have a stronger tendency to relate artistic expression to modeling. Why has life modeling in recent decades attracted creative workers and aesthetically inclined people in Hong Kong? How and why does life modeling become a work which helps models strive towards self-actualization and self-expression?

The effort of devoted models to achieve self-actualization and self-expression is often followed by their disappointment with artists, who are often reluctant to engage with naked bodies critically and/or unwilling to identify with models' belief that they are also creative coworkers in works of art. Despite their discontent, most models are ambivalent to articulate their feelings to artists. Reasons include models' difficulty to reconcile the prescribed role of female life models as passive, obedient employees and their view of models as creative agents. The dynamics in the studio reveal that models are usually encouraged to conform to the unequal power relationships and/or conservative view regarding nudity and drawing in the studio. This helps them get further jobs, and feel comfortable with their bodies and performance. The marginalization of life models in art history and the vulnerability of models' nudity in public render them relatively powerless to generate a radical change in the artist-model relationship. As a result, models who are critical of the above

²⁷ Laura Barnett, "Life Modeling: and now for the nudes," *Guardian*, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2009/apr/07/life-model-artists-studio>; Richard Johnson, "The art of sitting still," *Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/art/3670957/The-art-of-sitting-still.html>; Kate Thompson, "Art club models 'get to live art,'" *The Lantern*, <http://www.thelantern.com/campus/art-club-models-get-to-live-art-1.1125980>, all accessed on 10th June, 2010.

phenomenon adopt various strategies to express their opinion on life modeling. They may write or talk about their experience openly (for example, on the radio or in newspapers), discuss their viewpoints with fellow models and considerate significant others, generate discussion with like-minded artists, and experiment novel forms of modeling. (to be elaborated in Chapter 5) Some may adopt a reflexive attitude by fulfilling the request of ‘ordinary’ artists while enjoying creative expression facing more open-minded artists.

However, most artists in Hong Kong are resistant to changes and reflections proposed by models and the above strategies are unable to bring out a general change in the climate of studios. In most cases, artists do not even know about models’ thoughts as they do not express their viewpoints frankly to artists. Even if they know about them, they usually prioritize drawing and do not consider the way studios work as problematic. As many artists simply position themselves as employers of models, they believe that giving enough pay, showing respect for the hard labor of models and being polite are ethical enough. Models who have a great passion for life modeling and are critical of the current artist-model relationship choose to lower their expectation of certain artists in order to enjoy the valuable parts of modeling. For those who cannot solve the dilemma of fulfilling their strong desire of self expression and working with ‘uncritical’ artists may choose to quit life modeling, as in the case of Kitty.

Brief history of life modeling

The use of life models in art has a long tradition. There were scattered accounts of artwork which used models in ancient times.²⁸ Before the Renaissance, the body was

²⁸ Sarah R. Philips, *Modeling Life: Art Models Speak About Nudity, Sexuality, and the Creative Process*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 4.

considered as sacred in Europe and could not be dissected for the purpose of studying its anatomy. Life models were used as a way to study human anatomy accurately. It was not until Renaissance when formal employment of life models started. The dominant aesthetic of the time was generalization and idealization.²⁹ 18th century academies tended to depict a generalized ideal.³⁰ In the 19th century, drawings of nude models emphasized the particularities and idiosyncrasies of the life model.³¹ When state-supported art academies in Italy decided to offer training which included living models in the coursework, the use of life models in art training developed. Yet, the presence of nudes remained scandalous in many schools.³² Although drawing from the nude became an essential part of art training in Europe, the sex of models was largely limited to males from the Renaissance and until the Victoria Era.³³ The first professional models were men because the European academic system considered drawing from the male body as the intellectual foundation of high art. Soldiers or pugilists were usually employed as they had fine physiques and muscular bodies, and they modeled in attitudes adopted from classical prototypes.³⁴ The French academy had banned female models from its studios during the 18th century, and until around 1830 male body was the ideal that artists were expected to represent. Naked female life models were banned in the public.³⁵ During this time, female models probably worked in private studios. Artists used female models during that period but the practice was not institutionalized. It was not until 1830 that the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Susan Waller, *The Invention of the Model: Artists and Models in Paris, 1830-1870*, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2006), 5.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Sarah R. Philips, *Modeling Life: Art Models Speak About Nudity, Sexuality, and the Creative Process*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 5.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Alison Smith, "The Academy and Professional Modeling in 19th century Britain," in *Dictionary of artists' models*, ed. Jill Berk Jiminez and Joanna Banham, (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 26.

³⁵ Lam Shue Hong ed., *Visual Arts Anthology: Visual Arts and Creative Era in Hong Kong*, (視藝文集：香港視覺藝術和創意年代), (Mguru: Hong Kong, 2008), 32.

modeling profession became systematized and women models became the norm.³⁶

The rise of female models can be attributed to reformers and changes in the perception of beauty as a passive, feminine ideal.³⁷

State-funded academies only admitted female models in the latter half of the 19th century, and female artists were admitted later.³⁸ Despite the legitimization of employing life models, they were considered as of a lower class and a questionable personality.³⁹ Women models were considered as the equivalent of prostitutes. Due to their low social status and low pay, many early models were actually prostitutes or from drawn other marginalized groups.⁴⁰

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the bohemian community in Montparnasse prospered as the artistic centre of Europe. Many people went there to become models. The bohemian image gave people an impression that the artist was a heterosexual, sexually aggressive male artist and the model was a submissive mistress.⁴¹ This showed that life modeling was imagined as a job with a strong erotic nature. Life models were often romanticized and eroticized in literature in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁴² From the 18th to the 20th century, the life drawing class occupied a central place in the academic training of artists.⁴³ The importance of the nude was also bolstered by the popularity of the nude in the art market in the 18th and 19th centuries⁴⁴ Yet, the importance of the female nude in paintings, which was once the principal icon of Western art and a symbol for art itself, decreased by the 1980s. A

³⁶ Marie Lathers, *Bodies of Art: French Literary Realism and the Artist's model*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 4.

³⁷ Alison Smith, "The Academy and Professional Modeling 19th- century Britain," in *Dictionary of artists' models*, ed. Jill Berk Jiminez and Joanna Banham, (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 26.

³⁹ Sarah R. Philips, *Modeling Life: Art Models Speak About Nudity, Sexuality, and the Creative Process*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 2006), 5.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁰ Philips, *Modeling*, 6.

⁴¹ Philips, *Modeling*, 7.

⁴² Philips, *Modeling*, 3.

⁴³ Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, *Modern Art: a Critical Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 86.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

rejection of figurative art in much of contemporary painting, loosening of a rigid male artist-female model relationship and the rise of photography and other forms of media in art has led to the waning of the importance of the professional female model in the painting world.⁴⁵ Yet, life-drawing classes still survive to this day. Life drawing is still the preferred media for a few artists and students. It is considered as a fundamental, but not always essential training for art students.

Life modeling in Hong Kong

Models

There are not many official and academic accounts of life modeling in Hong Kong, yet records of life modeling are scattered in the mass media, usually without too much deep discussion. However, it is still possible to get a very general idea about the modeling scene in Hong Kong. Life models in the early 20th century were treated poorly when compared with life models in recent decades. During that period, superstition and the pressure of social ethics were the major reasons for the scarcity of life models.⁴⁶ There was a belief that one's soul would be captured if one modeled in a painting or a photograph. The monthly income of a life model was lower than that of a female factory worker in the late 1930s. Early life models were sometimes educated women and housewives but most of them were sex workers.⁴⁷ Women needed to be examined in nude by the employer to see if they complied with the beauty of the woman's body in Western art. During that period, 'virginal beauty' was of utmost importance. Models must be virgins and must not have given birth. Her breasts should be vigorous and buttocks rounded. If she had scars and wrinkles on her

⁴⁵ Marie Lathers, *Bodies of Art: French Literary Realism and the Artist's model*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 19.

⁴⁶ Lee Sai Chong, "Painting in Western Media in Early Twentieth century Hong Kong" (MPhil diss., Hong Kong University, 1997), 134-5.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

body, she would not be able to be a model.⁴⁸ In the 1930s, models were also found in a nudist society.⁴⁹ For all these reasons, Li Sai Chong commented that ‘most models might not be interested in their jobs’ and were willing to work naked ‘only because they had to make a living.’⁵⁰

Yet, these days models are granted much more respect. Theoretically, anybody can be a model, regardless of gender, age, physique, nationality and (dis)ability. According to the Body Art Association, registration of life models of Hong Kong rose from 10 in 1995 to 180 in 2002. From the most recent information I researched from Simon in 2009, about 30 to 40 models are active (with jobs once a month or more). Most are female, in their 20s or 30s with tertiary education. Yet, it is important to note that some models work independently and have no relations with the Association, but the number of them is unknown. In the past, foreign (usually Western, white) models dominated the scene but the number local models increased quickly.⁵¹ Artists told me that it was difficult to find local models fifteen years ago. Advertisements recruiting foreign models were often posted in Chung King Mansion, a place where many backpackers stayed. Local nude models do not form unions. Artists and models generally introduce themselves to each other to be introduced to models and jobs respectively. In recent years, social acceptance of life drawing in Hong Kong has increased and life drawing courses are becoming more popular.⁵² Yet, this should be seen as a result of more people taking up life drawing as a hobby or fundamental training of art rather than reflecting an art trend. In the mainstream art scene, the female nude is not a popular subject matter. It is more popular among Realist artists.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Chong, *Painting*, 142.

⁵⁰ Chong, *Painting*, 130.

⁵¹ “Earning 200 An Hour to Feed the Family – Selling Nudes Cheap,” *Sun Daily*, July 26, 2002.

⁵² Ibid.

Local mass media often looks at modeling work with voyeuristic interest, concluding with the cliché, ‘sacrificing (the body) for art/money.’⁵³ Models are usually female due to the preference of artists, which is the same case elsewhere like the US.⁵⁴ Although more men contact Simon for modeling work than women, it is mostly women who are needed. Models work for 2-3 hours each time, with a five minute break every 20-30 minutes. They get around 180-300 HKD for an hour, depending on the institutes or studios. Anyone interested in being a model can contact Simon, who helps them connect with artists for free, or seek referral from an artist or model friend. As creative workers and aesthetically inclined people are more likely to know artists, they have a greater chance to find life modeling work. An accurate demography of models is difficult to ascertain, as they are relatively discreet and do not form unions. However, most of them are aged between 18 and 40. As there are no full time life models in Hong Kong, most of them have their own full time jobs. Among them, only a minority stays active as life modeling is tiring and not very lucrative. Also, many people do modeling out of curiosity and are not interested in devoting time and energy to it.

It is not easy to obtain statistical information about life modeling. There is still stigma attached to modeling. Artists generally do not ask models too much personal information unless they tell the artists. Models usually do not talk about their full time jobs in the studio openly. Yet, many models are tertiary students and/or have a background of theatre, dance or art training. They are more open to nude modeling and are more flexible to work during school hours. Models usually work in private studios and art and design academies.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Philips, *Modeling*, 77.

Artists

Although the thesis discusses female models, it is necessary to provide a background on the artists doing life drawing as models often adjust their performance according to different artists. Hong Kong artists doing life drawing (LD artists) are affected by both Chinese and Western developments of life drawing, leading to a myriad of attitudes towards the objective of life modeling and their expectation of life models. I define LD artists as people doing life drawing generally, which include 'professional' artists, amateur artists and art students. The line between the first two nowadays is not very clear. Few artists can make a living by being a full time artist in Hong Kong, but they can be very devoted to art. Some 'professional' artists nowadays may not be good at traditional drawing and painting skills. Hence, the level of traditional drawing skills is not a good indicator of his/her artist status. There is a great difficulty to contextualize artists doing life drawings in Hong Kong as there are very few studies about them. In fact, a rigid and serious study about Hong Kong art history is almost nonexistent. Historical accounts of art history are always fragmented and much effort is needed to create a more comprehensive study.⁵⁵

While life drawing was as an elitist and transgressive bohemian practice in the 19th century, it popularized in the 20th century as a form of popular art education in the West.⁵⁶ Life drawing classes proliferated enormously in postwar consumer societies as a recreational pursuit, outside of art schools in the western countries.⁵⁷ Hong Kong underwent a similar development in recent decades. Most local artists in private studios draw long pose while studios run by Westerners and art academies draw short pose more often. The popularity of long pose in private studios originates from the

⁵⁵ Li Shi Zhuan, History on Hong Kong Art History, in Lai Kin Keung ed., *Romantic Colors – On Hong Kong Visual Art* (形彩風流 – 香港視覺文化史話), (Joint Publishing: Hong Kong, 2002), 68.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 25.

⁵⁷ Margaret Mayhew, "The Naked And The Blind; Exploring the Badness of Life Drawing," *TRACY*, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/wigd/mayhew.html>, accessed on 28 June 2010.

influence of Mainland artists. While some artists trained in Hong Kong are good at figure drawing, some are good at it because of their background in art academies in Mainland China, which emphasize much more on traditional Realist drawing techniques, which use long pose to study the nude in detail. From the 20s to 50s, many Chinese artists escaped to Hong Kong because of wars. They taught art and drew at the same time.⁵⁸ After 1984, many Chinese artists migrated to Hong Kong, opening private studios, offering classes on Realist painting and teaching in tertiary institutions and universities. As art academies in China are strongly influenced by Socialist realism, a large number of them have a solid training of Realist painting. Because of the well-established art training of realism and the lower cost of living in China, some Hong Kong artists who are interested in Realist figurative art also study in art academies of China, like Guangzhou Art Institute for weeks, months or even years, to improve their skills. This is one of the reasons for the popularity of Realistic figurative art and long pose in private studios. Although some of the more professional artists teach in universities, realism does not have a strong influence on the trend of art academies because of their strong British background.

Artists drawing long pose (LP artists) in the early 20th century

Western painting has prospered since the 20s and the 30s, but landscape art was more popular than figure drawing. Many artists could not draw life models easily due to the lack of space in the art studio and focused on landscape art instead. Landscape drawing requires fewer resources and can be done alone easily, as many artists cannot afford to employ a model alone. As rent is very expensive in Hong Kong, the crowded space in the art studio renders life drawing difficult for a larger number of

⁵⁸ Ibid.

artists.⁵⁹ As there were no well organized art schools in Hong Kong in the first decade of the 20th century, the utilization of nude models, if at all, was limited to private studios.⁶⁰ In the early 20th century, the absence of life models was a hindrance to the popularity of the nude as a subject. As the concept of the nude in Western painting has a strong thematic relation with Greek mythology and Christianity, Chinese artists in Hong Kong tended to ‘secularize’ the female figure by not putting any classical narratives in the painting.⁶¹ The study of the female nude stands out independently as a new subject in most Chinese artists’ works. By the late 1950s, nude painting was rarely found in Hong Kong art, since early artists doing nude painting either migrated to other countries or changed their topics. Other artists were more interested in outdoor landscape painting.⁶²

Artists drawing long pose nowadays

The practices of artists drawing long pose nowadays are similar to the mode of life drawing in the 1930s, which affiliated with life drawing in the European art academy of the 19th century. It was based on a highly contrived set of stylistic conventions which included the selection of models, the acceptable types of poses, and the execution of the drawing.⁶³ Artists drawing long pose generally internalize such artistic conventions.⁶⁴ Controlled mark making requires observational drawing and a longer pose duration, while copying from classical images often leads to gender stereotypes and limitation of poses. Basically, the form of life drawing in European Art Academy was largely eliminated in art academies in the West and in Hong Kong

⁵⁹ Kwok Hei Luen, “Life Drawing,” in Lai Kin Keung ed., *Romantic Colors – On Hong Kong Visual Art* (形彩風流 – 香港視覺文化史話), (Joint Publishing: Hong Kong, 2002), 28.

⁶⁰ Chong, *Painting*, 133.

⁶¹ Chong, *Painting*, 145.

⁶² Chong, *Painting*, 152.

⁶³ Mayhew, *Naked*.

⁶⁴ Mayhew, *Naked*.

after the Second World War, but similar forms persist in amateur studios in Hong Kong. The importance of life drawing in art schools has diminished since the 1960s in Western countries but becomes a mainstay of amateur art societies and community art centres.⁶⁵ Hong Kong shows a similar trend and LP artists are largely composed of members of amateur art societies.

Traditional academic study of the reclining, sleeping, standing pose of the female nude and the bather was popular during early 20th century in Hong Kong.⁶⁶ It is still common in local amateur studios nowadays. In drawing long pose, getting a right proportion, volume and texture of the body and depicting lights and shades produced by the body are the basic requirements. To achieve a higher level, the artist needs to depict the liveliness and verve of the nude. Because of the detailed study, long pose is usually used for these artists. It is composed of several 20 to 30 minute modeling sections over two to three hours. The drawing may last for a day, a month or even longer.

They are more likely to adopt classical aesthetics of feminine beauty than SP artists, e.g. models who have bodies nearer to the classical ideal and do classical and feminine graceful poses. The model is usually asked to do the most traditional and easy-to-keep poses to let artists draw from different angles.⁶⁷ In general, they do not expect models to be creative about poses. The most important thing for models is to keep a 'good looking' pose well by classical standard for twenty to thirty minutes. Although artists like reclining, standing and sitting poses, sitting or standing 'too properly' without twisting body parts is considered as too plain. The arms, hand, torso and thighs have to twist and move to create different silhouettes or geometrical

⁶⁵ Mayhew, *Naked*.

⁶⁶ Chong, *Painting*, 140.

⁶⁷ Kwok Hei Luen, "The life drawing of three artists," in Lai Kin Keung ed., *Romantic Colors – On Hong Kong Visual Art* (形彩風流 – 香港視覺文化史話), (Joint Publishing: Hong Kong, 2002), 34.

shapes, leading to the 'complexity' of the pose. However, some poses may be considered as inappropriate for drawing, for example, a 'superman gesture' or a victory gesture is too comical and not artistic enough. A female model who pretends to do kungfu fighting may look too unfeminine for artists who are strongly influenced by standards of beauty in European art academy.

Although Realism as an artistic movement in the 1850s involved the rejection of the classical ideal of the body, the strict selection of female models in the early 20th century according to classical aesthetics showed that artists at that time preferred the idealized body rather than the 'real' body.⁶⁸ For Mayhew, the selection of models, the tendency of idealization and generalization of the female body and the range of acceptable poses in academic drawing show that the history of life drawing classes has been explicitly concerned with training students to generate a figurative representation based on what they knew, rather than what they saw. She even argues that the presence of the model functioned less as source of visual information, than as a theatrical device to contain and control the pedagogical theatre of the art academy.⁶⁹ This attitude is an immense contrast with the view of passionate models, who consider that their physical existence and bodily performance as 'irreplaceable' and genuinely contributing to the life class.

Artists in recent decades have loosened their notion of the ideal female body and adopted Classical aesthetics of the female body to different extents, depending on personal tastes and training rather than their age. Tsang Kai Hon (曾繼康) was one of the most famous local artists to specialize in Realist figure drawing. Shek Lam Art Court (石林畫苑), opened by Tsang, was one of the oldest private studios in Hong Kong. Like many local Realist artists coming from China, some teachers of the studio

⁶⁸ Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: the Visceral Eye*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 201.

⁶⁹ Mayhew, *Naked*.

were trained in Guangzhou Art Institute, which was influenced by Russian socialist realism. Very few cutting edge local artists are using the female nude as their subject matter. Even for a few young artists who draw the nude like Shek Ka Ho (石家豪), his innovative approach to explore gender boundaries through drawing the nude is very different from the approach of most LP artists.

Artists doing short pose (SP artists)

While long pose has largely been abandoned in local art academies, short pose is still practiced occasionally. Outside of China, South Africa and the Soviet Bloc, post-war life drawing classes internationally all reduced long pose and devoted increasing amounts of time to the croquis or short drawings based on unresolved, rapid gestural scribbles.⁷⁰ Short pose is also called croquis or fast, loose sketch, based on either a moving or rapidly changing model. It was one of the experimental approaches practiced in French free ateliers in the late 19th century.⁷¹ Short pose emphasizes the practice of memory and capturing different gestures in a short period of time more than accuracy. It often starts from slow movements of a model's body, to 1 minute, 5 minute and longer poses. The longest pose is usually 20 to 25 minutes at the end of the drawing section.

It takes a long period of training to grasp the right proportion, light and shade of the nude in long pose. As Realist drawing and painting techniques are becoming less important in current art training, art academies nowadays generally do not spend a lot of time on long pose training. While long pose emphasizes on objective seeing, short pose endorses a more affective form of seeing by focusing on the energy flow between artists and models. Nicolaidis develops it into a specific form of empathic

⁷⁰ Mayhew, *Naked*.

⁷¹ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 102.

seeing of 'the gesture' of the pose, its movement, direction and energy. He insists that 'to be able to see the gesture, you must be able to feel it in you own body,' encouraging an empathic connection with objects as well as human subjects.⁷²

Putting the bodies and feelings of artists in life drawing, short pose artists are more likely to connect themselves emotionally with the status of the model. An artist commented that as long pose was too exhausting, the model gradually lost feelings during posing. 'If you just capture the outside look of the model, she becomes like an object, very boring.' The model is less seen as an object than an organic feeling and moving being. They expect a greater variety of poses for a comprehensive practice. The model's ability to do a wide range of poses within a relatively short period of time is highly appreciated. This has led to higher interaction between artists and models which will be elaborated on in Chapter 5. Creative and lively images are more likely to be made through quick strokes and higher energy transfer between models and artists.

Movements of a body create a lot of challenges for artists, and it serves as a fundamental training to sharpen their skills during their artistic creation, which may have nothing to do with the nude. The loosening of the academic convention leads to a wider range of body shapes among SP artists.

Short pose is usually practiced in art academies and studios of Jockey Club Creative Arts Centre (JCCAC), Wanchai, Central and Sheung Wan, who attract a higher proportion of Western artists.

Demography

Nowadays, there are around 20 to 30 private studios in Hong Kong which offer weekly or regular life modeling sections, each with around 5 to 20 members, ranging from newcomers to experienced artists. Women artists compose slightly less than half

⁷² Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 201-202.

of the artists. Artists are mostly middle-class. Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong Baptist University, Chinese University of Hong Kong, DesignFirst, Hong Kong Institution of Vocational Education (IVE) and a few international secondary schools are the major academies organizing life drawing classes. However, art academies and many private studios treat life drawing as a fundamental training rather than a subject of art. According to Professor Chan Yuk Keung, some local secondary schools also offer life drawing as figure drawing is one of the papers in the open exam. The number of schools offering such courses is unknown, as such practice attracts unwanted attention in a society extremely conservative towards nudity.⁷³

The importance of cross-media and new media art has increased in Hong Kong since the 90s. Mixed media, photography, installation art, video and digital art received unprecedented attentions. The importance of painting, and figurative art in general, decreases. Such trend is similar with the popular art forms in the international art scene.⁷⁴ Life drawing is not a prominent form of expression in the art circles in Hong Kong, but some experienced artists, usually with a strong Realist training, are interested in expressing the human form through figurative art. Many aspiring young artists prefer media forms other than painting. According to Professor Chan Yuk Keung, art academies are different from private studios in Hong Kong, as the former is more interested in novel art forms like conceptual art and media art, while the latter focuses on fundamental art training and/or figurative art. Private studios organize life drawing sessions more often than academies. Members of studios are either people receiving fundamental art training or artists who are interested in figurative art and the human form. Art academies in Hong Kong, e.g.

⁷³ "Female nude Modeling makes DBS boys embarrassed," A16, *Oriental Daily*, March 29, 2009.

⁷⁴ Lam Shue Hong, ed., *Visual Arts Anthology: Visual Arts and Creative Era in Hong Kong*, (視藝文集：香港視覺藝術和創意年代), (Mgugu: Hong Kong, 2008), 34.

Chinese University of Hong Kong, offer life drawing classes but may not consider this as an essential training.

Methods

Interviews

While some books on artists' models appeared in recent years, they are rarely written from the perspectives of the models. The low social status and education level of female models in the 18th and 19th century made them difficult to write about their experience of being models. Therefore, interviewing female models is an attempt to expose and readdress the invisibility of female models as an important component of art creation and art training. 'Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words, rather than in the words of the researcher. This asset is particularly important in the study of women because this way of learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women.'⁷⁵ Their detailed discussion on interactions and dynamics in the studios and how they work with artists enriches how art training and production of the female nude is actually practiced. It supplements formal art history which deals with the nude by describing, endorsing and analyzing the artworks but ignores their context of production.

I interview ten Hong Kong female life models aged between 18 and 60. Most are in their 20s and 30s, but one is in her early 40s and one is in her late 50s. They are all Chinese with different body figures. As there are probably no full time life models in Hong Kong, the subjects are all part-time. Models with more experience (above 1 year) are chosen, as they may have encountered more studios and artists. Also, I also investigate how continuous modeling work changes their attitudes towards modeling,

⁷⁵ Shulamit Reinharz, *Feminist Methods in Social Research*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

bodies, nudity, etc. Semi-structured questions are asked. They are divided into five parts. First, they talk about how they get into modeling and their experience in various studios. Second, I ask how they prepare and pose for the work. Third, I ask about how they feel about their bodies, and if modeling work changes their way they see their bodies. Fourth, they discuss their relationship with artists. Fifth, they share with me how they choose to disclose their work, and how people respond. My experience in life modeling helped me contact some of them, as some models contact each other in case they are not able to work as they have promised to. Also, there are two artists who volunteer to find models for different studios. I ask them to contact models who are willing to be interviewed. I mention that a wider range of models are needed (age, class, physique, personality, etc) to understand the diverse experience of models. For privacy reasons, I provide them pseudonyms in the thesis.

After individual interviews, a group discussion is held as some of the models are interested in deepening the discussion on life modeling. Mandy, Sandy and Yan take part in the discussion. The elements of group dynamics and of discussion among the participants are highlighted when group discussions are conducted.⁷⁶ Yan shows her documentary on her body and some online video clips to start a discussion of body image. As Yan and Sandy get to know modeling through Simon, they also exchange fruitful information and comments about the Body Arts Association. We also discuss ways to improve the treatment and status of models.

To make the research more comprehensive, I also talk to six artists drawing long pose and short pose and asked about how they perceive feminine beauty, aesthetics of female nude in art, their relationship with models and their artistic process. I also talk informally with a wider range of models and artists. The six artists do not generalize how artists in Hong Kong think about life drawing, but they provide an insight into

⁷⁶ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, (California: SAGE, 2006), 191.

how they think about the beauty of nudes, models and procedures of work, making the study more comprehensive. As formal history of modeling is not available in Hong Kong, this provides critical information to enhance my knowledge about life modeling in Hong Kong.

I also talk to Simon, model and the chairperson of the Body Arts Association about life models in Hong Kong. As he has been recruiting models for many years and organizes weekly life drawing sections, he knows a great variety and number of models. The interviews provide a more thorough picture about the demography of art models in Hong Kong. Due to the limited resources on life modeling in Hong Kong, I also talk with Professor Kurt Chan Yuk Keung, who is a specialist in Hong Kong art history.

As social stigma is still attached to life modeling and issues regarding public nudity are sensitive, life models may not feel comfortable to talk about their experience when they meet the researcher for the first time. Some scholars suggest that interviewer's self-disclosure concerning the topics in the interview may encourage respondent to be more forthcoming.⁷⁷ Before interviews, I told models that I had been a life model for a few years and this was why I was interested in doing a research on life modeling. However, I had to think carefully about whether, when and how much disclosure makes sense with specific participants to indicate openness to the other's experience and sharing of power within the interview relationship.⁷⁸ For example, if keep telling how a model who is not interested in art that I enjoy artistic expression during work, then it may give her pressure to adopt a particular point of view on life modeling.

⁷⁷ Shulamit Reinharz and Susan E. Chase, "Interviewing Women," in *Handbook of Interview Research: Contexts and Methods*, eds. F. Gubrium and James A. Holstein, (Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2002), 227.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 228.

When the researcher already knows participants, interviews sometimes do develop connections with and responsibilities toward participants that extend beyond the research itself.⁷⁹ This may lead to a ‘sisterly bond’ between the interviewer and the participant, but it may also bring tension between them on the expectation of the relationships. For example, I knew Mandy a few years ago. She expected the Modeling Shows (to be discussed more elaborately in chapter ?) to be held continually among her model friends and not just a few times. However, other models and I did not have plans to devote time and effort to the Shows. This made Mandy slightly disappointed. Once, I forgot to attend the dancing performance of Rosemary which I promised to go. These incidents made me slightly guilty that I was not ‘responsible’ enough. Thinking back, it is better for me to express as clearly as possible to participants my expectation and boundaries of research relationship.

Mayhew suggested that critically examining life drawings could reflect certain attitudes about art and common cultural attitudes towards bodily difference and its representations.⁸⁰ Throughout my interviews, I also ask how models think about the drawings of themselves by artists. However, it is not easy to do a comprehensive study of drawings as not all models keep photographed copies of drawings and their descriptions of drawings are not clear enough for me to analyze them critically.

Observation

Observation of life modeling of the models interviewed is done after getting consent from models and artists. Through observation in modeling work, I can get a better understanding of the spatial settings of work, the verbal and non-verbal

⁷⁹ M. Shotak, “What the Wind Won’t Take Away: The Genesis of Nisa – The Life and Words of a !Kung Women,” in *Interpreting Women’s Lives: Feminist Theory and Personal Narratives*, eds. Personal Narratives Group, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 228-40.

⁸⁰ Margaret Mayhew, “The Naked And The Blind; Exploring the Badness of Life Drawing,” *TRACY*, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/ac/tracey/wigd/mayhew.html>, accessed on 28 June 2010

interaction of artists and models, the personality, gender and bodily performance of models, and how artists draw the models artistically. I asked permission of artists and models to get into different types of studios, including private studios and art schools. In this way, the research can obtain direct observations on the performance of models and artist-model relationship, which may not be easily articulated in interviews.

Scholars doubt that the act of observation influences the observed in any case and it is not possible to observe events as they naturally occur.⁸¹ However, I do acquire some important information on how models discipline their bodies and artist-model relationship. For example, some models kept a distance from artists while Mandy talked with students about their works and encouraged them in the City University. Some models stopped modeling or were out of Hong Kong when I was doing my research. When I made the request, I stated clearly that models were free to choose whether they wanted to take part in the observation or not. In the end, I observed four models working. I began with field observation only, but then artists encouraged me to draw. As a result I also did a few sketches of models interviewed during observation.

Research limitation

The difficulty to interview a larger number of housewives and single mothers as life models is a limit of this research. According to Simon, there are a number of them working as life models but the proportion of less educated housewives and single mothers is difficult to ascertain. They generally work in a very discreet way as stigma attached to the job is still strong for them. This is why I cannot interview any of them except Mimi, a single mother in her thirties who sustained her living by Comprehensive Social Security Assistance and life modeling. Simon said that they

⁸¹ Uwe Flick, *An Introduction to Qualitative Research*, (California: SAGE, 2006), 219.

were more interested in getting money than artistic expression and the 'joy' of displaying their nude bodies. My interview with Mimi shows that the observation of Simon is generally accurate. The shame of getting naked in the studio still haunts her even she has worked as a model for several years, and she does not mention anything about artistic self-expression and job satisfaction. Perhaps because of this, she does not prefer life modeling to other low paid jobs she has worked before and does not attach any specific aesthetic values or love to the job. A study of the employment pattern of Hong Kong married women shows that they are more likely to select an employment status that is more flexible and requires less work commitment.⁸² It is likely that she chooses to be a life model mainly because the employment pattern allows her to look after her daughter and perform household duties.

The difference of attitude between Mimi and other models towards being interviewed gives a hint about what they think about their job. Mimi showed reluctance to my invitation for an interview at first then accepted with ambivalence. She was afraid that the interview would be overheard by others as this was a kind of stigmatized job for her. Extra work is needed in interviewing people with stigmatized identities by arguing against the dominant narrative.⁸³ In my case, I need to show my acceptance of public nudity and life modeling, and draw on my awareness as a cultural insider to get her trust. However, most of the models who have received tertiary education accepted my invitation to be interviewed immediately and talked about life modeling as a sharing of their love of art work or their unusual life experience. According to the knowledge of artists, especially those who volunteer to

⁸² Hang Yue Ngo, "Employment status of married women in Hong Kong," *Sociological Perspectives*, 35(1992): 480.

⁸³ Jill Reynolds and Stephanie Taylor, "Narrating singleness, life stories and deficient identities," *Narrative Inquiry*, 15(2005): 201.

find models, models in their 20s or 30s who have received tertiary education compose the majority of female models in Hong Kong.

Feminist art critics and art historians have problematized notion of putting ‘instincts’ of the (male) artists in female nude as objectifying women and sustaining the patriarchal tradition in Western art.⁸⁴ A blatant example is Renoir who ridiculed himself that he drew with his penis.⁸⁵ I attempt to explore if male sexual power is used by artists when they drew the female nude through asking artists and models on questions related to sexuality. However, I find this question particularly difficult to research, if it can be researched at all. When the studio is highly regulated to avoid sexuality, talking about his sexual desire on a female model is a taboo for artists. Some honest artists shared their feelings of sexuality in the studio with me, but the information is not sufficient enough to explore deeply how sexuality of the artist works in the studio and affects the models.

Thesis structure

The thesis will be divided into five chapters to explore how the above insights shape the subjectivity of models during work and lead to their reflexivity of the job.

The first chapter is an introduction of the thesis, which explores why the subjectivity of female life models in Hong Kong deserves serious study. It also gives a brief discussion on life modeling throughout history and in Hong Kong and emphasizes life modeling as an intersubjective exchange between artists and models. It discusses the methods I used to study the models and ethical issues of the research.

The second chapter explores how female life models reflect on dominant standards of female beauty through their work. In what ways does life modeling give models an

⁸⁴ Tamar Garb, “Renoir and the Natural Woman”, in *Feminism and art history: questioning the litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard, (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 577.

⁸⁵ Jean Renoir, *Renoir: my father*, trans. Randolph and Dorothy Weaver, (London: Collins, 1962), 192.

effective tool to confront their powerlessness facing the prevalence of idealized female bodies in everyday life? How do models make use of the visual display of their bodies during work to resist hegemonic beauty standards? Although life modeling shares some common features with other kinds of work like fashion modeling and sex workers, it differs from them in many ways. It welcomes women with all kinds of body figures and a 'pretty face' is not important at all. The pay of life modeling is humble compared with that in fashion modeling, and it does not have the glamour of the latter which attracts a large number of women trying to get into the field, making it highly competitive. Women interested in life modeling do not need to be screened to see if they comply with dominant norms of beauty, as long as they are willing to get naked and pose in front of strangers. This provides an opportunity for women not conformed to dominant beauty standards to show off their bodies, to become the center of attention and the object of admiration.

It first examines two reasons that life drawing accepts a wider range of female bodies. First, the ideal body in art is more diversified than the classical form; second, drawing nudes from different types of bodies is a necessary training for artists. Drawing from different figures trains the artists' eyes and drawing skills. Models resist hegemonic beauty standards by proudly showing off their less-than-ideal bodies and bodily 'flaws.' Also, by linking nakedness with naturalness, they consciously avoid popular techniques of the body, like makeup and shaving, to endorse a 'naturally beautiful' aesthetic of the body.

The third chapter examines that widening ways of expressing the female body in life modeling does not mean that life models are 'free' to do what they like. Subtle and varied strategies are employed to maintain the legitimacy of nudity in the studio. At the same time, I emphasize the rich field of encounters and experiences within which life drawing has proliferated as a modernist practice and led to the ambiguities

of how sexuality and physical suffering of models are managed in contemporary life-drawing.⁸⁶

As naked bodies remind people of sex, the management of sexuality is crucial to the maintenance of the respectability of the life drawing class. The relationship between sexuality and life drawing class has a long history. For hundreds of years, life models were mythologized and romanticized as sex partners and lovers of artists, which was sometimes really the case.⁸⁷ Yet, the modern relationship between artists and models is often pragmatic. Although both exotic dancers and life models display their nude bodies for money, the former involves the commodification of sex while the latter attempts to downplay sexuality and justify the use of naked bodies for artistic purposes.

I start this chapter by introducing how art critics think of issues of sexuality in the production of the female nude. Afterwards, I investigate issues of sexuality by using the argument of Petherbridge who claims that the discursive lacuna surrounding life drawing was based on the reluctance of art educators to explore the critical and ethical dilemmas of using naked models.⁸⁸ She also states the importance of contemporary art educators to articulate a critical engagement with naked bodies and criticized the silence of artists surrounding the sexual issue.⁸⁹ I argue that Hong Kong artists generally face the dilemma of interacting with naked bodies of real people and treating the model as a neutral object outside discourse as incarnated in the taken-for-grantedness of objective seeing in many life drawing sections. The lack of critical engagement with naked bodies by most artists leads to the avoidance of questions regarding sexuality and how to see the model as a person and an object at

⁸⁶ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 196.

⁸⁷ See Ruth Butler, *Hidden in the Shadow of the Master: the Model-wives of Cézanne, Monet, and Rodin*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008); Martin Postle et al., *The Artist's Model from Etty to Spencer*, (London: Merrell Holberton, 1999)

⁸⁸ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 74.

⁸⁹ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 74.

the same time. When models manage their sexuality well, the need to face those questions can be glossed over, but they still haunt artists from time to time.

Managing sexuality and maintaining modesty of female models are not unilateral request from artists. Instead, it is a continuous negotiation between artists and models. Models' affirmation of life drawing as art encourages models to defend the legitimacy of nudity in the studio and justify their bodily discipline. Variable factors affect how sexuality and modesty are managed. They include artist-model relationship, the nature of a particular life drawing class and the attitude of artists and models towards modesty and sexuality. Apart from defending the legitimacy of nudity in the studio, some models insist on the discipline of their bodies according to mainstream standards of modesty in order to establish themselves as good models and draw a line between themselves and stigmatized groups such as sex workers. Rather than arguing such discipline is oppressive to models, it can be seen as models' effort to achieve agency and feel comfortable through excelling in bodily control. They are also strategies employed by models to distance from the hegemonic constructions of nude female bodies as eroticized and commodified objects. In short, such discipline demonstrates a troubling subjectivity of models straddling an ambiguous realm between performer and dummy, subject and object. As mentioned in the introduction, the positioning of models as subjects or objects is not stable. Identification with objective seeing by models often leads to their objectification and desexualization, but it also constructs the subjectivity of models who consciously distance themselves from anything sexual.

Using the insight of Kelly Oliver, Mayhew proposes that affective seeing can be explained by an empathic acknowledgement of the experiences of others through witnessing others. It leads to a conscious form of ethical spectatorship which makes

some artists empathetic to the feelings and needs of models.⁹⁰ Although many artists do not know how to engage with the naked bodies critically, they express their care for models' comfort and even their feelings for poses. These prove that absolute objective seeing is untenable. When affective seeing is stronger in the studio and/or artist-model relationship is closer, models are more likely to loosen the management of sexuality and maintenance of modesty, while rigid objective seeing more possibly leads to higher self desexualization of models to minimize the contradiction between objective seeing and their sexual and fleshy bodies. This shows that artists are unavoidably performers and observers at the same time, whose bodily and verbal performance (often unnoticed by artists themselves) critically influences how models perceive and discipline themselves in the studio.

The fourth chapter discusses the relationship between professionalism and the spirit of passionate work in life models. Professionalism is a notion which is closely linked with establishing modeling as an appropriate performance. In life modeling, it is not composed of clearly written rules. Rather, it is mainly the 'consensus' followed by both models and artists which is usually not spoken openly but supposed to be known by both parties.

Adopting the insights of Fournier which sees professionalism in work as a disciplinary mechanism, Chapter Four explores how working professionally is inextricably related to the tough, cautious and painful discipline of the model's body.⁹¹ Butler's discussion of how submission and mastery takes place simultaneously to form subjection can help us explain why a model chooses to subject herself into a professional.⁹² By using the performativity of Butler to explain

⁹⁰ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 197.

⁹¹ Valérie Fournier, "The Appeal to 'Professionalism' as a Disciplinary Mechanism," *Sociological Review*, 47(1999): 281.

⁹² Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 115.

how a person subjects his/herself into a professional by engaging in repetitive performances of professional code of conduct, Hodgson reminds us that social norms are reproduced with a difference through disruptive performance.⁹³ While some feminists consider that the disciplinary practices of women produce 'docile bodies' according to my interviews, models generally do not feel their bodies as docile and realize their potential for agency instead.⁹⁴

First, by discussing the notion of staying still, it explores the paradoxical relationship between being an agent and an object. Devoted models in my interviews insist on staying still and are generally silent about their pain. Models identify with life drawing as a legitimate art form and discipline their bodies in order to be professional. Mythologies associated with modeling and art, and identifying with the aim of life drawing often lead to their endurance of the discomfort of posing and objectification.⁹⁵ Observational drawing, which is usually adopted during long pose, requires the cultivation of a close attention to detail. The model functions as an object or as interchangeable with still life elements appears to be tacitly accepted by the others.⁹⁶ This notion is paradoxically accepted and embodied by many devoted models as a source of pride. Therefore, the model is encouraged not to move as to facilitate the progress of observational drawing. However, even the most disciplined model moves slightly as time goes by. Taking pride in staying still and being silent about their pain imply models' professionalism and ability to work through pain, but it also prevents models from critically reviewing the rationale of observational drawing and the taken-for-granted stillness of models which tortures them. It also

⁹³ Damien Hodgson, "'Putting on a Professional Performance': Performativity, Subversion and Project Management," *Organization*, 12(2005): 51-68.

⁹⁴ Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 65.

⁹⁵ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 191.

⁹⁶ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 185.

encourages generalization of the silent performance of posing to an essentialized view of models as unseeing and unspeaking dummies.⁹⁷

The discussion of good pose provides another angle of professionalism. Although the stillness and dumbness of life modeling often renders them into objects, the appreciation of good pose by artists demands models to be inventive and creative about how to use their bodies. However, much of the history and even contemporary practice of life drawing often uses the life model as a pretext for executing an internalized ideal or representation of what a naked figure should look like.⁹⁸ Therefore, artists who claim that they ask for good poses do not mean that they always accept a wide range of poses. For example, life drawing in European art academy was based on highly rigid stylistic conventions which included the selection of models, acceptable poses and the drawing process.⁹⁹ It was the culmination of intense practice in controlled mark making and copying from classical images and casts. Although it was largely eliminated from most post-war art schools in Europe and the USA, it is still popular among LP artists in Hong Kong due to the strong influence of Realist and academic art training from China.¹⁰⁰ However, models are allowed more room to do a wider range of poses during short pose due to shorter time and the loosening of stylistic conventions.

In the latter half of the chapter, I explore the phenomenon of a high proportion of creative workers and aesthetically inclined people entering life modeling. They attach considerable emotional attachment to the work and insist that life modeling is unique in that it demands artistic sensitivity, creativity and bodily techniques. Making art has not always been seen as 'real' work. Artistic work is portrayed as fun, pleasure or

⁹⁷ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 195.

⁹⁸ Mayhew, *Naked*.

⁹⁹ Mayhew, *Naked*.

¹⁰⁰ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 179.

vocation, but not as labor. Some scholars suggest that this leads to an outcome that ‘psychic income’ rather than monetary rewards drives artists.¹⁰¹ This notion of the pleasure and even love to be derived from artistic work is a common finding of research into creative labor.¹⁰² In my interviews, ‘psychic income’ and pleasure of life modeling are some of the popular comments from life models. Life modeling is able to attract creative workers and aesthetically inclined people as it allows workers to be expressive and creative, get along with like-minded people and has a flexible working time. Nevertheless, cherishing artistic expression during work does not mean that devoted models are not reflective regarding the status of life models in art production, monetary reward and working condition. The articulation of the joy of doing interesting poses by models is often followed by the lamentation of the lack of job security and potential exploitation during modeling. Some of them are interested in organizing life models to improve the working condition, but the individualized, relatively discreet and freelance nature of life modeling makes a union of life models difficult to form. It also discusses the role of Body Arts Organization (BAO) in recruiting life models and its policy regarding the rights of models in the end of the chapter.

The fifth chapter explores the performance of female life models. I explore the interaction between artists and models to see how the practice of drawing the female nude in Hong Kong allows possibilities to explore the body by some models. This is especially important for some models who enter the job with an expectation to achieve psychic income through being expressive, creative and getting along with like-minded creative people.

¹⁰¹ M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953)

¹⁰² Karen Oakey, “‘Art works’ – Cultural Labor Markets: A literature review,” *Creativity, Culture and Education Series Literature Reviews*, <http://www.creativitycultureeducation.org/data/files/cce-lit-review-8-a5-web-130.pdf>, accessed on 10th June, 2010.

The meanings of the female nude in Western art in history are too complicated and varied to be analyzed in detail here.¹⁰³ The practice of artists affects how they see models and expect from models, and as a result, the performance of life models. Theories and examples in performance studies are essential for understanding the seemingly stillness and poses of models. Models' bodily performance has to be understood together with their psyche to see how and why they differentiate their performance in different situations. The description of artists in Chapter 1 is essential for understanding how artist-model interaction influences the performance of models.

A case study of a feminist performance artist and model, Mandy, further explains why adopting ideas of feminist performance art in modeling by reflective models causes puzzlement and excitement of artists because of the severe challenge of traditional life drawing practices by feminist performance art. It also discusses to what extent an innovative approach to life modeling by models is able to stimulate artists' introspection into models' bodies, and the practice and meaning of life drawing. Traditional life drawing neglects the subjectivity of models. Ironically, life modeling in recent decades has attracted models who are largely composed of creative workers and aesthetically inclined people who intend to assert their creativity and female subjectivity into modeling. Such tendency has the potential to increase the power of models, seen in the case of short pose. However, how this can fundamentally change the positioning of models as passive and obedient employees is unknowable. The case study serves as an excellent example to see the challenge of traditional life drawing posed by feminist art critics who believe in the importance of the assertion of female subjectivity in art.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Edward Lucie-Smith, *The Body: Images of the Nude*, (London: Thames and Hudson, 1981)

¹⁰⁴ Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 227.

Chapter 2

THE BODY OF FEMALE LIFE MODELS

How life modeling gives models an effective tool to criticize the idealized female body

This section explores how life modeling gives models an effective tool to criticize the idealized female body. Life modeling helps models generate a critique of hegemonic female beauty in the mainstream society. The critique leads to the employment of strategies by models to resist hegemonic beauty standards. The idealized female body here refers to the slim, fair-skinned and flawless body prevalent in the representations of the female body in contemporary culture in Hong Kong, like fashion magazines and advertisements, which influences greatly how women view and treat their bodies.¹⁰⁵ Feminists contend that images of fashion models define and reinforce an ‘idealized femininity’,¹⁰⁶ and fashion models need to maintain their slim bodies as hard as they can to comply with the ideal.¹⁰⁷ However, this is not the case in life modeling. In life modeling, human forms are equally beautiful, at least theoretically.¹⁰⁸ The actual scene is more complicated. This point will be elaborated throughout the thesis. But it remains true that all women, regardless of age (as long as they are above 18), nationality, height and physique, can be life models in recent years. As there is no screening before a drawing session, the artists have to accept the model however she looks. The artist cannot ask the model to

¹⁰⁵ Katherine Reedy, “Ads pressure women to white up in Hong Kong,” *Women e-News*, 2 Feb, 2009, Culture and Tradition, <http://www.womensenews.org/story/cultural-trendspopular-culture/090212/ads-pressure-hong-kong-women-whiten>

¹⁰⁶ Sandra Lee Bartky, ‘Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power’, in I. Diamond and L. Quinby, eds. *Feminism and Foucault: Reflections on Resistance*, (Boston, MA: Northeastern University Press, 1988), 65-81.

¹⁰⁷ Ashley Mears, “The Discipline of the Catwalk: Gender, Power and Uncertainty in Fashion Modeling,” *Ethnography*, 9(02005): 429-456.

¹⁰⁸ Philips, *Modeling*, 66.

provide photos beforehand. Also, most of the artists like to draw a greater variety of models in order to know how to draw different bodies, with different facial features, muscular and bone structures, etc. The practice of modern life modeling implies that all bodies have aesthetic values and worth studying, contrary to the popular belief that women need to work on their bodies in order to achieve the narrow ideal: the slim, smooth and flawless body. This gives life models a chance to ponder on hegemonic feminine beauty through interacting with artists that welcome a much wider range of bodies. The bodily experience in life modeling gives models a tool to cope with the heavy pressure to fit in the idealized beauty in everyday life.

It is necessary to explore the discussion of female nude in art in order to demythologize art. Art is often mythologized as composed of a series of eternal and universal values without being intermingled with social, historical, racial and gender issues. In art, there is no such thing as the ideal female body. The ideal is a concept not a thing.¹⁰⁹ Melody de Milo was sculpted according to the Classical ideal of bodily perfection, while Botticelli's Melody of Urbino was painted as a Renaissance version of this ideal for the Medici princes. They served for centuries as interpretations of the ideal, and were endlessly copied in art.¹¹⁰ Although the ideal is a concept rather than a body, a lived human body is chosen and drawn during the creation of classical art. Therefore, a female model closer to the classical ideal may receive more work. In a private studio, announcing that a traditionally beautiful model will come to work the following week may attract more artists to come. For example, the studio sometimes became more crowded when Melody came to work. She is considered as beautiful by contemporary standards of beauty. Nevertheless, a wider range of bodies is wanted in practice. How a person poses is considered as

¹⁰⁹ Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art*, (London, GBR: Routledge, 2000), 1.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

more important than how he/she looks. Modernist art forms on the human body emphasize the abstract rhythm created through how a person balances or moves himself/herself instead of how the person looks. As artists in Hong Kong do not only draw classical ideals, they generally have a higher acceptance of female bodies in the studio than the general masses. But their level of acceptance may vary.

The relationship between representation of female bodies in art and female life models

The belief that female nude in art has nothing to do with real women bodies and thus, has nothing to do with female life models, is strongly influenced by the ideas of the famous art historian Kenneth Clark, who wrote the book, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*.¹¹¹ His view on the female nude in art is canonical and has a huge influence on both artists and scholars. He distinguishes between a particular body (the naked) and art that represents an ideal body (the nude), providing a point of departure for most of the recent discussion on the female nude in art.¹¹² He proposes that the nude is a form of art while the naked is merely the human body undressed, replete with all its flaws and blemishes. Therefore, he dismisses the naked body, i.e. the real human body, as 'worthy' of art. Life models are therefore put in the contradictory position in art production. Although their existence is often necessary in the studio, their contribution to the creation process is neglected. This coincides with the findings of Mayhew, who suggests that life modeling largely operates within a critical vacuum, which may contribute to its marginalization as part of the discursive field of contemporary art.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press: 1972)

¹¹² Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art*, (London, GBR: Routledge, 2000), 7.

¹¹³ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 73.

Fortunately, some art historians have provided convincing critique of Kenneth Clark's naked/nude distinction. For example, Lynda Nead thought that his distinction embodies a dualist paradigm which not only structured his thinking in the rest of his text about the ideal female body, but also that of Western culture generally.¹¹⁴ Clark's dualism is to forestall discussion of a social taboo – that is the naked body, or nakedness. The nude acts as a foil that ensures that the authority of the taboo remains undisturbed, but which, when considered in relation to this authority, becomes unstable and ambiguous.¹¹⁵ The distinction between matter and ideal form led to the history of dualistic thinking in Western art. The mind (male) is privileged over the body (female). It is developed into other dualistic modes such as mind/body, culture/nature, male/female, and art/obscenity. The former term is valorized over the latter. This binary model is also the basis for Kant's distinction between the contemplative and sensory pleasures, underpinning a hierarchy of aesthetic experience.¹¹⁶ Life models are therefore also considered as trivial as they are on the body/naked/nature/female side. I emphasize the embodied experience of life models as it shows how the naked and the nude are related instead of separated. The real bodies of women are on the 'naked' side. They trigger desires and anxieties about sexuality, which their suspected obscenity 'contaminates' sacrosanct art and are therefore suppressed, trivialized and ignored throughout art history.

It would be naïve to separate female nude in art from female bodies in popular culture as a discrete aesthetic category. Feminists find that popular fashion and pornography promote continuous cultural fantasies of the female body, which run parallel to and intersected with the high-art industry.¹¹⁷ As art is sanctified

¹¹⁴ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 10.

¹¹⁵ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 60.

¹¹⁶ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 10.

¹¹⁷ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 10.

throughout history, female nude in art is often considered as a discrete category, which makes the nude become singular, academic, historical and exclusive. It is a myth that was disqualified as a standard that might be applied to living bodies.¹¹⁸

It has to be reminded that the conceptual ideal of the female body in art is not static. For example, some attempted to replace the Classical ideal of the female body with a positive, feminist ideal in the 1960s and the 70s, symbolizing it with images of the archaic goddess whose maternal body were connected with spiritually and essentially to Nature and the Earth.¹¹⁹ But later, the ideal of female bodies equated with maternity was considered as regressive by some artists in the 1980s.¹²⁰ In short, contemporary discussion of female nude in art has widened the body ideal. Many feminist artists use various ways, including their own bodies, to explore the complexities of female nude artistically and intellectually. They were dissatisfied with the male-dominated art scene and the problematic ways male artists treat the female nude. For example, Nead argues convincingly that the representation of the female nude in the history of Western art aimed at containing the female body, which was perceived as base matter; and regulating female sexuality, which was perceived as wayward and uncontrolled.¹²¹ Therefore, it is important to see how the ideal is led by changing historical, social and signifying relations. Art in recent decades have engaged in different ways with changing attitudes towards gender and visual culture, and contributed to changes in the ideal female body by feminist artists.¹²² Such changes render the ideal unstable and eventually groundless.¹²³ The art realm, thus, accepts a wider range of bodies than the fashion industry and the entertainment industry. The ideal(s) in art is far more diverse

¹¹⁸ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 10.

¹¹⁹ Helen McDonald, *Erotic Ambiguities: The Female Nude in Art*, (London, GBR: Routledge, 2000), 10.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹²² McDonald, *Ambiguities*, 13.

¹²³ McDonald, *Ambiguities*, 13.

than the Classical nude proposed by Clark.¹²⁴

A critique of hegemonic female beauty

1. The welcoming attitude of artists towards different bodies

Life drawing in Hong Kong is an extremely hybrid and intriguing practice. On the one hand, the dominance of female nude in art is influenced by patriarchal ideologies and traditions. On the other, changing and conflicting ideals of female nude as stated above allow ambiguities and fluidities of the body ideal. In the 19th century, British artists began to reject the classical ideal in favour of the living body.¹²⁵ This means that they accepted a wider range of bodies and temperaments of models. As mentioned, life models in the early 1930s in Hong Kong were strictly chosen according to classical standards of beauty. However, the influence of diverse artistic traditions in later decades may lead to the loosening of classical standards in Hong Kong. For example, Modernist art forms also influence local artists. An ideal body is not the prerequisite of producing a good Modernist nude.

Life drawing in recent years has become a popular training for art students and a recreation for the general public rather than a practice by a small number of elites as in the early 20th century in Hong Kong. Life drawing classes proliferated enormously in postwar consumer societies as a recreational pursuit, outside of art schools in Western countries.¹²⁶ The proliferation of amateur art studios in Hong Kong in recent years shows that Hong Kong follows a similar trajectory. It leads to more possibilities of how life drawing is practiced apart from academic life drawing in the 18th and 19th centuries.

¹²⁴ McDonald, *Ambiguities*, 10.

¹²⁵ Alison Smith, "The Academy and Professional Modeling 19th- century Britain," in *Dictionary of artists' models*, Jill Berk Jiminez and Joanna Banham ed., (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 30.

¹²⁶ Mayhew, *Naked*.

The aim of figure drawing in Western art training is to learn bodies of all kinds, which makes the recruitment of models with different body shapes necessary. The training of life drawing is often very technical. Different bodies provide different technical challenges for artists.

With higher gender equality in recent decades, the entry of women artists in life drawing and the generally high education level of life models, the relationship between artists and models becomes more equal than the situation in the 18th and 19th centuries. The tradition that life drawing was composed of a male artist and a female model exclusively was slowly challenged in the late nineteenth century, when women artists started entering institutions of higher art education in Paris and fought for the right to draw female models.¹²⁷ In Hong Kong, although male artists represent a higher proportion in private studios, more than half of the students in art academies are females.

Many models encounter a ‘surprising’ moment during their early stage of modeling. They discover that artists appreciate a wider range of body figures than the mainstream society does. This is not to say that life drawing is a refuge from the mainstream. It is, however, a space more appreciative of different women bodies than the everyday world, which amazes many life models. Such space is especially precious in a society when more than 60% of women are dissatisfied with their body shape and attempted slimming.¹²⁸

Mandy, in her early 30s, was very impressed when an artist shared his thoughts about life drawing,

¹²⁷ Marie Lathers, *Bodies of Art: French Literary Realism and the Artist's model*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 47.

¹²⁸ Caritus, *A study on the Slimming Trend among women in Hong Kong*(明愛瘦身風氣研究), (Hong Kong: Caritus, 2003), 14.

He was 80 something... once he said, 'I am not going to draw a very beautiful person, I have to find something beautiful from different models.' I was very impressed. Very often, *the mainstream has a lot of judgments*, like being fat and short is not pretty. What he said showed that a person had something beautiful even if he was fat and short. An artist has to find some parts of the person which he wants to grasp. What he said seems to diversify and enrich what beauty means.

All bodies are equally worthy of artistic study of line and form, and each body type presents a different technical challenge to an artist.¹²⁹ New models are impressed by the attitude of artists towards life drawing not only because of what they have said, but also what they draw and how they treat models. A study showed that more than 80% of women thought that Hong Kong society emphasized the body figure too much in judging a woman's value.¹³⁰ They had conflicting feelings about the slimming trend. They did not agree with such trend and yet, felt powerless in combating it.¹³¹ Therefore, the point of life modeling is not to realize the absurdity of the hegemonic beauty standard, as they already know it too well, but to do something about their powerlessness. Life modeling allows a woman to do something about her body to reaffirm her confidence whether it conforms to the hegemonic beauty standard or not. Yan, in her late twenties, said,

In the past I did not like myself to be fat. The trend of slimming started around 2002. Too many people around me, including my Mom and other family members, have been laughing at me since I was small because I

¹²⁹ Philips, *Modeling*, 66.

¹³⁰ HKYWCA, *A study on the body image of women* (女性自我體態形象調查研究), (Hong Kong: HKYWCA, 2004), 15.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

was fat. When I grew up, people started to compare and commented on who was beautiful (and who was not). But I did not agree. I think everyone is beautiful. I don't think beauty requires any specific qualities, so I start to think...I have been thinking for 2 years. I think that my fat body is good. Some people are slim but I am bigger than them. That's it. Somebody is average. It's about difference... *When I am modeling, I confirm my viewpoint.*

She knows about the oppression of hegemonic beauty standards very well, but her lack of embodied experience to deal with her dissatisfaction with her body in the past frustrated her. Life modeling provides a tool to confront powerlessness facing such a norm. This shows that rational acknowledgement of an oppressive social norm is not enough to bring about a change in a person's subjectivity. Embodied experience, including putting off clothes in front of strangers (and being nervous), being drawn and appreciated about her performance, and seeing herself in a piece of art, serves as a rite of passage which transforms how she sees her body being seen. She is able to escape the tyranny of comparative looking among women, even for a while, in a world obsessed with body ideals, youth and visibility.

Florence, in her early 40s, is below 90 pounds and is considered as too thin. Although the idealized female body emphasizes the beauty of slimness, being too thin with a flat chest is considered as 'going too far' as the woman is 'shapeless', and thus, not beautiful. Yet, her bony figure makes her popular among some artists.

Zheng said that I was the best model for students because I was bony. My ribs are exposed. You can touch it. They are exposed when I pose like this. Also, my pelvis can be seen clearly. It is also beautiful... He

always asked me to model for him as I have a lot of things to be drawn. He said that I was suitable for teaching.

In life modeling, bodies are interesting to be drawn not because they are traditionally beautiful. Very often, the idiosyncrasies of the body arouse the interest of the artist. Very slim bodies provide a good example for studying bone structures, while fat bodies allow people to examine the texture of the flesh and the beauty of volume and mass. Therefore, artists need to accept different bodies if they want to be good at drawing a greater variety of human bodies.

Yan continued,

This is what makes an artist different. At least they can try... not to identify so much with the 'beauty' *outside*. Large breasts, slim waist, long legs. If the artist can accept seeing the naked body and spend two hours drawing it, *he should have this quality*. Whether he has or not depends on the effort he has paid. To put it further, any physique should also be an object of inspiration.

Chu, in her late fifties, said,

A real artist won't draw your face...

For Chu, a real artist does not prioritize pretty faces in drawing. The attitude of the artists regarding life drawing itself is not the only factor which leads to an effective critique of the idealized female body by models. Models make use of the artists' viewpoint selectively to help them cope with the pressure of achieving normative

feminine beauty in everyday life. In doing so, models categorize artists into two groups: those who hold such a viewpoint are ‘real’ artists who are able to ‘transcend’ mainstream values to pursue artistic beauty, and ‘vulgar’ ones who stick to such values. Facing a world full of harsh judgments on their bodies, they project a better world onto the studio to cope with their powerlessness – a place relatively immune from such unreasonable standards. As many models are creative workers or aesthetically inclined people, they expect to find like-minded people in an art-related work. For them, artists should be creative and open-minded. An artist sticking to a narrow bodily aesthetic means that he or she is not open-minded enough, and therefore, not a good artist.

Sandy, in her early 30s, said,

I think the mainstream ideal is very boring and vulgar. Of course you can say, Miss Hong Kong is beautiful, but you get bored of her quickly. If you look at a person carefully, you will see how his eyebrows look like. His beauty will be apparent. *If an artist draws all the time, he is already familiar with ordinary beauty and loses interest...* I think *an experienced artist can catch the uniqueness of every model.*

Florence said,

Most of the artists want to draw different bodies very much, especially pregnant women. They want to draw pregnant women, the elderly, children and babies as they are very difficult to find.

Models reported that when they saw women with different bodies became the subjects of different great artworks, they started to think that their bodies could be a part of the masterpiece too. Although life drawings are rarely recognized as artworks in contemporary art, models usually consider people doing life drawings as artists. The current art scene in Hong Kong is heavily influenced by avant-garde movements and conceptual art, and there is a lack of formal criteria for accreditation as a 'professional' artist.¹³² However, among outsiders of fine art, life drawing is an activity easily associated with the practice of being an artist. The idea of a group of artists gathering around to look at and draw from a naked model provides a popular and accessible image for what artists do.¹³³ Most of the models in my interviews also rely on the popular imagination of artists. This leads to a phenomenon that they expect artists to be different from the mass in their aesthetic regarding the female body, despite the fact that life drawing is popularized as a recreational activity among a wider public in recent years.

In a city where women are incessantly reminded of their imperfection and ugliness by advertisements, the thought that they can be beautiful in a piece of art through posing is very empowering. It is true that most artists want to draw different kinds of bodies. Some approach strangers and search for new models of different body figures and ethnicities actively. Some ask models if they have any friends who are interested to be a model. They usually do not require any special requirements regarding the physique. After understanding the variety of bodies artists have seen and drawn, models find that they are 'not that weird' in the eyes of the artists even though their bodies do not conform to standardized beauty. It is relieving for a model who is judged as imperfect or even ugly by the norm, but feels totally accepted and

¹³² Mayhew, *Naked*.

¹³³ Mayhew, *Naked*.

appreciated when artists draw her. It is not uncommon for models to be worried of the artists' response when they model for the first time, only to find that artists are so used to different naked bodies and show no particular 'response.' Therefore, the response of artists during early stages of modeling is especially important in shaping the experience of models.

It has to be noted that although elderly and babies, etc, are highly valued in life modeling, they are also highly unusual. Very few old people over 70, if any, are willing to do life drawing in Hong Kong. Young women between 20 and 40 compose the largest proportion of models and they are the most popular. Artists may be very open to different kinds of bodies, but they are most receptive to young women bodies. Asked about the reason for preferring female models, artists, both male and female, usually answer that women's bodies are more beautiful than men, and therefore, more artistic. Occasionally, some female artists demand male models. However, more than half of the artists in private studios are men and most of them prefer female models. According to Simon, more men than women apply for being a life model each month, but he always warns that fewer jobs are available to men.

A unique feature makes a person beautiful when being represented in drawing. In life modeling, a round figure may be considered as unique. Sandy said,

They say that they prefer to draw well-rounded models as they are easy to draw, people who find models or those who work as models are usually more well-rounded.

Well-rounded women refer to women who are slightly overweight but not obese. Ironically, it is the stigmatizing of fat women's bodies in society which leads to the remarkably small number of 'well-rounded' women entering life modeling. Yan, who

is slightly overweight, claims that she often finds her beauty in art. This encourages her modeling. Well-rounded women are judged more harshly by the mainstream as not beautiful. During my research, it is very difficult to find fat female models so most of my subjects have average or slim bodies. It is understandable for them to feel that they are 'too fat to be a model' and are not confident enough to show off their less-than-ideal bodies.

2. Widening bodily ideals to counteract hegemonic beauty standards

Models start to understand that many artists are able to appreciate beauty outside the hegemonic beauty standard after working for some time. They begin to broaden the definition of bodily ideals from their modeling experience.

Kitty, in her mid-twenties, said,

I think my body proportion is not quite right, but I encounter this when I am modeling. I am not satisfied with many parts of my body. For example, I think I am short, my legs are so thick and short, I have a fat stomach. Later I worked as a model and *see how others look at me*. I begin to think about the body. Everyone has something beautiful. An artist has to express his or her beautiful part, which means I also have beautiful parts. *I don't need to achieve the ideal. I break through myself.*

Modeling is an act which helps her break through the pressure to achieve the ideal female body. Again, the ideal she refers to is the slender body celebrated in mainstream society. She is a slim woman, but she is not 'slender' – with long legs and a good proportion. Therefore, she considers herself as 'not quite right.' She said that she started to think about her body more after modeling, as many of them did.

She tries to use the notion that ‘I also have beautiful parts’ to combat her dissatisfaction with her body. The beautiful parts mentioned by the models are usually not the commonly eroticized and objectified parts in popular culture, i.e. breasts, a slim waist and buttocks. They refer to their less eroticized parts, for example, the neck and the back, as beautiful body parts that can be expressed aesthetically. When asked about what ‘beauty’ means, models do not usually refer to any concrete standard of beauty. For example, a model may think that her back is beautiful not because it is flawless, but because she feels good about it. Beauty for models can be loosely defined as confidence of models towards their bodies, rather than how they actually look like. A body conformed to hegemonic beauty standards may easily lead to better feelings of the model regarding her body, but it is not the only condition. It is an attitude to see one’s body positively regardless of harsh beauty standards in the mainstream. Such notion of ‘beauty’ based on confidence and acceptance of one’s body shows their attempt to challenge the narrow idealized female body. Asserting themselves as beautiful is unavoidably pivotal in building up the confidence of many models in a society where the value of a woman is often judged according to her appearance rather than her ability.

Although she and other models may not overcome such pressure of idealized feminine beauty totally, they are making a genuine attempt to resist it. Media projections of images of thin, fashionable and glamorous women were often cited as contributing to body dissatisfaction, but most of the young women were able to negotiate these discursive constructions and their effects in a way that allowed for strategies of resistance.¹³⁴ Modeling as a way to combat such images shows that the relationship between self and body is more complicated. Although women face immense pressure to mould their bodies according to the mainstream culture, they

¹³⁴ Shelley Budgeon, “Identity as an Embodied Event,” *Body & Society* (2003): 18.

may not follow suit completely. They may selectively mould their bodies, and/or view bodily techniques critically or with ambivalence. the inscription of the text upon the surface of the body. She, like other models, emphasizes 'how others look at me' changes her attitude towards her body positively or negatively. This shows that a woman who chooses to let her body be gazed by artists (who are usually male) does not mean that she voluntarily puts herself in a submissive and passive position of the male gaze. Inviting an appreciative gaze can be a strategy to resist hegemonic beauty norms on her body.

Chu, a model in her late fifties, said,

Artists should not mind my fat stomach as it represents a person's characteristic... *the life behind the person, her status, her personality.*

This is a kind of feature... In the past I didn't have double chin, now I have one, you should be able to notice it. When you do this job, you start to notice yourself. Parts which did not sag start to sag now... When you become older, your necklines will appear. This is an inevitable stage in life.

Rather than aiming at drawing youthful, slim and firm bodies, she proposes that a body which shows the life experience of the person should be cherished by artists. Instead of thinking the emergence of sagging flesh and necklines on her body as deficiencies, she proudly celebrates these as unique marks of her lifestyle and life experience. For her, different bodily surfaces are worth drawing not just because how they look like. Instead, they reflect how a person lives and forms her body. Most models are aged between 18 and 45, so she is one of the very few models aged above 50 in Hong Kong. Probable reasons include the modern beauty ideal of a youthful,

toned, thin body.¹³⁵ Older women have more difficulty to achieve such ideal, so they are less confident that they can also be models. Very little is known about how they negotiate and interpret the aging process in their daily lives in terms of its effects on their perceptions of and feelings about their body images and their embodied experiences.¹³⁶ Laura C. Hurd finds that aging signs are more harshly judged in women than in men, so older women are more disadvantaged in their struggles to achieve and maintain the existing cultural standards of physical attractiveness.¹³⁷ Chu may be an unusual woman who can overcome ageism. As artists often consider wrinkles as something idiosyncratic, an aging model might be able to better cope with the ageist norm in the mainstream by feeling her aging signs appreciated by artists.

3. Distancing the idealized female body from herself

Sometimes, a model may have delicate facial features or a body closer to the idealized female body. They may be more easily accepted by the majority of artists, but some of them are critical of such a status and avoid identifying themselves with such an ideal. Identifying with the ideal may help them cope with the pressure to achieve the idealized female body, but this also supports the patriarchal discourse, which is something most of them do not want.

Melody, in her mid-thirties, said,

How do I see my body? I think my body is ok. It is classic. If a modern body demands a very thin, very bikini body, *obviously I am not...* I mean those slimming ad standards, very thin. The person has to be very thin, very long,

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Laura C' Hurd, "Older Women's Body Image and Embodied Experience: An Exploration," *Journal of Women & Aging*, 12(2000): 79.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

the legs have to be very slim, and the arms have to be very slim too. I am not this type. I am thicker. Really, I am not the girl in the posters and ads.

She is a very popular model and is considered as beautiful by many people. Although her appearance fulfills normative feminine beauty to a large extent, she does not conceive herself to be so. In fact, no models in my study think they fulfill idealized images of feminine beauty. For them, it is too difficult to achieve, if it can be achieved at all. Models try not to build their embodied self through comparing with such ideals. Even Melody fulfills such ideal to a large extent, she tries to keep a distance from it.

Mandy, in her early 30s, said,

I am different from Kitty. Kitty is different from the mainstream obviously, different from how people think of models. Her arms and legs are shorter. Compared to her, my body is more proportional, so I am not particularly criticized or changed in the painting.

She is very conscious that her tall and slim body may bring her advantages in modeling. She is accepted more easily by artists than Kitty. Yet, she does not take the advantage for granted. Instead, she implicitly criticizes artists who say that Kitty's body is proportional. 'Changed in the painting' here means that some artists idealize or beautify the bodies of models. She did not oppose this, but she was critical of why and how artists did it. For example, she said that her flat chest was always enlarged by artists in the works. She wondered if this implied that artists preferred women with larger breasts. She believed that artists were also influenced by the mainstream culture that women with bigger breasts were more attractive. As said in the

introduction, life classes in history have been based on an abstracted ideal of a figure rather than the close observation of the living present model. Although the Realist project in the 19th century was opposed to classical epistemology in favor of a perceptual and individualistic model, it is possible that some local artists still prefer to draw ideal nudes in their mind. It can be a mainstream standard, the classical ideal or other bodies.¹³⁸ Life drawing is not taught not only from the life model, but also based on images of naked figures.¹³⁹ Artists who internalize the aesthetics of curvy and feminine women are more likely to modify models according to ideals in their mind.

How life models resist normative standards of beauty through ways of displaying their bodies

It is apparent that Hong Kong women face considerable pressure to achieve idealized feminine beauty. Feminists explore how dominant norms of femininity leads to women's endless 'beautifying' and 'improvement' of their bodies. For example, Bordo analyzes the ways in which women come to discipline and survey their own bodies by engaging in practices which produce their own 'docile' bodies according to the dictates of idealized constructions of feminine embodiment.¹⁴⁰ Bordo believes that women internalize the normalizing gaze to decide what are acceptable for them to do, and what are not. 'There is no need for arms, physical violence, nor material constraints. Just a gaze.'¹⁴¹ This makes many women incessantly keep on watching if they are eating too much and not doing enough exercises. Bartky

¹³⁸ Deanna Petherbridge, "Drawing backwards into the future: Formulating an agenda," in *Issues in Art and Education: Aspects of the Fine Art Curriculum*, ed. Paul Hetherington, (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 59.

¹³⁹ Mayhew, *Naked*.

¹⁴⁰ Shelley Budgeon, "Identity as an Embodied Event," *Body & Society* (2003): 14.

¹⁴¹ Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 27.

discusses how disciplinary practices constitute the docile bodies of women, and how this affects the shape, deportment and gesture and the adornment of the body, and the effects of the imposition of such discipline on female identity and subjectivity.¹⁴²

These feminists undoubtedly pinpoint critically how women suffer physically and psychologically from cultural norms of feminine beauty. However, such arguments easily put women's bodies as a medium through which oppressive cultural norms of femininity are expressed. This has often been at the expense of recognizing women's agency. Very often women are cast as cultural dupes and victims of cultural constructions of femininity.¹⁴³ Therefore, it is insufficient to consider women as only receivers of cultural norms who modify their bodies to comply with the ideal without a second thought. The narratives produced by the models about how they display their bodies during work show that they are consciously avoiding popular 'beautifying' techniques of the body and endorsing the naturally beautiful aesthetic to resist normative standards of beauty.

In general, models do not feel an immense pressure to present their bodies according to normative feminine beauty during modeling, as the studio is more tolerant of less ideal bodies than the everyday world. Although their bodies are totally visible to others, they do not feel the need to modify and beautify their bodies in every minor detail to achieve the flawless, slim and hairless ideal.

1. Being 'natural'

Yan, in her late twenties, said:

¹⁴² Sandra Lee Bartky, *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression*, (New York: Routledge, 1990), 65.

¹⁴³ Shelley Budgeon, "Identity as an Embodied Event," *Body & Society* (2003): 2.

I do not beautify my body. First, I don't like makeup. Second, I aim at cleaning myself. Nothing from the outside, nothing artificial. This is my principle of preparing my body (for modeling).

The attempt of trying not to modify her body consciously is rare among young ladies in Hong Kong, as Hong Kong young women generally have high body dissatisfaction. They want to modify their bodies, especially to be slimmer and beautify themselves by cosmetics and other technologies.¹⁴⁴ Yet, such attitude is quite common among models. Keeping the body 'as it is' is the best way of preparing herself to be a model.

She explains further,

I won't shave because this is the most natural state. *I think I have to give my most natural body to them.* The body which touches me most is the body which undergoes no artificial processes. Shaving is an artificial process too. If you reduce doing such things, the body is at its most beautiful state.

Bodies are unavoidably cultural bodies. Yet, she believes that if she minimizes the human intervention of bodies, including makeup and shaving, the body will be in its most beautiful state. This is contrary to contemporary standard of a flawless and hairless body achieved by makeup and shaving. Maintaining a 'natural' body can be seen as the models' stance to keep a distance from how women treat their bodies in the mainstream.

¹⁴⁴ Sing Lee et al., "Body Dissatisfaction Among Chinese Undergraduates and Its Implications for Eating Disorders in Hong Kong," *International journal of Eating Disorders* (1996): 77-84.

It is intriguing to note that models like to refer bodies without clothes as ‘natural.’ They think that clothing is a cultural product. When you put it off, your body is in its natural state. Yet, they are not aware that even when the body is naked, it is made amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power. When a civilized body is decontextualized, stripped of clothing, adornment and nationality, it is still marked by its disciplinary history, by its patterns of movement, by the corporeal commitments in everyday life. It is in no sense a natural body, for it is as culturally, racially, sexually, possibly even class distinctive, as it would be if it were clothed.¹⁴⁵ Although a natural body is unachievable, a model’s attempt to define and maintain a ‘coherently natural’ body untouched by techniques of the body can be seen as a way to resist normative feminine beauty, which demands incessant techniques of the body to make it look flawless, fair and smooth. In life modeling, artists often prefer bodies with less adornment. Once an artist told a model to wash her makeup because it was ‘too much.’

2. Being ‘lazy’

Another model, Joyce, in her early twenties, said,

I don’t shave. I don’t makeup. They cannot see such detail. There is so much light above me. They just want a strong silhouette. They will express other features by themselves. It is just my fantasy. I don’t know if it’s true. I tend to believe in this way.

Instead of thinking that her body is under serious attention and worrying that her body is not perfect enough, she does not care about procedures to achieve normative

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 142.

feminine beauty as she thinks that artists won't notice such 'trivial' detail. This is similar to the temporary lack of body self-consciousness of nudists as they reject an aesthetic discourse in the nudist setting.¹⁴⁶ Shaving was a popular behavior among young women originated in Western culture, and later spread to other countries. US women have considerable social pressure to shave their body hair for fear that people judge them as less sexually and interpersonally attractive.¹⁴⁷ In Hong Kong, 65% of women aged between 18 and 35 believe that an unshaved body is unhygienic and affects interpersonal relationships.¹⁴⁸ However, the prevalence of shaving seems not to apply to models very much.

Classical female nudes and even female nudes of early modern artists were always without pubic hair. It was one of the signifiers of sex and its explicit depiction is usually reserved for pornography.¹⁴⁹ Yet, more than half of the models interviewed report that they do not shave their underarms, pubic hair or legs before they work. She thinks that the artists simply don't notice as they concentrate on her body shapes rather than those 'minor' details of her body. Joyce is not clear whether artists think the same, but she assumes it so as to save her from those procedures. This may not be an overt resistance to the idealized female body, but at least it shows her neglect. We will see that such attitude is quite common among models. They think that artists are drawing body figures. As their body silhouettes produced by their body shapes and poses are more important than other features of the body, they should focus on their poses instead of worrying if they look perfect or not. While a pose may be good or

¹⁴⁶ Ruth Barcan, "The Moral Bath of Bodily Unconsciousness: female nudism, bodily exposure and the gaze," *Continuum*, 15(2001), 310.

¹⁴⁷ Susan A. Basow and Amie C. Braman, "Women and body hair, social perceptions and attitudes," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 22(1998): 637-645.

¹⁴⁸ A behavioral study of Hong Kong women on shaving,
<http://hkupohku.hk/chinese/report/hair06/release.html>

¹⁴⁹ Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, *Modern Art: A Critical Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 114.

bad, a body or body part cannot.¹⁵⁰ The importance of posing over the appearance of the body allows models to resist normative beauty standard by emphasizing the former and downplaying the latter.

3. Decorating your body too much is not necessary

Florence, in her early forties, said,

Whether you are pretty or not is not so important, I mean the face. *The most important thing is that you know how to pose...* I will wear make up a little bit, not too much. My skin will be allergic after wearing makeup, I need to see a dermatologist.

Having a skin allergy is a good reason for not wearing makeup. As a beautiful face is not that important in life modeling, she can spend fewer efforts on beautifying her face. As the face is not the focus of life modeling, she does not find the point of beautifying her face while posing is much more important. She recalls that her teacher in the Academy praised her performance, but told her honestly that a pretty face was very important in the entertainment industry. For this reason, she might not easily enter the industry. She was really sad to hear this and managed to accept the reality. While she could not succeed in the entertainment industry easily, she was considered as a good model and a good actress. This shows that the aesthetic labor required in modeling is less strict.

Another model, Rosemary, in the mid-30s, said,

¹⁵⁰ Philips, *Modeling*, 66.

I just wear mascara and lip gloss... I am used to wearing makeup, but I think it's better not to wear any makeup when you are modeling... If you wear no makeup, it's more natural... There is a model who wears heavy makeup. I have seen her. If your body has nothing on it but makeup, it looks uncomfortable and unnatural. It becomes another thing, something similar to the makeup in pornographic magazines.

Her attitude towards makeup is ambivalent. Rather than thinking that makeup beautifies her face, she thinks that she is more beautiful without makeup. She wears makeup herself (it looks almost invisible) as a daily routine, perhaps to make herself comfortable. As the act of makeup itself is enough to make her feel feminine, whether the makeup can be seen by others or not is not that important. Performing femininity can make a woman feel comfortable as this confirms that she is a woman. It is precisely the repetition of acts, gestures and discourse that produces the effect of identity at the moment of action.¹⁵¹ Interestingly, even though she appreciates women with a 'natural' face without makeup, she still wears makeup. She only tells me that this is her habit, and I am not able to explore deeper reasons. Yet, she thinks that a model wearing heavy makeup looks like a porn star, thus her attempt to separate life models and porn stars through different techniques of the body. If the model wears heavy makeup, she is more sexualized, and therefore, not a suitable look for art modeling. A life model is not supposed to be sexually provocative during work. Rosemary attempts to define a line between a life model and a porn star to maintain her respectability. The difficulty of models to cope with the tension between their sexual bodies and desexualization in the studio will be elaborated in Chapter 3. A porn star combines sexual attractiveness with her performance while a life model has to separate the two. This is a dubious line, yet it is

¹⁵¹ Moya Lloyd, *Judith Butler: from Norms to Politics*, (Cambridge: Polity, 2007), 54.

important for some models to keep a distance from any kind of sex work to make it more socially acceptable.

4. Celebrating bodily features not conformed to the hegemonic beauty ideal as something worthy of aesthetic attention

Sometimes, models understand and present their bodily 'flaws' in a way different from the normative feminine beauty. Despite the tendency of idealization of the female nude in much of the history of life drawing, they expect art to appreciate the particularities of every woman, and an artist to 'supersede' ideal norms of female beauty. For them, a good artist should be able to transform the uniqueness of every woman into artistic beauty, rather than depicting a conventional beautiful woman. Art is considered as a way to combat idealized feminine beauty in the eyes of models. If the artist cannot appreciate different bodies, his/her level is not 'high' enough. Many models use this strategy to establish their embodied selves. With this belief, they are able to display their not-so-perfect body parts proudly and blame artists who fail to do so as a defense mechanism.

Yan said that she was unwilling to conceal her freckles during modeling.

I have freckles...this is my most beautiful state... A flawless face is weird for me (as it doesn't match with the body), unless you wear makeup on your whole body...In my documentary about my body, I thank Mom for giving my body. I have many things considered as imperfect by others, but I miss it...

Giddens proposes that the self is seen as a reflexive project, for which the individual is responsible in late modernity. We are not just what we are but what we

make of ourselves.¹⁵² He also adds that the reflexivity of the self extends to the body, where the body is part of an action system rather than merely a passive object.¹⁵³ The body is brought into the self-reflexive biographical project as an object of choice. Being cannot be reduced to an effect of the consumption of images but the result of various forms of self-inventions which occur within embodied practices which also are not effects of representation but sites of production.¹⁵⁴ Yan engages in the bodily reflexivity of the self to affirm the value of her 'fat body.' Modeling and making documentaries of her body are some of the reflexive projects to reflect on how standards of feminine beauty in Hong Kong leads to intense bodily dissatisfaction and how she tries to change it. Such projects help her to develop a deeper self understanding and a rewarding sense of identity as a feminist. In her documentary, she took a short video of her nearly naked body (wearing only underpants), zooming in her various body parts, e.g. her face, her breasts and her tummy. She described them and talked about how she thought of them. In the end of the video, she thanked Mum for giving her body despite it looked so imperfect according to current bodily standards. My understanding of her is that she has a lot of dissatisfaction with her body, and the feeling is very strong. Even though she has been a model for a few years, she is still worried about her overweight body from time to time. However, she is also a very tough girl who finds various ways to reflect on herself whenever she feels vulnerable because of hegemonic beauty standards. For example, she also participated in a sharing group on body image in a feminist organization. Life modeling may not be able to eradicate her frustration totally, but it is one of the empowering choices she can embark on to develop a better body image.

¹⁵² Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity, Identity and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 75.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁵⁴ Shelley Budgeon, "Identity as an Embodied Event," *Body & Society* (2003): 17.

Her narrative of her freckles showed that she did not consider them as imperfect. She thinks that freckles are a part of her self, and eradicating them means losing an important part of her. Therefore, she feels proud to show them off during modeling. She thanks her mom for giving her this body, including the freckles and all the 'imperfections.' There is a Chinese saying, 'our body, hair and skin come from our parents' so we should not hurt our bodies. This is one of the duties of fulfilling filial piety. This Chinese tradition is sometimes used by people against 'subversive' body inscriptions like piercing and tattooing. Yet, she is using this thought to cope with hegemonic beauty as she should accept the body given by Mum.

Mandy shows off her scars and cellulite and hopes that artists will draw them, although they may be considered as flaws to be eradicated in the mainstream society.

But scars, I will let them draw deliberately. I had a car accident in Thailand and I was hurt quite seriously. I want them to draw them, but nobody does. Quite disappointing. I hurt my knees and legs in the car accident. But they won't draw these things. There was one student who drew, but he was the only one among ten students. I think that they do not draw it deliberately. In fact my bottom has many lines called cellulite. I don't mind if they draw it. Those lines are good. It's a part of me. But they won't draw them. Artists do not cope with these things. They don't care. Anyway, (the artists try to make) my skin smooth. I don't know if this is their norm. I expect them to draw realistically. They should cope with these things.

For her, scars and cellulite are not things to be eliminated, but features of a model which an artist should grasp artistically. In classical art, these are considered as

imperfections to be idealized in the nude form. Yet, she believes artists who aim at drawing the nude accurately should portray a person's particularity. Despite artists' endorsement of observational drawing in long pose, they very often do not draw exactly what they see but have a tendency to idealize the bodies of models. Mayhew analyzes the contradictory practice of stressing on the presence of the model in the life class and idealizing the model according to the art training of artists at the same time. She believes that life drawing interrogated the equivocating tension between observation and representation without success.¹⁵⁵ This has led to the doubts of models on the practice and purpose of life drawing.

'Scars show an individuals' consciousness of their body as a site or corporeality but also of survival and resistance: the scar is the result of the body having resisted another object, the body has suffered damage. Scarring is a discourse of embodied consciousness.' When the scar is self-consciously reflected upon, it is a reality which becomes transformed and reified through representation through telling how the scar was acquired and its significance to an individual.¹⁵⁶ The model, through narrating her scar story, positions that what happens to her body is connected with her life experience. Contemporary culture emphasizes that the value of a woman's body is to be seen and to be attractive. But such accounts of her body make her body a heritage site, something which demands attention not because of its feminine attractiveness, but its history and uniqueness. Cellulites and scars are not 'beautiful.' To achieve normative femininity, one needs to use various ways, e.g. skincare products, laser therapy, to eradicate 'imperfections' to obtain perfect smooth skin. The model cherishes and flaunts such features of her body as she thinks that these markings of the body show how life experience and daily habits inscript her bodies, i.e. what

¹⁵⁵ Mayhew, *Naked*.

¹⁵⁶ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity, Identity and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 33.

makes her human. For some models, if an artist has to achieve depth in his work, he needs to observe the person in detail to understand how life shapes him/her. Artworks idealizing women like advertisements may look nice, but they simply lack sophistication.

Conclusion

Life modeling in Hong Kong nowadays provides a great potential for women to confront their powerlessness facing dominant ideology of feminine beauty. By actively displaying their naked bodies and inviting artists to gaze at them, many models slowly get over their bodily dissatisfaction in their everyday life. This shows that the power of initiating a welcoming and accepting gaze by artists in a safe setting relieves the insecurity, or welcomes the appreciation, of female models towards their bodies. Yet, most models understand that the studio is different from everyday life and not all models easily adopt a more empowering view towards their bodies outside the studio. While models like Kitty, Chu, Rosemary, Sandy and Florence show an apparent improvement of their body image, the journey of Yan is more arduous. More than half of the models talk about the experience of working as in the studio as gradually leading to more positive feelings of their bodies. Yan repeatedly recalls her attempt to get over negative comments on her slightly fat body with intermittent success. Rather than seeing Yan as not tough enough, her difficulty in generating a coherently positive body image reflects how entrenched hegemonic beauty norm leads to the greater hardship of bigger women regarding their body image.

Chapter 3

MANAGING SEXUALITY AND MAINTAINING MODESTY

Sexuality in life modeling is a dubious and complicated issue. Sexual liaisons between artists and models were commonplace throughout history and romanticized in literature, and life models were stereotyped as ‘loose’ women.¹⁵⁷ Nevertheless, formal art history on the female nude painstakingly tries to separate sexuality from art.

Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Aesthetic Judgment* is fundamental in the formation of European aesthetics and art practice. Its influence can be seen in the attitude of artists towards life models. For Kant, aesthetic judgment itself should be disinterested. The observer’s desires and ambitions should be put aside in the act of pure contemplation. One has to distinguish sensory from contemplative pleasures in order to appreciate beauty.¹⁵⁸ Therefore, an artist has to observe the model in a disinterested way without being ‘disrupted’ by sexual desire for the naked body. The usual practice of objective seeing in the studio requires artists to detach from their desires and identification with the model in order to achieve aesthetic judgment of the nude. The management of sexuality of life models, thus, becomes a thought-provoking issue.

As mentioned, Kenneth Clark endorses the nude and disdains the naked in order to prevent the sexual tones of the naked female body from contaminating the female nude.¹⁵⁹ Nead mentions the difficulty Clark encounters when dealing with the problem of sexuality. Clark does not deny sexuality totally. Instead, he mentions an ambiguous term, the ‘erotic’, an ‘artistically sexual’ yet not pornographic word.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ Kathleen Rooney, *Live nude girl: my life as an object*, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2008)

¹⁵⁸ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality*, (London: Routledge, 1992), 24.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

If the transmutation of sexual drives into artistic creation is impossible, then the nude also presents the risk of too much sex – too much, that is, for art. The triumph of a 'successful' representation of the nude is the control of this potential risk.¹⁶¹

As we read further, Clark does not really deny the sexuality of the female nude in art. Rather, heterosexual desire of the male artist projected on the female body is the normative desire, if not the necessary desire, of the formation of art. When discussing the nude, Clark is frequently assuming a female nude and a male viewer.¹⁶² The category of the female nude loses its specificity and takes on the symbolic importance of the high-art tradition of 'the nude.' When the female nude becomes simply 'the nude,' the male artist and connoisseur become the legitimized creator and consumer of the female body.¹⁶³ When Clark refers to the work of Rubens and Renoir, Clark alludes to the universal sexual 'instincts' which contribute to their great paintings.¹⁶⁴ 'The universal instinct' is actually referred to the heterosexual desire of the male, heterosexual connoisseur.

Art educator Deanna Petherbridge discusses the problem of sexuality in the life class. For her, the nude body in the life class is neither 'natural' nor neutral' but the site of very complex constructions of meaning.¹⁶⁵ However, the nude body is often treated *as if* it is neutral to avoid sexuality from undermining the legitimacy of nudity in the studio. Instead of critically engaging with naked bodies by discussing sexuality among artists, and between artists and models, most artists choose to ignore the issue

¹⁶¹ Nead, *Art*, 13.

¹⁶² Nead, *Art*, 13.

¹⁶³ Nead, *Art*, 13.

¹⁶⁴ Nead, *Art*, 13.

¹⁶⁵ Deanna Petherbridge, "Drawing backwards into the future: Formulating an agenda," in *Issues in Art and Education: Aspects of the Fine Art Curriculum*, ed. Paul Hetherington, (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 58.

of sexuality altogether and expect models to do the same. Mechanisms of control were developed to minimize disruptive effects during the life drawing class, for example, the control of the gaze of artists on the model's body.¹⁶⁶ 'Disruptive effects' are moments when naked bodies are reminded as naked bodies, instead of material forms to be studied, and threaten to transgress the formality of a 'decent' class. An interesting example is the art policy on nude models by a Christian college to solve the dilemma of the necessity to study the human body and the potential sexual feelings elicited by the naked body during the lesson. The solution to the problem of sexuality is to 'elevate the nude figure as a metaphor' rather than treating them as bodies of real people and 'not to reduce ourselves to the naked body.'¹⁶⁷ This attitude is commonplace in studios and art academies in Hong Kong. As pornographic business disguised as 'drawing schools', which showed women posing in indecent manners to entertain the audiences, was popular in the 1950s, artists were very determined to draw a line from anything sexual throughout the history of life drawing in Hong Kong.¹⁶⁸

The deliberate neglect of sexuality successfully leads to the smooth running of the life class. However, 'elevating the nude figure as a metaphor' is an unnatural way of seeing which suppresses feelings of the viewer facing real naked bodies. Within this modality of observation, the paradoxical projection of objectivity upon naked living human beings serves to reinforce the emphasis of rigorous observation as profoundly decorporealised.¹⁶⁹ Partially successful objective seeing desexualizes and objectifies models. While models assert themselves as subjects through articulating their reflection on the idealized female body, they, at the same time, often engage in

¹⁶⁶ Clinton J. Jesser and Louis Donovan, "Nudity in the Art Training Process: A Thesis with Reference to a Pilot Study," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 10(1969): 361.

¹⁶⁷ Policy on art models, Gordon College, http://www.gordon.edu/academics/art_nudemodels

¹⁶⁸ Chong, *Painting*, 131-132.

¹⁶⁹ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 196.

desexualization and objectification of their bodies to comply with the need to ensure the legitimacy of nudity in the studio and avoid being seen sexually. Mayhew argues that the movements of models between the status of subject and object suggest that the status of 'subject' is not a fixed position, but a series of continual movements, performances and exchanges among them to regulate and contest the fragility of their ontological experience.¹⁷⁰ As nakedness is the most potent visual sign that a body is available for sexual encounter with another body, models feel the need to discipline their bodies to minimize being seen as sexually available. Models who identify with objective seeing to a larger extent and/or are more concerned with distancing themselves from sex work discipline their bodies more rigidly to comply with the desexualized standard of objective seeing.

Non-sexual poses

Although models are encouraged to explore their poses, sexual poses are generally avoided. Again, this is not an absolute norm. Models avoid overtly sexual poses for fear of considered as 'cheap,' i.e. like a porn star, by artists. For some models, this is considered as a measure to preserve respectable femininity. They think that they are still decent and respectable women even if they get naked, as they employ strategies to avoid themselves being seen as erotic objects. Besides, they are also concerned about the legitimacy of nudity in the studio. They guess that artists may not like sexual poses and prevent doing them. An artist told me that when he started learning figure drawing, he was startled to see a female model spreading her legs wide in front of him. Yet, he did not condemn the model for doing this. Instead, he reflected on his acceptance of poses and confirmed that legs spreading wide could be a legitimate pose for studying art. The management of sexuality is often unstable due to different

¹⁷⁰ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 197.

perception of artists, artist-model relationship, and how models think about the issue. It is generally stricter in art academies but not necessarily.

Sexual poses include spreading one's legs 'too wide' and touching the genitals while posing, or when two models touch each other sexually. However, the definition of sexual poses can be vague at times. For example, spreading legs wide is not sexual by showing how flexible the model's body is. A sexual pose is described by some models as 'poses seen in Playboy magazine.' A porn star may not spread her legs wide or touch her genitals, but her pose can be considered as erotic, depending on her gaze, the props, the words describing her body, lighting, etc. Here, sexual poses of a female model can be loosely defined as poses flaunting female sexuality and arousing sexual desire of the seer. Instead of regarding this as an oppression of their sexuality, many models believe that disciplining their bodies to minimize sexuality is a way to be comfortable with their performance. Posing sexually is a transgression of modest femininity which may cause an identity crisis in the life model. The possibility of being considered as a stripper and the stigma attached may not be easy to bear. This perfectly fits in with the agenda of artists who aim at downplaying sexuality to maintain the legitimacy of the studio. For Chu, models who make sexual poses have little dignity as they are willing to see themselves, and to be seen, as sexual objects. Among models I interviewed, she is the one who agrees with the principle of objective seeing most. Artists who overstep objective seeing and affiliate sexual feelings with the model are unacceptable even when models cannot notice it. I showed her my drawing of a pose with two models lying down and crossing their legs with each other. The pose was one of the poses during a lesson which students who major in Creative Media participated. It was highly appreciated by the teacher and students, yet Chu thought that it was too sexual and disdained it. This shows that the meaning of a sexual pose is entirely subjective and depends on the opinions of individual artists.

They do this to please the artists... They models who cross their legs with each other have no baseline at all... If you are an artist, you know what pose you like. You cannot give him any bad thoughts. You don't know what men are thinking when they are drawing. Sexual fantasy is already rape.

For Chu, a model is partly responsible for minimizing the sexual desire of the (male) artist by avoiding sexual poses. Her training as an artist helps her define what sexual poses are. Although famous artists like Picasso and Klimt have also drawn erotic nudes, showing women masturbating or doing other sexually provocative poses, mainstream art training of drawing the nude does not teach much about these drawings nor endorse erotic nudes. LP artists have more classical aesthetics towards the pose of models. They do not consider spreading legs wide or touching the genital as aesthetic as they are not graceful and mimic pornography too much. Such tendency shows that modest femininity is more appropriate for those artists in drawing the female nude. For them, this is the line between pornography and high art. Chu's training in Realist art and classical aesthetics helps to form power/knowledge on appropriate femininity in art. She endorses her knowledge and experience in art training through doing traditional graceful and non-sexual poses. This further reproduces the power/knowledge of classical aesthetics of feminine beauty.

She strongly defends objective seeing through condemning eroticizing and objectifying gaze of the artist. For her, doing a sexual pose makes her a sex object. A pose which incites sexual fantasy is unacceptable. She embraces traditional femininity by emphasizing the responsibility of the woman to discipline her body in order to control the sexual urge of men. It is worth exploring that she links sexual fantasy with rape immediately. According to Sutton, the power and vulnerability of women's sexualized bodies give men an excuse to justify their violence against women. A woman with little clothing or asserts her sexuality may be considered as immoral and deserves to be

raped.¹⁷¹ Although she works hard to maintain the legitimacy of the studio, she does not deny that artists with sexual intentions may come in and break the legitimacy. Her effort to desexualize her naked body and her connection of sexual fantasy and rape can be seen as a fear of the slippage from nakedness to violence, therefore a need to defend herself from such threat.

Avoiding spreading legs wide can be seen as an act of a model to gain control of her body. Joyce said,

Some poses do not sound sexual but look sexual when being drawn. That's funny. Those artists are middle-aged people, with men and women. I think it's difficult to do erotic poses. They like decent things, I think. They do not ask me to spread my legs. They don't want to see my genital probably. But they may ask me to spread my legs, hug the chair and face them with my back. I did once or twice. Sometimes I refused. I said, 'I don't like to spread my legs.' But it did not occur often.

Spreading her legs wide exposes the model's genital clearly and embarrasses her. A majority of people doing life drawing in private studios in Hong Kong are middle-class people. Although life drawing may not be a luxurious hobby, basic requirements of life drawing often make it difficult for working class people to take part in. Artists need to rent a place, share costs of employing a model, buy utensils and have leisure time for drawing. Their middle-class background may be a reason for their general discomfort with seeing the genital 'too clearly' and facing overt sexuality. Hong Kong people without any training of drawing or appreciating the

¹⁷¹ Barbara Sutton, "Naked Protest: Memories of Bodies and Resistance at the World Social Forum," *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 8(2007): 145.

female nude are more likely to see models as merely naked women, whose existence are mainly to satisfy the gaze and desire of viewers. When the first body painting event was held in Sheung Wan Civic Centre in Hong Kong in 2003, it welcomed everybody. Comers were mainly middle-aged men living nearby. Florence told me with disgust and anger that they did not hide their intention to see naked girls. They commented on the body figures and breasts loudly and explicitly, and some even brought telescopes to look at body parts of models more clearly. As overtly sexual seeing easily leads to the humiliation of models, identifying with objective seeing and disciplining their bodies according to this objective reduce the insecurity of models when they are naked.

Apart from the medical setting, a woman spreading her legs wide in the public connotes that she is sexually open and loose. A life model who is concerned with disconnecting life modeling from sexuality avoids such poses. Although a female model is happy to pose naked, she may think that some parts of her body are more private and does not wish to be seen by others. If a genital (or other places considered by the model as very sexual) is closely examined, some models feel that the interaction becomes sexual rather than artistic.

Mandy said,

There are some poses I don't like. Once I lied down, he saw my anus clearly as he drew as he sat very close to me. I felt slightly uncomfortable. Perhaps it had a strong sexual tone. As he was drawing me, I felt like being penetrated. It may have to do with the gender of the artist. If he is a male, the sexual tone is stronger. But I forgot the artist's gender. When he draws poses, I don't think such poses are beautiful. Anus from different angles.

A popular tendency of female models to avoid spreading their legs has to do with feminine comportment. Iris Marion Young found that women did not use their bodies as freely as men when they performed a task. Women are afraid of extending their bodies as widely as men do. Women generally are not as open with their bodies as men in their gait and stride. Women still tend to sit with their legs relatively close together regardless of what they wear.¹⁷² It also has to do with the social convention for a woman to be modest and protect her genitals upon from being gazed and sexually harassed.

Ambiguity in art makes a sexual pose difficult to be defined. A drawing can be disdained as erotic and not artistic enough when it was first exhibited but upheld as a masterpiece of fine arts years later. The nude paintings of Edouard Manet and Gustave Courbet stirred immense controversy due to their sexual explicitness during their times but are considered as canons nowadays. The 'Origin of the World' by Courbet is a close-up view of the genital and abdomen of a naked woman, lying on a bed with legs spread. It was scandalous when exhibited but it has become one of the most famous paintings in modern art. Facing such ambiguity, it is not surprising that artists in Hong Kong have different attitudes towards sexual poses due to their training background and disposition. There is actually room for adventurous models to experiment and play with sexuality. A radio programme in RTHK interviewed a few female life models in Hong Kong, and one model stated that she was curious how the artists would respond if she posed like a porn star with a lewd gaze. Tracy, an art student and a model, appreciated a model during her drawing lesson for her bravery. She posed like a sexy girl on the cover of a porn magazine confidently and the scene shocked and amused her.

Florence recalled excitedly a very sexual performance of life modeling with her artist friend. This is an interesting and unusual case where sexuality and professionalism do not

¹⁷² Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing like a girl" and other Essays*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 42.

contradict. Sexy poses are not always frowned upon by artists. Erotic poses are considered as unreasonable requests in Register of Artists' Models (RAM) in Britain which models can refuse.¹⁷³ Yet, if both parties agree to it, artists can draw erotic poses without being blacklisted by RAM. Hong Kong does not have a formal organization to regulate the behavior of artists and models. Drawing unconventional or sexual pose is agreed upon informally by artists and models who are friendly to each other.

Only Ka Hing asked me to do erotic poses. Sex poses. Others are non-sexual. I don't mean that he is not 'pure.' He has a different taste. You don't know if you can do it or not if you don't try. I express myself freely. I pretended that I was a porn star who was going to have an orgasm. I cried loud when I was modeling. *I considered myself as acting. This is not me.* 'Oh... so comfortable...' I groaned. I won't do this in other places. I do average model poses.

She performed very erotically by acting like a woman enjoying sex. It first started when an artist wanted to draw something unusual and sexual. As they have known each other for years, she agreed to pose sexually. As she dubbed adult films before, she groaned and moaned 'like a porn star' while posing. This was very rare in life modeling. She transgresses the norm of managing sexuality by the disruptive performance. Yet, she upheld that it was her professionalism which helped her performance, rather than her sexuality. She recalled her experience of dubbing adult films which helped her 'get into the role.' The incident shows that how models see objective seeing in life modeling influences how they manage their sexuality. She held an ambivalent view towards objective seeing, considering this ensured the safe distance between artists and models.

¹⁷³ RAM Guidelines on selection of life models, <http://www.modelreg.co.uk/4.htm>

But sexual seeing 'once in a while' was acceptable if it contributed to the creation of the artist and she was sure that artist-model relationship would not be sexual.

She did such performance as she agreed with her artist friend that sexual elements were able to stimulate creativity of the artist. At the same time, she stated clearly that her relationship with the artist did not become sexual because of this. For her, she is interacting with the artist theatrically rather than sexually. This incident is not exactly an exploration of her sexuality. She detaches herself from the porn star by emphasizing the acting. She is performing as a porn star, but she is not a porn star. Her daring performance not only upsets life modeling as generally non-sexual, but also disrupts her strong identity and gender performance as a sexually conservative woman. At the same time, it strangely confirms it by insisting that she is acting and 'not her.' This is very paradoxical as she avoids the stigma of being sexually expressive by stressing her professional performance while enjoying acting sexually.

Dressing and Undressing

Dressing and undressing privately is the most common way for models to maintain modesty. As undressing reminds people of eroticism and the model's body as a social/sexual body, it is usually done in the toilet. Once, a male model undressed in front of the students in the art class. The male professor in an art school was unhappy about this and stopped using him afterwards. When the model is fully unclothed, she usually comes out with a piece of towel or cloth and takes it off when she starts to work. When the model is having a break, she usually puts on a piece of cloth to cover herself. Some artists think that models who get changed in the public and do not cover up during breaks are unprofessional and lead to embarrassment. Such belief shows that artists generally have a great difficulty to see models as objects to be drawn (as promised by objective seeing) and real people at the same time. They avoid

thinking about the sexuality issue by expecting models to desexualize themselves and prevent 'exposing' themselves as social beings who need to dress and undress.

The emphasis on modesty by models shows that many of them agree with the importance of maintaining the legitimacy of nudity in the studio. Models actually understand that objective seeing of artists is not natural and has to be maintained through disciplinary acts of models. Through regulating their dressing and undressing behavior, they can avoid the voyeuristic gaze of the artist. The gaze of the artist can be controlled to be as professional as possible. It is professional as long as it is the 'necessary gaze' required to study the naked form, but not anything else. It also signals the moment of performance: when I am naked, I am performing. While I am resting or changing clothes, I am not.

The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life by Goffman provides a good explanation of why models emphasize privacy so much, and how they create the space for privacy.¹⁷⁴ Using his theory, the model and the artists can be considered as the performer and the audience respectively, and modeling is a performance. The ideas of front stage and backstage are useful for understanding how models create the legitimacy of nudity. If the stage is the front stage, the toilet or the place where they get changed is the backstage. It is the place where the performer can reliably expect that no member of the audience will intrude.¹⁷⁵ Not all models insist on getting changed in the backstage but most of them do. The separation of the front stage from the backstage ensures that the performance in the front stage will not be interrupted by sexual meanings of the undressing female body. Chu said,

¹⁷⁴ Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, (London, Overlook Press: 1973)

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 113.

I am a model, but I am not a stripper. I don't feel that I have to change clothes in front of you. What do you think when you see me undress? ... When men draw, you don't know what they are thinking about. Sexual fantasy is already rape.

She differentiates herself from a stripper, whose undressing is a deliberate act to stimulate sexual excitement of the audience. Dominant representations of women's unclothed bodies – particularly those conforming to dominant standards of beauty, often display women as objects catering to male sexual desire.¹⁷⁶ To reconfigure nakedness on their terms, some life models are conscious of distancing her naked body from anything with a sexual connotation. For her, the sexual element in modeling should be eliminated, or at least minimized. Undressing in the private aims at controlling the sexuality of the artists, not hers. When I said, 'you cannot control what they are thinking. Even you don't get changed in front of others, they may fantasize about you too.' She replied that although it might be the case, she should avoid doing anything which might trigger sexual feelings. She felt sexually harassed if artists had sexual fantasy towards her even if it was unspoken and hidden.

For Kitty, artists have a responsibility to provide a place for models to undress. This shows a respect for the privacy of models. Here, the model sees the maintenance of modesty not as an act to fulfill the artists' demand or regulate her femininity, but the need for dignity by demanding a private place to get well prepared.

A very important thing is to provide a place for models to get changed. You cannot expect the model to undress suddenly in front of you. I always think that the artist's place may not have a specific area for models to get

¹⁷⁶ Sut Jhally, "Advertising, Gender and Sex: What's wrong with a little objectification," *The Spectacle of Accumulation: Essays in Culture, Media and Politics*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2006), 163-175.

changed, but they still have to find it. 'There is a toilet. There is a room. Others are not allowed to get inside.'... I always wear a dress when I model. If there is no place to get changed, I will put off my long dress until it reaches the shoulder, and undress under the dress. *I think my responsibility is to put my clothes off, pose and let your draw, but I have no responsibility to undress in front of you. You can say, why do I calculate so much? But for me this is about respect of my body.*

Models feel the need to get changed in the backstage not because they are told to, but consider this as something personal. Rosemary said,

Taking on and off my clothes is a personal thing. It depends on where and when. When I am working, I need to show my body. When I am not working, I don't need to.

With/without clothes signifies a fine line between working and non-working for her. Undressing is private, but posing is public. 'Not-working' means before and after work, and during breaks.

Backstage does not necessarily have to be a definite space behind the front stage. If it is difficult or inconvenient to create a backstage, the model can make one under her dress. The aim is the same: to avoid artists seeing them undress.

Melody said,

When I get changed, I go into the toilet. Before I start, I go to the toilet too. Sometimes I even use the tampon. It is because there is secretion from my

vagina when I am working. I don't want to make the place dirty. This is something you need to do in the toilet. You cannot do it in front of them.

For some models, the regulation of sexuality through dressing during non-working time means claiming the body as herself and her responsibility to protect it. In our society, whether a woman has a respectable femininity depends on how well she protects her body from erotic gaze. Wavering their breasts when walking is considered too sexual, and one should avoid this by dressing during breaks. Although aesthetics regarding the female body are loosened to a considerable extent, ideals of appropriate femininity are more ingrained in the minds of artists and models. A modest femininity means a woman who is not 'easy' about her body and sexuality. A tendency of female models not to move around naked and accentuate their wavering breasts is very similar to the policy of nudist camps which prohibits dancing in the nude. It is considered as immodest, as the act accentuates certain body parts and is contradictory to the aim of the nudist camp to separate nudity and sexuality.¹⁷⁷

You should rest when you break. You cannot wear nothing during breaks. This is so ugly. Some studios were all men. My breasts waver as I move if I don't cover it. I need to respect myself... I will put it off when I pose, but I will cover myself when I break. I respect my job, I respect myself. My body is mine. *I have to protect myself.*

As mentioned, a woman is often reminded of the need to protect herself from danger especially in a society when female nakedness or sexiness 'deserves' male

¹⁷⁷ Martin Weinberg, "Sexual Modesty, Social Meanings, and the Nudist Camp," *Social Problems*, 12(1965): 316.

violence. Even if male artists in the studio behave decently, the model is aware of them as sexual beings who are well trained enough to downplay their sexual feelings in the studio. Her awareness to protect herself reflects that models do not see the studio as a place where objective seeing perfectly operates and sexuality is naturally nonexistent. Without bodily discipline of models, they are unachievable.

Models usually, but not necessarily, follow this unwritten conduct. Some of them contend that rituals of dressing and undressing stem from the fact that artists do not reflect on their attitude towards naked bodies and expect models to regulate their bodies instead. When models are familiar with the artists, some of them loosen the 'pretentious' ritual of undressing and covering up during breaks. Sometimes a nearby toilet or changing place is unavailable or inconvenient. Occasionally, the artist states that he/she does not care about whether the model undresses in secret or not.

Sandy is one of the few models who does not mind undressing in front of others. She believes that artists need to face the living bodies of models instead of burying their heads in the sand by assuming models to *act as* desexualized and decorporealized objects.

I don't really hide myself when I dress and undress. I did so a long time ago when I started to be a model. Usually they will give you a place to get changed, then get out and be ready. *The most important thing is to get over it.* I get over how they look at my body for the first time. If they are used to looking at naked bodies, it would be fine... We rarely look at the bodies of others directly. You know that the body is nothing special after looking at them for a few minutes. So it is not a problem to undress and dress in front of them... *I expect that artists cope with naked bodies maturely, so I don't need to worry too much*

Here, the model thinks that the responsibility of the management of sexuality should be on the artist. If undressing in the public makes the artist uncomfortable, it is because the artists do not cope with naked bodies maturely enough. Models learn about undressing in private when they begin working in the field. Some artists tell them that this is the norm although artists may not care about it, or when models get to know about modeling from Simon. This is flexibly adapted by artists and/or models occasionally.

Mandy pushes the critique of artists regarding their attitude towards nudity and sexuality further. She argues that latent sexuality of the body is something to be played with. Her description of the shy art teacher in the classroom shows that some artists attempt to treat models as 'still lives' without success. She is determined to teach him a lesson on how to treat naked bodies naturally. She said,

When I am having a break, I may not wear anything. I may move. The teacher is so uncomfortable. He dares not look at me. I think this is so funny. If I play a trick on him, walking towards him naked and pat his shoulder, he will be scared. It depends. Usually, the break is very short. It takes so much effort to dress and undress. The most important thing is to feel comfortable. If I feel nothing, I think they feel the same. Quite funny. I educated them through how I treat my body. A naked body can act very naturally. It's nothing. *You can have sexual fantasies towards the naked body.* It's OK for you to see me naked when I am resting.

By loosening the maintenance of modesty, Mandy attempts to open a dialogue with artists on how to be comfortable with nudity. She does not think that desexualization of her body is always necessary as she accepts artists to have sexual fantasies towards her body. For some models, their nudity does not only serve the

practical need of the drawing lesson, but also a kind of sexual education. As Hong Kong society shows a paradoxical attitude of fetishizing sexy bodies of women while being neurotic about public nudity, some models feel that the presence of a brave model working naked teaches people to feel comfortable about naked bodies. That is why Mandy believes that her comfortable attitude towards her naked body in the studio can serve as a role model about how artists treat models' bodies. Models who are critical of objective seeing and artists' inability to critically engage with naked bodies are more likely to loosen their bodily discipline regarding sexuality and modesty. The critique of Petherbridge on the artists' lack of reflection on nudity in the studio is seen in models' comments on artists. Joyce talked about the consequence of artists who failed to reflect on the sexual issue. Models are seen as objects rather than human beings, and artists cannot draw the sexual parts of models well.

This is why I say I am a bowl... The gaze of artists is not integral but focused on fragmented body parts. That's so strange... I think that they intend to avoid sexuality and don't treat the model as a human body. They dare not look at my nipples from the beginning... The shape of the nipples becomes very strange in their drawings. Not real. Not human. I think they deliberately avoid my nipples. They dare not look at them for a long time as they draw. They think they know how to draw them and don't look at them clearly. The nipples become very ugly. The meaning of drawing from a model is lost. What a pity.

Fine arts curriculum is in need of training artists to think of life drawing, nude body and the sexuality problem critically. When discussing feminist perspectives in fine arts education, Griselda Pollock lamented productivism in the prevailing

ideology of studio teaching. 'Just keep working, go on producing, stick with the old artisanal model.'¹⁷⁸ The problem of productivism can be seen in the opinion of Kitty on artists.

They never think about what drawing means. They neither think about why they draw people nor their relationship with the person being drawn. They are so mechanical. They aim at training themselves to be accurate drawing machines. What is the point of drawing then?

The function of sex education by models is more apparent when models are working for young art students who may have little chance to see a naked body. The model may feel the nervousness of students before she takes off her clothes. During breaks, the model may grasp the chance to talk with students. For example, a female student in the Baptist University praised me for my bravery to get naked in front of a whole class. Before that lesson, she imagined that only old women would do such an embarrassing job as they were in need of money. In reality, artists told me that they had never seen a female life model aged over 60. She then admired my 'great body' and said that she wanted to have a body figure like me. I replied that everybody could look beautiful during modeling as long as one was confident about his/her body.

Managing Menstrual Fluids

The art practice of drawing the nude has to do with the control of biological matter of the female body. Biological matter of the female body is managed whether in representation or in everyday life. Quoting Mary Douglas, Nead states how dirt and

¹⁷⁸ Griselda Pollock, "Feminist perspectives in fine arts education," in *Issues in Art and Education: Aspects of the Fine Art Curriculum*, ed. Paul Hetherington, (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 24.

disorder are related, and how rituals of cleansing and purification are used to control the threat. Hygiene implies order while dirt implies a transgression of order. The margins and edges of categories critical in the construction of symbolic meaning, pose a threat to the order.¹⁷⁹ For her, the female body in western culture is considered as lacking containment and releasing filth and pollution from its faltering outlines and broken surface. Classical forms of art regulate the female body by containing it and temporarily repairing the orifices and tears. The process is never complete, however. The margins are dangerous and have to be regulated in art.¹⁸⁰ According to Douglas' model, bodily transgression is also an image of social deviation. Art aims to seal orifices and to prevent marginal matter from transgressing the boundary dividing the inside of the body and the outside, the self from the space of the other through the forms, conventions and poses of art.¹⁸¹

In life modeling, the 'marginal matter' of the life model's body is also sealed for the reason of modesty. Objective seeing is not compatible with the leaky bodies of women. Bodily self-management has to be complete and constant that all individuals are vulnerable to moments of stress when competence breaks down.¹⁸² Therefore, the leaking of menstrual blood or the fear of it often leads to stress by models. Contemporary culture associates menstrual blood with injury and the wound and indicates an out of control status.¹⁸³ A woman who is unable to manage her bodily fluids well is suspected to have a questionable femininity. Rosengarten maintains that contemporary Western notions of humanness produce and negate the viability of the menstrual female body. Self-will and self-control signal the capacity for reason in

¹⁷⁹ Nead, *Art*, 6.

¹⁸⁰ Nead, *Art*, 7.

¹⁸¹ Nead, *Art*, 7.

¹⁸² Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity, Identity and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 57.

¹⁸³ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 205.

Western liberal individualism. An autonomous person has to be self-directed and self-controlled. It is because the categorization of the embodied sexed individual is related to the conceptualization of a border, a surface that separates inner from outer and one individual from another.¹⁸⁴ Yet, remarks by models show that the menstruating body of the model is less a taboo in the studio than the everyday world. The leaking of menstrual blood may lead to self blame, but it is never blamed by artists. While objective seeing is the assumed norm, many artists understand that models' bodies are also living bodies. Objective seeing is an ideal which can be never totally achieved.

A menstruating model often uses the tampon in the toilet, tries to put the string into the vagina and checks if there is any leaking blood before she works and during breaks. Life models often think of ways to manage her vaginal and menstrual fluids well. As the breakdown of bodily self-management leads to the threatening of ontological security, models often engage in incessant bodily discipline.¹⁸⁵

Some models refuse to work during menstruation. However, models still work during menstruation when artists book her for a few weeks successively, or when it comes irregularly. Many models talk about the worries of leaking blood during menstruation. They think of ways to avoid this from happening and tell about their 'scary' stories of blood leaking during modeling.

Chu said,

When I am menstruating, I use tampons. (she whispered), but it has a chance of leaking. I feel a lot of pressure...

Rosemary said,

¹⁸⁴ Marsha Rosengarten, "Thinking Menstrual Blood," *Australian Feminist Studies*, 13(2000): 99

¹⁸⁵ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity, Identity and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 57.

I use tampon during menstruation. *Once I was careless and it leaked, and I covered it up with a piece of cloth. I always had tissue paper nearby. The place looked the same when it was finished modeling. Nobody could see it. A taboo... It looks very apparent. I don't want others see it. It feels dirty.*

Menstrual blood should be kept excluded from view in all but the most intimate of places.¹⁸⁶ Rosemary thinks that she does not control her body well enough and blames herself as careless. A woman's integrity as a subject is potentially at risk because of the 'the uncontrollable waste' of menstrual blood.¹⁸⁷ She thinks that the blood is dirty and feels relieved that the blood is concealed with a piece of cloth. For Mary Douglas, nothing is dirty in itself. Dirt is the by-product of a systematic ordering and classification of matter, in so far as ordering involves rejecting inappropriate elements.¹⁸⁸ Menstrual blood is considered as dirty as it is out of place.¹⁸⁹ The leaking of menstrual blood uncovers the female model as a flesh-and-blood human. Menstrual blood, thus, becomes something out of place in the art studio.

Yan said,

When I am menstruating, I usually don't work. But I also use tampons. I don't think it's a problem. But a tampon has a string. Is it very embarrassed when they see it? They know something which is not supposed to be known...I will pose in ways which people cannot see the string. There must be a way. Some people are very superstitious... artists are not superstitious

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 91.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 102.

¹⁸⁸ Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: an Analysis of the concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, (London: Ark, 1984), 35

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 40.

usually. Some think that seeing feminine products leads to bad luck. There are still such people... You don't know how they feel as there are so many of them. It is not good if I make them uncomfortable or embarrassed. I am worried but I won't refuse jobs because of this. You don't know when it will come...But you have to use tampon as you will make the place dirty.

If menstruation is inevitable, the model needs to discipline her body by using the tampon while hiding the string, so that the menstruating body looks invisible.

Although models discipline their bodies to uphold the taboo of menstrual blood as a taboo, artists are generally considerate on the issue of menstruation. Taboos about menstruation are not equally strong in all circumstances and cultures, and saying that such taboos oppress women to the same extent are inadequate.¹⁹⁰ Artists are fairly calm and do not blame a model for being careless when she leaks blood. Although artists face a difficulty to critically engage with the sexuality issue, they hold an easier attitude towards menstruation, perhaps of its greater relation with biology than sexuality. Leaking blood may not be a mistake made by the model. It is just naturally happening. Chu talked about two incidents of leaking blood during modeling.

Once I posed for three artists. They were all nice men. I worked in a studio behind his company. I was menstruating. The blood leaked and made the sofa dirty. But they were very nice and didn't blame me. He just asked his domestic helper to clean the sofa cover. There was another time, when the blood leaked on the table. I used my cushion to wipe the blood. I was so

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Buckley and Alma Gottlieb, eds. *Blood Magic: the Anthropology of Menstruation*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1988), 14.

afraid that other people would see it. When I had menopause, the bloody cushion became a memory of my menstruating times.

Chu showed a conflicting attitude regarding the leakage of menstrual blood. It is embarrassing and at the same time, memorable. It is embarrassing as she feels out of control. It is memorable as it reminds her of her menstruating youth. The stained cushion becomes less an object of taboo than an object reminding her reproductive femininity in the past and signaling her post menopause stage. In the art studio, artists are trained to treat public nudity as if nothing special has happened. Such environment leads to the greater acceptance of the leakage of menstrual blood than the everyday world.¹⁹¹ Artists may express their shock explicitly through their facial expression if a woman leaks menstrual blood on the street. Yet, they act as if nothing has happened when they see the 'failure' of bodily discipline in order to save the face of models. The calm response of artists facing menstrual blood makes the model feel that her menstruating body is more accepted than it is in everyday life. If a model leaks menstrual blood in the street, she has a greater chance of being ridiculed by the passerby. Florence's account of the leaking blood reflects something similar.

I don't work as a model when I am menstruating. I know when it comes. There is a special case. I worked when I was menstruating in the Art Centre. I knew it was coming.... It came when I posed. I didn't feel embarrassed. Students were not startled. I said sorry, excuse me, covered myself with a towel and went to the toilet. I wore my underpants and kept on modeling. I put a napkin inside. This is biological. I don't feel anything special. This is normal. How can I know when it comes? You know, girl. It

¹⁹¹ Philips, *Modeling*, 45.

happened once. You can say leaking blood is an interesting incident (趣事) during my 11, 12 years of modeling. *I am very devoted as I work, I am detached from myself as Florence.* I am a model. I don't feel embarrassed. *But when I dressed and went back, I felt quite embarrassed when I was on the bus. But I wouldn't be embarrassed because of that at that moment.*

Detaching from herself as Florence makes her less embarrassed about the leaking menstrual blood in the studio. When she said 'I am a model,' she intended to depersonalize herself to become 'the model' in the studio. Throughout the interviews, models show an oscillation between subjects and objects. While stressing how their body figures and posing inspire artists, they refer themselves as unique and creative subjects. When models talk about their nakedness and silent pain in the studio, some of them claim that they 'forget' themselves as individuals and become 'the models.' One model with theatrical training even referred to his status in the studio as 'neutral.' It is a term in theatrical training which trains an actor to forget his bodily habits, personal or cultural history temporarily to prepare him to get into various roles on stage.¹⁹² For her, the incident of leaking blood is something unusual rather than intolerable. The culture of the art studio of avoiding comments on the model's body makes her less embarrassed when she leaks blood. This makes her accept of her leaking body more when she is working.

Joyce openly declares her menstruating body to others to get a better treatment.

Men... care more about my body. For example, they ask whether I am tired or not during menstruation...Women artists are less caring. They

¹⁹² Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, (London: N. Hern Books, 2001), 32-34.

are not happy when I am tired or cannot do a wide range of poses when I am menstruating. They think that being a model is easy... I hate it... I work when I am menstruating. I use tampons usually and I am used to it. I tell artists that I am menstruating for sure. I will tell them during my first three days of menstruation. I will be more tired. I may work for a shorter time. Break every 20 minutes. Menstruation is something I can use to bargain with them as I am very tired. I am not very familiar with them. But it's quite good that they understand it. I don't feel embarrassed to tell them. They already have wives and kids. Their daughters are as old as me. If they are not considerate when I tell them my request, they lose face.

Her account of artists shows that artists can never reduce models into objects completely. Some artists are emotionally sensitive to the feelings and poses of models, and how this influences the performance of models will be elaborated further. She makes use of the stereotypes of menstruating women as tired and weak to ask for a better treatment. In the art studio, menstruation is, strangely, a more openly discussed topic in a heterosexual setting than the everyday life, as it influences the work of the model directly. For example, artists allow models who do not like to wear tampons to wear underpants instead. Models have to tell artists in advanced to make them prepared.

Mandy said,

I will tell them when I am menstruating. Sometimes they book a few times. I may be menstruating during one of the few times. They can say, 'you may

wear the underpants.' I don't like tampons so I don't use them. I will remind them that they cannot draw my bottom.

Models also expect artists to be more acceptable of their bodies as menstruating bodies. Yan continued with the talk about menstruation. Despite worrying about the artists' response when they find a model menstruating, she feels that they should not treat it as a taboo.

It's ok even they see the string of the tampon. It's something biological about a girl, several days a month is not very short. A normal person should know it and shouldn't mind. I will tell myself, I don't mind.

Conclusion

The need to maintain legitimacy of nudity in the studio by artists coincides with models' will to avoid being seen sexually. The voluntary regulation of sexuality and maintenance of modesty by most models leads to the desexualization of their bodies and their comfort with nudity in the studio. In a society which generally relates public nudity to sexuality, it is understandable that both parties are concerned about the sexuality issue. The fact that such measures are sometimes loosened and even modified shows that some artists and models are reflective on the sexuality issue and public nudity. However, artists in general prefer the avoidance of the issue by depending on the partially successful objective seeing and management of sexuality by models as they prioritize drawing over thinking critically on drawing. Such attitude is criticized by some feminist art critics and educators. Petherbridge claims that 'if contemporary art educators cannot articulate a critical engagement with something as obviously discomfoting as naked bodies, then there would not be much

hope for engaging with the more contentious areas of contemporary art, such as ... broader ethical issues of teaching creative practice.’¹⁹³ I agree with her. Models’ viewpoints on the discomfort of some artists with sexuality and nudity reflect that artists are not reflective enough on why and how they draw the nude.

¹⁹³ Deanna Petherbridge, “Drawing backwards into the future: Formulating an agenda,” in *Issues in Art and Education: Aspects of the Fine Art Curriculum*, ed. Paul Hetherington, (London: Tate Gallery, 1994), 75.

Chapter 4

PROFESSIONALISM AND PASSIONATE WORK

It will be illuminating to explore how and why models subject themselves to professionalism. Although there is no full time modeling in Hong Kong, and professionalism is usually used to describe jobs like lawyers and doctors, artists and models sometimes use the term 'professional' to judge a model's performance. To begin with, it will be useful to discuss the term 'professionalism' in life modeling. The notion of professionalism is transposed to more and more diverse domains. Even non-professional labor is being caught in the discourse of professionalism.¹⁹⁴ Fournier argues that it acts as a disciplinary mechanism which allows for control at a distance through the construction of 'appropriate' work identities and conducts.¹⁹⁵ The appeal to professionalism can be seen as a way to regulate the autonomous conduct of employees through the articulation of competence. Female models began to join the professional ranks of men as schools slowly loosened their regulations in the 19th century.¹⁹⁶ It is not established once and for all but has to be continuously negotiated. It has to be reminded that, although competence embodies the government of truth, it is not evaluated only in terms of the extent to which the practitioner has mastered truth, but in terms of appropriate conduct.¹⁹⁷ In discussing the notion of competence, Foucault argues that it serves to control medical practice by regulating the person who is to become practitioner.¹⁹⁸ Therefore, one not only has to absorb the knowledge, but also conduct and constitute oneself in an appropriate manner. Truth

¹⁹⁴ Valérie Fournier, "The Appeal to 'Professionalism' as a Disciplinary Mechanism," *Sociological Review*, 47(1999): 281.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ Alison Smith, "The Academy and Professional Modeling in 19th century Britain," in *Dictionary of artists' models*, ed. Jill Berk Jiminez and Joanna Banham, (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 2001), 30.

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 286.

¹⁹⁸ Michel Foucault, *The Birth of the Clinic*, (London: Trivstock, 1973), 80.

and knowledge are translated into a code of appropriate conduct which serves to construct the subjectivity of the professional practitioner, making a professional practice an embodied practice. Therefore, the practice of professionalism relies on the technologies of the self rather than domination.¹⁹⁹ This professionalism, according to Fournier, is highly contestable and malleable. The disciplinary logic of professionalism is always loosened.

Hodgson uses the notion of performativity theorized by Butler to explain how a worker is subjected into a professional by engaging in repetitive performances of professional code of conduct.²⁰⁰ Butler's vision of performativity proposes a reflexive model of identity which avoids a simplistic domination/agency dualistic model. Actions are always 'citations', re-enacting previous performances to establish a certain identity. Identity formation is achieved through 'forced reiteration of norms', which strengthens through repetition and sedimentation.²⁰¹

He adopts the insight of Butler on subjection and domination in exploring how a person is subjected and dominated simultaneously by performing as a professional. Butler's interpretation of interpellation by Althusser is useful for explaining the 'professional spirit.' Butler takes his interpellation as a kind of 'conscience,' demanding behavior consistent with the professional identity assumed.²⁰² In the *Psychic Life of Power*, Butler argues that

Conscience is fundamental to the production and regulation of the citizen-subject, for conscience turns the individual around, makes him/her

¹⁹⁹ Valérie Fournier, "The Appeal to 'Professionalism' as a Disciplinary Mechanism," *Sociological Review*, 47(1999): 287.

²⁰⁰ Damien Hodgson, "'Putting on a Professional Performance': Performativity, Subversion and Project Management," *Organization*, 12(2005): 51-68.

²⁰¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (London: Routledge, 1993), 94.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 58.

available to the subjectivating reprimand.²⁰³

For Hodgson, professionalization works in a similar way. Conforming to a discipline is not just learning a set of rules mechanically. How the professional constructs oneself as a professional involves how the person interprets and makes sense of the world, in keeping with the logic of the discipline itself. For Butler, ‘to master a set of skills is not simply to accept a set of skills but to reproduce them in and as one’s own activity. This is not simply to act according to a set of rules but to embody rules in the course of action and to reproduce those rules in embodied rituals of action.’²⁰⁴ The citational repetition of terminology and of actions is pivotal to the embodiment of a professional identity.²⁰⁵

The above insight regarding how one is subjected to professionalism is very useful for analyzing how a model identifies herself with the notion ‘professional’ by continuously performing it. Unlike Britain, life modeling is not institutionalized in Hong Kong. Although life modeling is also a freelance job in Britain, models and artists are highly recommended to register at Artist Model Registry (RAM) where there are codes of conduct to regulate and protect both artists and models. The Body Arts Association is known in Hong Kong as the established institution for recruiting life models but it is not as influential as RAM in the UK. It is chiefly managed by Simon alone and it is mainly a nudist organization. There are no clear and written rules about how to be a ‘professional’ model, but the rules in practice are quite similar to those written in RAM. Models learn about the code of conduct informally by working for a longer time and in more places. Artists generally do not talk about what

²⁰³ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 115.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

²⁰⁵ Damien Hodgson, “‘Putting on a Professional Performance’: Performativity, Subversion and Project Management,” *Organization*, 12(2005): 58.

it means to be professional openly as they assume that the models know about it. Despite this, most of the models know what it means to be one. Models learn about professionalism when an artist praises a model that she is professional, some artists remind new models about how to behave in the studio, or when models learn from other models they know. Here we will see how professionalism is embodied in life modeling, and how a model takes up the subject position as a professional model by engaging in self-discipline.

Chapter Three focuses on how models' identification with objective seeing and the need to maintain a desexualized studio leads to their regulation of sexuality and modesty. This chapter further elaborates how models' identification with life drawing leads to their voluntary endurance of pain during posing and their urge to create good poses. Discussing professionalism of life models is necessary as many models use professionalism to evaluate their performance, affirm their identity as life models and differentiate life modeling from mere manual labor. It is also useful to critically review a common belief among outsiders that life modeling is a passive behavior which a model tunes her body according to what the artist wants. The seemingly basic requirements of staying still and good pose by models are not discussed critically in literature of art history and art education, despite the enormous effort spent on drawing and appreciating the nude. Numerous models and artists stress that good models are often artists. For artists, it often means that models have passion for figurative art rather than artists seeing modeling as artistic creation; for models, it usually means that love of figurative and performance art improves models' performance. However, in much of the history of life drawing it is assumed that models are dumb, ignorant about art, and probably life drawing as well. This assumption of dumbness obscures the frequent uses artists have made of modeling as a means of accessing art education, and reinforces the low status of models in the art

world.²⁰⁶ Instead on emphasizing on the difficulty of the techniques of life modeling, the discussion on professionalism is mainly about how models understand and embody the professional spirit. Models' articulation of professionalism and the discipline of the body shows that they try hard to incorporate artists' needs with their job satisfaction, which involves an understanding of and even reflection on the practice and values of artists.

Not moving

Chu said,

I lost consciousness three times. I hid it well. My eyes darkened when I lost consciousness. *This is the professionalism I insist on. Die-hard professional.* When people set the time, they are prepared to draw for this amount of time. If you stop posing, you affect other people a lot. I don't want to be like this.

As mentioned in the introduction, life drawing in Hong Kong is largely influenced by the Euston Road approach, especially among artists drawing long pose. The approach emphasizes on seeing as an objective process and drawing as an objective record of what the eye saw. Models who identify with this way of art training think that their motionlessness denotes professionalism, as this allows artists to observe and draw them 'accurately'. Mayhew argues that such identification led to models' own capacity to move out of their discomfort and objectification.²⁰⁷ Chu defines herself as a professional model by insisting on not to move even if she is so

²⁰⁶ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 178.

²⁰⁷ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 178.

tired and painful from the pose that she is going to faint. This shows that the self-discipline required for achieving the status of a professional may hurt a model's body. What Butler argues about subjection is very useful in understanding professionalism. 'The more a practice is mastered, the more fully subjection is achieved. Submission and mastery take place simultaneously, and this paradoxical simultaneity constitutes the ambivalence of subjection.'²⁰⁸ For her, to be professional is to master the skill of staying still even when her body is unable to endure it. It also means she is better than the 'average' models through excellent body endurance and control, and such notion gives her confidence and dignity. As passionate models believe that devotion to modeling is related to devotion to art, being a professional model also contributes to her strong identity as a devoted artist.

My poses are good. I am professional for sure. Some models move right after the time is up, some cannot even hold a pose, and some are doing similar poses all the time during short pose. Such poses are not aesthetic and they are not well prepared. They don't understand what artists need.

Models can certainly move after the time is up, but Chu thinks that the model should ask the artist if he/she needs to draw for a little bit longer. In the US, models who are casual about moving or breaking a painful pose are considered unprofessional and unacceptable.²⁰⁹ Models in Hong Kong generally hold the same attitude. A model who is good at staying still is considered as professional, as this helps artists to draw them more easily. On the surface, staying still sounds like 'doing nothing' for the outsider, but it takes a lot of physical energy to keep the pose,

²⁰⁸ Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection*, (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 116.

²⁰⁹ Philips, *Modeling*, 112.

especially when the pose is difficult. Being a professional life model means choosing constraints, but those who are devoted to it consider this as a challenge rather than a straightjacket. The point of staying still is not to master a high level of technique acquired through time, as in the case of ballet dancing, but to challenge one's willpower and how well the body endures pain and fatigue. Mandy said,

Sometimes I challenge myself to see if I can pose for five more minutes to feel the force on my body. Sometimes it feels bad but sometimes it feels gorgeous. I feel successful when I can challenge myself, for example, I can stay still for half an hour.

Apart from letting artists draw them accurately, the endurance of pain when staying still is experienced by the model as a body training and mastery of the self. Success in staying in the pose leads to an intense feeling of satisfaction. Not only does the representation of her become an artwork, but also the modeling body. It is a statue made of a lived body. It is not uncommon for a model to sweat when she is modeling. Twisting the waist, even a small angle, for longer than five minutes is already very tiring for some models. Putting most of her weight on one of the legs or arms during standing or sitting adds too much weight on that body part and makes the model very tired and painful. If the left leg is crossed over the right leg, the right leg will become paralyzed after some time, and it takes a few minutes to recover even when the model is resting and stretching. As five minutes is sometimes not enough for recovering from a tiring pose, the tiredness may accumulate which makes the final one or two sections especially painful.

We have to be reminded that professionalism is very often not strictly demanded by artists and studios. Rather, it is endorsed by some models to define and demand

themselves. As being a professional model does not guarantee financial reward, models set a high goal to satisfy their desire to subject to professionalism rather than their wallets. A model defines herself as professional because she can stay very still even when the artist may not notice minor movements. She is confident of her bodily control. She demands herself to make full use of her bodily capabilities through exploring human movements and endurance rather than doing similar easy poses every time. For models whose artistic identity is based on their bodily performance like Florence, Mandy and Rosemary, successful discipline of their bodies confirm that they are good artists. She is a professional not because of how she looks but what she does. The emphasis what the body does in life modeling is empowering for models in a society which often judges a woman by how she looks.

Observational drawing was largely eliminated from most post-war art schools in Europe and the USA. It is not a major training in local art academies nowadays, but it is still popular among private studios doing long pose. Objective seeing in life drawing and art education is criticized by feminists as based on the neutrality of the impartial detached observer who embodies the subjectivity of an idealized public masculinity: rational, detached, unemotional and able to reduce, rearrange and remake the world around him.²¹⁰ However 'outdated' and problematic observational life drawing seems to be for some people, it gains enormous influence in private studios, and it is adopted occasionally in art academies. Devoted models generally do not question it and discipline their bodies to comply with it. Some models are critical of such seeing and attempt to challenge it in the Modeling Shows, to be explained in Chapter Five. Some artists sympathize with the physical discomfort of a model and adopt a flexible mode of observational drawing. They remind her to rest anytime she wants or to relax her tiring parts during modeling, e.g. to put down her hands holding

²¹⁰ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 178.

up. They even warn about the tiredness of a pose if the model is trying to do something challenging. Some propose that artists should be able to draw the model even when she slightly moves by time naturally. This shows that professionalism in life modeling is negotiable, as artists take the notion of observational drawing and objective seeing flexibly.

A model who is less subjected to professionalism is less concerned about not to move under most circumstances. Usually, she does not show a passionate attachment to modeling, nor connect modeling with artistic creation. When I was observing Joyce's modeling, I found that she moved and scratched her body more than others. When asked about her attitude towards modeling, she said,

I won't give a lot of effort to make myself a professional... I am more interested in knowing what kind of people they are. I listen to what they are talking very carefully, what they did before, why they like drawing so much, why they can put so much time on drawing... Chan has an artist friend. She seemed not very happy that I did not endure the pose well enough. But Chan's wife is very nice. She never speaks too much and gives me trouble. She is caring. Very nice. Only a few are harsh. They think that I am not expressive enough. I am embarrassed. I said before, 'I don't know what it means to be a good model.' I haven't been a model for a long time... The artists seem to be connoisseurs. They do not have much professional request. They rarely have a harsh request. So the line is very blurred for me. When I cannot satisfy their request, I feel very embarrassed. It seems that I cannot do the job well.

She is considered as not expressive enough because her poses are too sedentary or without variation. Expressive poses are usually more physically demanding. Joyce became a model as she wanted some extra money and knew some people apart from her circles. For her, understanding the artists through modeling is fulfilling enough, and she is not interested in being a professional model. Life modeling does not make a career in Hong Kong, and this is not something she is very interested to do. Therefore, she is less disciplined compared to other devoted models. Yet, she is still influenced by the notion of professionalism even she claims that she does not understand what it is clearly.

Higher reflexive and self-disciplinary forms of control lead to higher professionalism. Claiming herself as a non-professional makes her less submitted to the discipline of the body. When she feels that she is not disciplined well enough, she feels embarrassed and even guilty. Such guilt contributes to the formation of conscience of some models who aim at being professional.

Good poses

A professional model is supposed to be inventive during short poses and able to hold 'graceful' poses during long pose for artists who have a more classical aesthetic. Artists doing academic life drawing in the 19th century Europe usually explained in great detail what they wanted to create; according the historical, mythological or purely plastic themes of the drawing. She was only given ten minute break for every hour of posing.²¹¹ The professional status of the model was defined as how well she endured the pose. Artists drawing long pose in Hong Kong nowadays may ask models to give particular poses. But very often, artists in general allow models to pose by

²¹¹ Billy Kluver and Julie Martin, "A Short History of Modeling," *Art in America*, 79 (1997): 157.

themselves. An effort to generate an interesting pose is highly appreciated by artists. A model usually takes the initiative to make a pose, then artists may fine tune it. In the art academies of Southern China, formal art training is more traditional than that of Hong Kong. It also has a greater emphasis on traditional skills, e.g. painting and sketching. The salary of life models is very low (as low as 80 yuan for 3 hours). Therefore, artists can employ models for a long time. In Guangzhou Art Institute, artists can spend as long as half an hour to decide on a long pose. Art schools and studios in Hong Kong are more casual about poses, and generally do not show great disagreement with the pose of the model. An interesting pose may not have to be very weird, against-the-gravity pose. One may sit, stand or recline 'with a twist' which makes it more 'energetic' than the ordinary ones.

The time demanded in long pose limits the range of poses, as the pose may look very inspiring but too difficult to hold for more than five minutes. A model can be more expressive when doing short poses. That means she does not need to stick to the 'graceful' and quiet poses. In general, models who consider themselves as professional are more passionate about short pose as they feel that they can engage in the creative process in drawing, i.e. the subject of art creation alongside with the artists. There is actually not much room for models to be creative during long pose because of the physical constraint, and the need to comply with classical aesthetics.

'Graceful' long poses are often composed of contrapposto, according to Professor Chan. Short poses usually deviate from contrapposto. Contrapposto is crucial in classical art in the human form. In visual arts, contrapposto is used to describe a human figure standing with most of its weight on one foot so that its shoulders and arms twist off-axis from the hips and legs. The weight of the body is shifted in a dynamic way, creating a tension that energizes the pose. Posing like this gives the figure a more dynamic or alternatively relaxed appearance. It also leads to tension as

a figure changes from resting on a leg to walking or running. It is an extremely important sculptural development in Western history. The ideal of man represented is thus embodied in the pose of the sculpture. Contrapposto was revived again in Renaissance art. Michelangelo's sculpture of David is an example. As mentioned in the introduction, LP artists receive trainings similar to those of the European art academy. The preference of more traditional artists for long pose and 'graceful' poses can be traced to their emphasis on observational drawing and appreciation of contrapposto as an ideal of beauty. To achieve the contrapposto effect, models often need to stand, sit or recline asymmetrically or put most of her weight on one foot, as mentioned above. Although such poses are intended for creating a calm and relaxed state of mind and classical beauty, models often report great discomfort and pain when those poses are embodied. This shows that the visual effect of the representation of a body in art may contrast greatly with the embodied experience of the model.

Chu despised models who did 'bad poses.' Models who are not professional enough become subjects of contempt for some models. Criticizing unprofessional behavior reinforces a model's subject position as a professional. She said,

What they pose is just homework, not creation.

She positions herself as a creative worker during modeling, leading to her emphasis on creation during posing. She said that her status was the same as the art teacher, as the life modeling class could not be completed without her presence and performance. Models who are not interested in being a professional tend to think that short pose is difficult and prefer 'lazy' poses that are not usually innovative. Her training background in figurative drawing and life drawing with more emphasis on classical

aesthetics helps to form her taste for 'graceful' poses, i.e. contrapposto and non-sexually explicit poses. It also serves as power/knowledge which subjects her to the discipline of a professional model who is good at graceful poses. She is proud of herself doing such poses and critical of models who lack knowledge of classical aesthetics and fail to pose them. Interestingly, although posing gracefully follows an established tradition in European art academy, this is artistic creation for her rather than 'merely' an imitation of contrapposto.

Joyce continued explaining why she was not a professional.

Mostly because of poses. Very long time ago, Winnie expected me to be professional but I was not. So she was not happy. The artists are younger there. They want more aggressive things. They found me because they have never drawn me before. I cannot give them anything aggressive so they don't give me jobs anymore. I am happy with it. I am not aggressive.

As she did not care very much to be a professional model, she does not feel unhappy when she is not popular among artists who are more demanding about poses. Occasionally, some artists hope that models can do unusual long poses as artists may get bored of classical poses. However, they may not care about the feelings of models and expect them to keep such poses for a long time.

Chu considered models who did not care about poses as unprofessional. She expressed her discontent with models before she became one. She encountered some models during her art training and commented on them.

The models introduced seemed to find poses on the internet. Untrained. They didn't understand what it meant to be a professional model. They could neither be interactive nor professional.

As there is no formal training for life modeling in Hong Kong, all life models are in a strict sense, untrained. Some passionate and experienced life models in Taiwan offer life modeling workshops for those who are interested, but this is not a very common practice. In other words, the training in life modeling refers to self-training: the self discipline of the body through modeling experience and sometimes at home. When Simon recruits models, he will provide very basic training. Basically, it is just a test to ensure that aspiring life models are really comfortable with being naked in front of strangers and are able to hold poses.

Kitty mentioned about the excitement and sense of fulfillment of being called as a professional. Praise regarding the creativity of models often comes from SP artists as they have a higher expectation of unusual poses.

Sometimes there is sparkle between the artist and I. The artist may be an old man or a woman. You know what poses he likes and you pose accordingly. He thinks it's gorgeous. Once I went to the Academy of Performing Arts, one minute for a pose. He thought that I was so awesome, so professional. He will say things like, 'Great! This pose is even better!'

Florence is well known for doing difficult poses. By doing tiring poses, she establishes herself as achieving artistic perfection.

Short poses are more fun. I like to challenge myself. Sometimes I stand with one leg and pose upside down. The more difficult the pose, the more I like it. I am challenging myself. I don't want to be a piece of wood, to sit and raise hands only. I am more devoted than the average. I don't mean that other models are not devoted. *If I am a model, I have to be perfect.*

For Florence, challenging her body limits through doing difficult poses is more important than getting more jobs. She modeled for free a few times 'to help friends' and for the joy of it. Devotion to professionalism is linked with higher discipline of the body and higher job satisfaction. While internal rewards stem from competitive tendencies - in Florence's case, to be better than average models, they differ from external rewards because their successful achievement provides a 'good for the whole community who participate in the practice.'²¹² In this case, she considers herself as setting up a good example of what good poses are in life modeling. They are not primarily pursued for personal advantage or material gain.²¹³ Good poses make her body unique and aesthetic through what she performs. Through narrating her physical effort to make a good pose, she experiences herself not just matter, but as 'a materializing of possibilities.'²¹⁴

Being interactive with artists also indicates professionalism, although sophisticated communication is not needed in most cases. The communication issue will be further discussed in the Chapter 5. This occurs more often in art schools when art students are new to life drawing. The teacher may first tell the model to do easier poses to warm up, then attempt more difficult ones to train their skills. For example, if an art

²¹² Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 110.

²¹³ Ibid.

²¹⁴ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution," in Sue-Ellen Case, ed. *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theatre*, (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 272.

teacher wants to provide some basic training for students, the model should do some basic and 'pragmatic' poses like sitting, reading a book, etc. When the skill of students improves, models can do more complicated poses which are more challenging to the students. These lessons are exhausting physically and mentally because of the higher self-discipline of their bodies and sensitivity to the response of artists. However, discipline of the bodies here should not be considered as an oppressive and restrictive discipline forced on their bodies. Instead, it is a way towards artistic achievement through maintaining her physical strength during the performance. Florence feels that she is more devoted than other models because she shows her bodily strength through her endurance of challenging poses. Physical strength and femininity are believed to be incompatible. The body and femininity are closely related, but bodily control and physical strength are not considered feminine. Physical achievements are associated with masculinity.²¹⁵ However, life modeling offers women an opportunity to excel physically without being attacked as 'unfeminine.'

Passionate work among models who are creative workers and aesthetically inclined

More than half of the models in my interviews are creative workers or aesthetically inclined people. From the interviews and informal talks with artists and other models, many Hong Kong models do fit in this category. I describe their work as 'passionate work, as they often attach aesthetic values to their work. I use the definition of the creative workers proposed by Markusen and Schrock to understand the core dynamics of the creative sector. They include actors, directors, performance artists, dancers,

²¹⁵ Precilla Y.L. Choi, *Femininity and the Physically Active Woman*, (London and Philadelphia: Routledge, 2000)

musicians, composers, authors, writers, painters, sculptors and photographers. For them, self-identification as artists and artists who find a way to engage in their art work as their major occupation are the characteristics of creative workers in the core sector.²¹⁶ I define aesthetically inclined people as people who may not work full time as a creative worker, but consciously find a paid job which gives them time to pursue their passion in art or culture (whether paid or unpaid), and people who study culture or art related subjects. As the rent and standard of living in Hong Kong is very high, it is not uncommon for people interested in creative work to find non art-related jobs to sustain their livelihood and art production.²¹⁷ This may be a reason for the large number of models in my interviews who are aesthetically inclined people than creative workers.

Among my interviews, models who are creative workers include Chu, a part time art teacher and artist, and Florence, a freelance dubbing artist and actress. Aesthetically inclined people include Yan, a part time research assistant who devotes to life modeling and production and screening of social movement documentaries; Mandy, a part time counselor in a church who is also a freelance instructor of physical theatre and a passionate feminist performance artist; Rosemary, a clerk who spends her spare time on dance, theatre and performance art; Tracy, a fine arts student and a freelance designer; and Kitty, a cultural activist working in an NGO.

Studies on creative industries and creative workers are relatively new in Hong Kong. But it is still possible to get a brief idea of local creative workers. They are relatively young with high education qualifications, who prefer irregular and compact pace of working with multi-tasks.²¹⁸ Creative workers and aesthetically inclined

²¹⁶ Ann Markusen and Greg Schrock, "The Artistic Dividend: Urban Artistic Specialisation and Economic Development Implications," *Urban Studies*, 43(2006): 1666.

²¹⁷ Leung Po Shan, "A mini ethnography of the creative space of creative and art workers – the problem of activating industrial buildings," *Mingpao*, 19th Nov, 2009, D04.

²¹⁸ Centre for Cultural Policy Research, "Baseline Study on Creative Industries," 47.

people in my interviews largely fit into this pattern. Many of them express discontent with a mundane and repetitive job, and prefer to find a job which allows more flexibility, creativity and individuality even if it is less well paid. Florence quit her low paid and 'boring' clerical job to work as a dubbing artist, actress and model after professional training. After working as a social worker and doing other jobs for several years, Yan is satisfied with her present part time job which can fulfill her basic material needs and allow her time for less well-paid or non paid creative work. Mandy has been a freelancer for a long time but finds that the financial insecurity is unbearable. She finally gets a well-paid part time job which allows her to spend a lot of time on performance art. Kitty is interested in jobs which can give her cultural exposures (e.g. overseas opportunities) and room to engage in activism.

To explain why life modeling attracts a larger number of highly educated women and cultural workers nowadays, it will be fruitful to examine how individualization affects women, cultural work and creative workers. Modernity leads to the individualization of women which loosens their bonds to family life. The expansion of educational opportunities of women also renders them develop a new private and political self-awareness.²¹⁹ Better educated women and women with higher social status have a greater chance to find an intrinsically satisfying activity from which they can earn their own living and fulfill their expectation of autonomy, self-realization and emancipation.²²⁰ Higher social status and freedom of women in recent decades in Hong Kong, and the generally high educational level of life models in my interviews equip them with the knowledge, social and cultural capital to achieve self-actualization. They can, therefore, afford to see life modeling as a part of their aestheticized life projects rather than merely a way to earn money. Life

²¹⁹ Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim, *Individualization: Institutionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences*, (California: SAGE, 2002), 56-58.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 59.

modeling is considered as a well-informed choice which combines work and self-realization by many models.

Using the insight from Giddens on the relationship between modernity, individualization and the reflective self, and Lash and Urry, who come up with the term 'aesthetic reflexivity,' Banks argues that individualization has a large impact on the mentality of creative workers. First, the growth of 'aesthetic reflexivity' due to the transition to a post-industrial economy of information and communication structures enables a reinvigorated pursuit of 'aestheticized' life projects based around cultural production and art for art's sake. Second, individualization also encourages a renewal of interest in 'authentic' cultural practices that can generate internal rewards and benefits for creative workers.²²¹ He then continues to demonstrate that creative workers emphasize the art dimensions of the art-commerce relation, in so far as they prioritize creativity, self-expression and the pursuit of the aesthetic over and above the purely rational pursuit of profit and accumulation.²²² His insights are very useful in understanding the subjectivity of the models during work, as their attitude is very similar to what he has described.

Aestheticization of the self in everyday life revives the desire amongst creative workers to 'live a life of one's own' in a self-consciously stylized and artistic manner.²²³ The emancipated body is the condition for its reflexive restructuring.²²⁴ Individualization of women in recent decades gives women more freedom to reflect on themselves. The rising number of Hong Kong women entering universities in the last ten years indicates that there are more women with the freedom and knowledge to

²²¹ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 101

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid., 105.

²²⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity, Identity and Society in the Late Modern Age*, (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), 218.

reflect critically on their social conditions of existence.²²⁵ Aesthetic reflexivity is especially vital for understanding artistic practice in cultural work, for it focuses on expressivity, symbolism, style and bodily performance – the creative, self expressive elements of being.²²⁶ The concept of aesthetic reflexivity can help us understand how life models treat life modeling as a part of their aestheticized life projects, rather than merely a part time job. As aesthetic reflexivity is concerned with bodily, emotive and creative modes of being, it is not surprising that life modeling, with an emphasis on bodily performance and art production, attracts so many creative workers and aesthetically inclined people.²²⁷

When discussing the subjectivity of cultural workers, McRobbie uses the term ‘passionate work’ to describe workers who are attached to their work as there is possibility of the maximization of self expressiveness. This provides a compelling justification and disciplinary mechanism for tolerating high self-discipline and even self-exploitation.²²⁸ Banks also argued that internal rewards of cultural workers are practice-specific that can be only fully realized through dedication and immersion. To get a true ‘feel for the game’, practitioners establish a knowledge and appreciation of a given practice’s interior qualities and an intimacy with its specific demands, rhythms and routines.²²⁹ To get a true feel for life modeling, devoted life models embody professionalism which requires tough discipline of their bodies.

Staying still and doing good poses are considered as the interior qualities of the job which lead to ceaseless discipline of the models’ bodies in order to achieve the internal award – self expression, and being called as a professional model. Although

²²⁵ Grace C.L. Mark, “Girls’ education in Hong Kong: Incidental Gains and Postponed Inequality,” in *Mainstreaming Gender in Hong Kong Society*, ed. Fanny M. Cheung and Elenor Holroyd, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2009), 27.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 197.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

²²⁸ Angela McRobbie, “Making a living in London’s small-scale creative sector,” in *Cultural Industries and the Production of Culture*, (Routledge, London: 2004), 134.

²²⁹ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 110.

such internal award is important to devoted life models, the lack of unionization, medical insurance and job security may lead to self-exploitation, which results in fatigue and even permanent harm to the model's body.

McRobbie uses the word 'passionate work' to describe the self disciplinary and affective dimension of creative workers she studied in London. I will use this term to describe the attitude of devoted life models towards modeling. Rose talks about the entrepreneur of the self in late modernity, in which individuals are to become entrepreneurs of themselves who shape their own lives through the choices they make among the forms of life available to them.²³⁰ McRobbie believes that the notion of Rose was very useful in analyzing the subjectivity of creative workers, who strived to live an art life despite institutional and financial difficulties and sacrifices in leisure, personal and family life.²³¹ For example, they often use 'other paid work' to prop up and provide the financial underpinning for the 'real work' which is the primary source of identity and self-value and status.²³² Despite the difficulties they encounter, they dedicate a lot to art work as a source of self identity. She concluded the study of London creative workers as new subjects of cultural individualization. 'They are self disciplining and self managing, they understand themselves to be fully responsible for the choices and pathways they have followed, they enjoy this freedom and prefer to take on many tasks or projects rather than consider normal work or stable employment in an art field.'²³³ Devoted life models in Hong Kong and western countries who are creative workers or aesthetically inclined people show similar life trajectories.

²³⁰ Nikolas Rose, *Powers of Freedom*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

²³¹ Angela McRobbie, "Making a living in London's small-scale creative sector," in *Cultural Industries and the Production of Culture*, eds. Dominic Power & Allen J. Scott, (Routledge, London: 2004), 139.

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Ibid., 139-140.

A previous study by Sarah R. Philips on life models in the US shows that many life models are creative workers or aesthetic people who see life modeling as a way to achieve self expressiveness and get closer to the art world. Money is an important but not the sole reason which attracts them to modeling. For example, some of them treasure the chance to gain access to the artist community and enter an environment which they can meet like-minded creative people.²³⁴ One model traded modeling for artwork or art classes which helped her get into the artist's consciousness and inner circle of friends.²³⁵ Some studios even specifically hired someone with theatrical experience.²³⁶ This shows that life modeling nowadays has a close connection with creative workers in contemporary Western countries.

More than half of the life models interviewed have a similar mentality. The increase in self reflexivity may have helped reenergize the desire among the aesthetically inclined to pursue the 'art-life' which point towards new modes of aesthetic reflexivity.²³⁷ Local models who are creative workers or aesthetically inclined people often see life modeling as a part of art life alongside with other cultural practices, like teaching, learning and performing art. They all help to form their strong artistic identities. Life modeling is much less fruitful for some models if it has little chance of self-expression or working with devoted artists. This shows that they prioritize the importance of internal reward when models discuss the meanings of work. Keat argued that individualization provides enhanced opportunities for critical self-reflection of the part of economic subjects, and can lead to a more evaluative attitude regarding ones' involvement in the competition for obtaining internal or external rewards.²³⁸ Such

²³⁴ Philips, *Modeling*, 82.

²³⁵ Philips, *Modeling*, 102.

²³⁶ Philips, *Modeling*, 107.

²³⁷ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 105

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 115.

self-reflection is clearly seen in the models from how they view the meaning and reward of work.

For example, Chu has never worked full time as her ex husband was rich. After her divorce, she trained herself to be an artist and then became a model. She said that she always dreamed of teaching art in universities as she never studied in a university before. The self-portraits of her nude body were exhibited in the Hong Kong Fringe Club and she proudly told me that she was invited to teach figure drawing in universities after a few years of training. For her, life modeling not only brings her money, but also allows her to cooperate with artists to create good work. She shows disdain for art students who do not draw seriously. Money is secondary compared with working with 'real artists' who are passionate about creation.

If an artist finds me and says, 'I am poor, I cannot pay you anything.'
Never mind. Money easy comes easy goes. I had a lot of money before.
I won't give up the chance of working with a good artist because of a
few hundred dollars. Money is not that important. The most important
thing is the meaning.

Florence had a similar attitude. In fact, she did receive formal training in acting many years ago in the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts. She did well at school. Many years ago she was a clerk but later quitted as it was poorly paid and boring. Then she joined a course in dubbing and her talent was discovered by her teacher in the dubbing class. Since then, she works as a freelance dubbing artist and model. Because of her unstable income, she lives in public housing and has a simple material life. Yet, she is satisfied with her status that she can do more creative and interesting job and has a lot of free time. Although dubbing work is an unstable

freelance work, she enjoys it very much as she can pretend to be different characters, including porn star, mother, grandmother and animals. For a few times, she even modeled for free for an artist friend who was not rich enough to pay her. When asked about if the income was able to sustain her living, she mentioned that she was happy to have a simple material life. Although many models interviewed are not creative workers, they are aesthetically inclined people who spend considerable effort on art. Their working attitude is similar to the description of McRobbie. A study on creative workers in Hong Kong shows that they are mostly young, well educated and self employed. Yet, they are generally underpaid with great wage discrepancies.²³⁹ As the living standard in Hong Kong is high, some models cannot stand the insecurity of underpaid self employed work and find a more stable job to support their art work instead. The generally high educational level of life models allows them more choices in the job market apart from the very poorly paid and exploitative feminized work in Hong Kong like waitresses, cleansers, care work and junior sales work.²⁴⁰

Mandy mentioned that she was a freelance theatre instructor and performance artist a few years ago. Yet, financial insecurity due to the unstable income gradually became unbearable for her. Luckily, she happened to know a friend who introduced her to a fairly well paid part time work which allowed her a plenty of time to do performance. Her attitude is similar to many models interviewed. The enhanced stimulation of desire, aspiration and a sense of style has encouraged the pursuit of other aesthetic, non-rational or non-linear modes of being.²⁴¹ For many of them, getting a well paid stable job with a clear career path which demands incessant climbing to the top prevents them from discovering other meaningful things in life, in

²³⁹ Centre for Cultural Policy Research, "Baseline Study on Creative Industries," 51-55.

²⁴⁰ Ngo Hang-yue and Ngai Pun, "Gender, Work and Employment in the 'Global Condition,'" in *Mainstreaming Gender in Hong Kong Society*, ed. Fanny M. Cheung and Elenor Holroyd, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 2009), 68.

²⁴¹ Scott Lash and John Larry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, (London: Sage, 1994).

many cases, aesthetic pursuits. They prefer a work which sustains a basic standard of living and gives them more time for art creation. Yan thinks the same. Different kinds of work help her to develop different strengths, and she does not want to abandon any of them. Therefore, she finds a full time work too exhausting. She worked as a social worker and in non-government organizations before. Now she works as a part time research assistant in a university. Her professor is specialized in social and gender issues which are also her interests.

Clerical work and making documentaries are about solving problems. Life modeling has to do with being with myself, breaking through myself and inspiring myself and the artist. In ordinary work, I don't notice my body, but I do notice how my body changes when I am modeling... When I was devoted to my full time work years ago, there was no space for me to do modeling and making documentaries. I prefer work which is flexible and free.

Rosemary works as a clerk and takes part in dance and performance art when she is free. When asked about her attitude towards work, she said,

I think my clerical work is ok. I don't need to work very hard. My job does not give me a lot of inspiration in creation but my life does. As I can be lazy during my work, I have more space to think of my life and creation. Yes, a career path is not important for me.

The full time or part time paid work is often seen by models as a way to strike a balance between livelihood and artistic creation. They are less likely to see

themselves as ‘career women’, who work hard along imagined career paths and consider the achievement of a higher position and pay as the chief goal of life. The strong connection between life modeling and art makes many models consider this as one of their real work, and equate the devotion to modeling with devotion to artistic creation. Seeing life modeling as a part of aestheticized life projects leads to immersion in the work and the emphasis on the internal rewards, which is a crucial element in their art life. In short, professionalism and internal rewards are mutually reinforcing for devoted models. This is why models with the attitude of ‘passionate work’ stress on how they engage in professionalism even when they do not get a higher pay for their good performance.

Potential self exploitation

McRobbie discusses how the attractive image of marrying paid work with personal creativity may lead to hidden or invisible labor disciplining.²⁴² Pleasure in work among creative workers provide a compelling justification for tolerating not just uncertainty and self exploitation.²⁴³ When models say that they do not mind doing free work and suffering pain from modeling, it is unavoidable that their love for modeling may lead to self exploitation.

The assimilation of work and play of devoted models who enjoy performing while modeling may lead to self exploitation: A model who stresses too much on staying still during a tiring pose may harm her body. For example, Florence and Chu fainted more than once because they insisted on not to move even when the pose was unbearable. Florence did not notice this as self exploitation. Instead, she told artists to call an ambulance as a joke. However, Yan is aware of such danger.

²⁴² Angela McRobbie, *British Fashion Design*, (London: Routledge, 1998), 179.

²⁴³ Ibid.

There were two years which I worked more intensively. But I discovered some problems about occupational safety. It's very tiring to work in three studios in a day. My backbone was not protected. I needed to stop working like this.

Although nobody forbids models from speaking during work, most of them keep exceptionally quiet during modeling even when artists are chatting. As mentioned, life models are often considered as dumb in the history of life modeling. The dumbness assumes that they do not have strong opinion regarding how to be drawn and they are not expected to voice out their opinion on the practices of life drawing. In short, models are generally seen as the good assistants of artists at best rather than coworkers. Having 'too much' opinion on life drawing by models upsets the authority of the artist as the sole creator of the work. Although the treatment and status of local female life models have improved tremendously in recent years, the supposed dumbness of life models still lingers on that makes models sometimes feel inappropriate to voice out their fatigue, unfair treatment, humiliation and objectification. When I observed Rosemary modeling, she sat on her legs in a long pose which might be exhausting for her. She looked very tired during the break. When I asked her if she was very tired, she whispered that she was but she did not want artists to hear this. Most artists respect models very much and try to make models more comfortable. However, when there is unfair treatment, models are often put in an unfavorable position as they are unprotected institutionally in general. For example, there are no clear guidelines about the responsibility of artists or the studio when the model gets hurt during modeling. Models generally do not receive medical insurance when they work. As a union run by life models is nonexistent, models who are sexually harassed (which is rare) or humiliated may not be able to seek help and guidance easily, especially when they work discreetly. In the cases of Chu and Kitty,

the teachers of the studio did not point out the problems of the students. This may reinforce the prejudice of a few artists that models do not deserve respect.

Intensive modeling may lead to chronic injury of the body if the model does not get sufficient rest. Yet, the freelance nature of life modeling makes models fairly unprotected from such danger. Yan recalled an extreme case which an artist did not consider her feelings at all. She was treated by the artist as a still life with no feelings that could be twisted and molded as the artist wished. Despite the exploitation, she did not show her discontent clearly in the studio and put it in the heart. The reluctance of models to voice out exploitation clearly despite their anger shows that they may be ambivalent of their status. Even if they are confident that they are coworkers of artists, and creative and feeling human beings, they are aware that some artists do not treat them so. The marginalization of life models in art production may render them relatively powerless in voicing out mistreatment.

I saw a Chinese doctor as I hurt my wrist. The artist promised not to ask me to do difficult poses. When I was in the studio, he took out the photo book and asked me to twist my hand while posing. I was very unhappy as I have told him about my wrist before. I didn't do one of the poses finally. He didn't reply my request of not to twist my hand directly. He just told me to rest when I was tired. But I was afraid of injuring my hand again if I posed like this.

Some models encounter rare situations when artists commented on models' bodies openly and even humiliated them. They made models really angry but none of them showed overt discontent during modeling. They usually reacted as if

nothing had happened. Kitty recalled that some impolite young students enjoyed commenting on models in class.

The extreme case is that, they said 'I cannot draw well because the model is not pretty' in front of me.

Once, an artist ridiculed Chu's nakedness in the studio. When I asked her why she did not show her discontent more strongly despite her rage, she explained that 'it is meaningless to teach them.'

Once, art students of a private studio wanted to have a barbeque and asked me to come... Another fat, rich and beautiful taitai felt unhappy and told me to go naked if I went barbeque. Everybody was shocked and blamed that woman. To relieve the atmosphere, I told everybody to go naked. She said something more problematic, 'I won't. I am a good woman!'... The teacher heard this but he was silent.

For the past ten years, the usual hourly rate for life modeling stays between 180 and 200 HKD. Art academies usually pay more than 200 HKD but the pay of private studios has not changed much. Rosemary said,

I think the salary is OK. But the salary is the same every year. It seems that the pay is less now. In the past it was 180, 190 HKD an hour. It is the same now. Sometimes they even bargain with me. It depends on who they are. *If I like them, I may accept a lower price.* I have a job already. The pay

in life modeling is not the most important. It's better if the pay is higher, of course!

Some models comment similarly on their powerlessness in negotiating a better pay. Rosemary shows ambivalence regarding the pay issue. On one hand, she is dissatisfied with the same pay for the past ten years despite inflation. On the other hand, pleasure in work and interacting with artists lead to the downplaying of external reward. If a model can enjoy artistic expression, she may consider herself as 'inappropriate' to ask too much, i.e. a pay rise. She uses notion like 'pay in life modeling is not the most important' to console her discontent with the unchanged salary.

When Mandy, Sandy, Yan and I met together to talk about the Modeling Shows (explained in the fifth chapter), we were aware that models were often unable to negotiate for a higher pay. The dependence on the good will of the artist to protect the occupational safety of the models is also problematic. The lack of collective power makes models worry about losing job if they ask for a higher pay. They are also afraid that if they talk about artistic expression and money at the same time, they may sound 'greedy' in the eyes of artists. Sandy thinks that a higher pay may discourage young artists from practicing life drawing although she wants to have better salary.

The role of the Body Arts Association in life modeling

The Body Arts Association (BAO) organized by Simon started as a nudist organization which organized regularly outdoor and indoor nudist activities in Hong Kong. As Simon is a passionate model, he started to recruit life models more than ten years ago and introduced them to different studios for free. In the interview, he guarantees models to receive 250 HKD an hour even when studios are not able to pay

this price, as BAO would subsidize models when needed. The organization supported itself by private donations and participation fees of nudist activities. The high profile of BAO in promoting life modeling and nudism in the mass media has made it famous among academies and private studios that they contact him for models. However, some schools and studios prefer to find models by themselves. In general, he distributes jobs equally to all registered models. Everyone can register as life models for free in BAO. Simon would talk to them about the basic requirements of being a life model like posing and etiquette. He has strong gender stereotypes and believes that female models should shave and wear make up, and male models should do masculine poses. Beautiful female models should be slim and handsome male models should have a good muscular tone. Some models do not agree with him. However, he does not really screen models according to how they look, and models do not need to follow his aesthetics to get jobs. Having a flexible schedule is more important. Models reported that Simon is quite fair in distributing work to models and does not give more jobs to the 'pretty' ones. Nevertheless, Simon told me that some artists discussed models with him in secret and asked him not to introduce models who did not reach their aesthetic or posing standards. It is difficult to tell how this affects the chance of recruitment of models accurately.

There is some initial discussion about setting up a life model cooperative among models in my interviews, in which models organize and contact artists actively for jobs. However, they are afraid of Simon who may criticize models for transgressing their roles. Once, he reprimanded artists for advertising for models in Chung King Mansion as he believed that all artists should contact him for models. He considered the organization as a sole agency and 'union' (in his words) of life models. Registered models should not accept jobs which are not introduced by him, as the safety and treatment of models cannot be guaranteed. However, many models do not agree with

him that the organization is a union. As models do not have decision making power in the organization, it cannot be called a union. BAO should be seen as an easy way for starters to get into life modeling and an organization which brings more jobs to life models. Many of them work secretly without notifying him even if they have registered. Life models in some parts in the US and Western countries have started to organize unions and support groups in recent years.²⁴⁴ A union organized by life models may not emerge in the near future in Hong Kong.

Conclusion

Although professionalism involves the tough discipline of the body for devoted models, it should not be treated as a set of rigorous rules to constrain the models' bodies placed upon by inconsiderate artists, or models with unquestioned subjection/submission to the notion of professionalism. It mainly arises from models' identification with the value, aesthetics and method of life drawing which leads to their willingness to discipline their bodies. Notwithstanding, a closer look at the performance of life models shows that some of them hope to have a more critical engagement with the value, aesthetics and method of life drawing and take on a more important and active role. How this affects their interactions and leads to tensions with artists will be explored in Chapter 5.

The notion of passionate work explains why devotion to professionalism leads to self-actualization of models through possibilities of artistic self-expression. Intense satisfaction further reinforces their subjection to professionalism. They master a high level of body control but they are also submitted to it. Some models are aware of the potential self exploitation due to the lack of written guidelines in life modeling and

²⁴⁴ The Life Models Society, <http://www.lifemodelssociety.org.au/about.html>, accessed on 28 June, 2010.

medical insurance. They intend to find ways to change the status quo like setting up cooperatives, raising salary every year, adjusting salary according to weather (a higher salary for cold weather), establishing clear guidelines for models and artists regarding the safety of models, etc. Yet, the individualized and (still) stigmatized nature of life modeling makes collective organization of life models difficult. The attitude of Simon who aims at being the sole organizer of life modeling activities also hinders other models from uniting themselves.

The notion of professionalism helps models devote to and evaluate their performance.. Despite the physical hardship and doubts regarding professionalism, passionate models consider the embodiment of professionalism as necessary to establish their identity as good life models – prioritize artistic beauty over temporary physical pain and have a good ‘taste’ for poses. Mainstream values regarding the female body are concerned about how women should use their beauty to achieve secular benefits, like wealth, praise of others, career and heterosexual partners. In the case of devoted life models, they are proud of the fact that the use of their bodies can contribute to art, a value which is sacred, self-sufficient and invaluable for them. In contemporary life modeling, bodies can be artistic whether they are traditionally beautiful or not. For the above reasons, the more professional models conceive themselves to be, the more they feel that they are able to escape mainstream values of the female body. This greatly improves the body image of life models.

Chapter 5

PERFORMANCE OF FEMALE LIFE MODELS

The critique of long pose/ academic life drawing

As mentioned in previous chapters, identification with the value, aesthetics and method of life drawing by models lead to their devotion to bodily discipline and stylization. This chapter analyzes how models critically reflect on the relationship between the practice of life drawing, artists' aesthetics of the nude and their performance.

It is discussed in the introduction that long pose in life modeling nowadays stems from academic life drawing in the 18th and 19th centuries in Europe. Local artists in the early 20th century and Chinese art academies practicing socialist realism draw the female nude either as an essential training or a subject matter in art. Essential training means that drawing the nude is one of the basic training in Western art at that period. When artists treat the nude as a subject matter in art, it means that they not only treat drawing the nude as a practice, but also an important theme in art work. They have secularized the themes of the female nude, like replacing mythological stories in classical art by everyday life settings. The choice of models and aesthetics of posing have broadened but the influence of classical aesthetics remains. As art academies in Hong Kong have almost abandoned long pose, they are usually practiced in private studios. Models often criticize LP artists for two reasons. First, the preference of poses by LP artists is too stereotyped and traditionally feminine. Second, they have a narrow aesthetics towards feminine beauty. The aesthetic of the nude proposed by Kenneth Clark was fairly popular among early famous local artists, e.g. Yee Bon (余

本) and Chan Hok Shu (陳學書).²⁴⁵ Clark's book, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, is severely criticized by feminist art critics for upholding male-centered aesthetics as universal.²⁴⁶ Such phenomenon reflects that LP artists with a strong Realist tradition are generally ignorant of feminist critiques of female nude in art. For them, the aesthetic represents unquestionable 'timeless' beauty. Not all models dislike long poses. Some LP artists have broader aesthetics than the classical forms, while some models think that short pose is too demanding. Reclining and sleeping poses are common poses in long pose. They are sometimes comfortable that most models enjoy them physically.

Feminist art critics find that poses of female nude are not only poses, but reflect how artists of a certain class, gender and period (usually male, heterosexual and higher/middle class) view femininity and female sexuality. This makes Lynda Nead believe that lessons of the life class basically amount to an aesthetic endorsement of patriarchal power.²⁴⁷ As gender is instituted through the stylization of the body, it has to be understood as how bodily gestures and movements constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered self.²⁴⁸ For example, the seemingly 'natural' pudica pose is very popular in Greek statues of women. It shows a woman covering her genital or breasts with her hand. Such gesture signifies the sexual vulnerability of women which is served as defining the sexuality of women as opposed to the aggressive male in ancient Greece.²⁴⁹ For the more traditional artists, poses of male models show (muscular) power and strength while that of female models show tenderness and

²⁴⁵ Kwok Hei Luen, "The Life drawing of three artists," in Lai Kin Keung ed., *Romantic Colors – On Hong Kong Visual Art (形彩風流 – 香港視覺文化史話)*, (Joint Publishing: Hong Kong, 2002), 34

²⁴⁶ Nead, *Art*.

²⁴⁷ Nead, *Art*.

²⁴⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 519

²⁴⁹ Nanette Salomon, "Making a world of difference: gender asymmetry, and the Greek nude," in *Naked Truths: Women, Sexuality, and Gender in Classical Art and Archaeology*, ed. Ann Olga Koloski-Ostrow and Claire L. Lyons, (London: Routledge, 1997), 209.

softness. Books on life drawing sometimes use very feminine words to describe the beauty of the female nude but not the male nude. Poses which express the tenderness and delicacy (柔婉可憐) of women are aesthetic.²⁵⁰ Sometimes, props which are related to 'lives of women' like silk scarves, flowers and combs are used to highlight the femininity of the model.²⁵¹ A system of compulsory heterosexuality is thus reproduced through the cultivation of bodies into discrete sexes with 'natural' appearances and 'natural' heterosexual dispositions.²⁵²

Also, a 'shy' pose in the painting may imply that reserved female sexuality is endorsed by the artist. The common bather (浴女) theme in the early 20th century in Hong Kong resembles the classical convention of the nude.²⁵³ The naked figure is displayed intentionally for the visual pleasure of the spectator yet unaware of this voyeuristic intrusion.²⁵⁴ Such theme is criticized by feminist art critics as justifying the male gaze in art.²⁵⁵

Acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core of substance, but produce this on the surface of the body. Such acts, gestures, enactments are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs or other discursive means.²⁵⁶ Here we can see how the 'essence' of femininity, being shy and reserved(含蓄/矜持), is produced through the performance of corporeal signs – covering her face, legs closed together: When analyzing a piece of female nude

²⁵⁰ Hua Yu Si (華雨詩), *The Nude Sketches and Poses*(人體素描與姿勢), (Taipei: Nan Tian Publishing, 1990), 210.

²⁵¹ Ibid., 208.

²⁵² Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 521.

²⁵³ Chong, *Painting*, 142.

²⁵⁴ Chong, *Painting*, 142.

²⁵⁵ Linda Nochlin, *Bathers, Bodies, Beauty: the Visceral Eye*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

²⁵⁶ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and Subversion of Identity*, (New York: Routledge, 2006), 173.

created by Chan Hok Shu (陳學書), Kwok Hei Lun (郭喜倫), his student, praised him for incorporating Chinese and Western aesthetics by depicting the shyness of women and using oil painting at the same time.²⁵⁷ Both artists were trained in the Realist tradition. The woman in the painting embodies a traditional Chinese woman according to Kwok, as being shy and reserved is the ‘essential temperament’ of Chinese traditional women. As she is shy about her nakedness, she covers her face with her hands and closes her legs while she sits. Artists who like the aesthetics of reserved women prefer models who have more feminine curves and features and pose modestly, i.e., expressing ‘shyness’ and minimizing sexual tones of the pose.

Kitty is tired of LP artists who embrace such aesthetics. Models like her do not refuse those jobs but treat them ‘merely’ as jobs to earn money. They comply with what artists want because they think they have the responsibility to satisfy the artists after being paid. While their corporeal style conforms to passive femininity, they treat these poses with satire or even contempt. Such opinion by models shows that they are often more critical than artists on the practice of life drawing but do not talk about them openly. LP artists are more generally interested in how to do an ‘accurate and good looking’ life drawing than to ask why they have to do it.

They love stereotypes like those women in art books. If he sounds like an old-fashioned man, I will pose stereotypes. He doesn’t think about the body. I don’t know why he draws... I don’t think that artists are particularly interesting. I don’t think that they are very creative nor they are passionate about drawing. They are not open-minded at all. They never think of *broadening their horizons* through drawing. The angles

²⁵⁷ Kwok Hei Luen, “life drawing,” in Lai Kin Keung ed., *Romantic Colors – On Hong Kong Visual Art* (形彩風流 – 香港視覺文化史話), (Joint Publishing: Hong Kong, 2002), 34.

and the composition are all the same. Sometimes I get angry after modeling. You are insulting your pen!

It is worth exploring why some models consider LP artists as ‘not thinking about the body.’ They do think about the body, but their concern is very different from models. In short, artists and models have a different idea of what creativity means. Those artists are thinking about portraying the body in representation instead of the body per se. Technical skills required to represent the body like lighting, colour and strokes help an artist produce a ‘creative work.’ However, some models think that creativity is about reflection on the fundamental values of life drawing. If they draw similar feminine poses all the time, what is the point of doing this? For many artists, drawing the female nude in a certain way is an established tradition in art training which does not need to be questioned. Despite the decreased importance of figurative art in contemporary art, the general public still easily relate artists to people who draw. Models also carry such belief, consider people doing life drawing as artists, and expect artists to be ‘talented, innovative and imaginative’ people. They enter modeling with the hope of getting along with like minded creative people but show disappointment after working for some time. As artists usually base on what they know (in their background of art training) rather than what they see when drawing the long pose, models feel that they can rarely act as coauthors who discuss with the artist on the drawing or explore bodily movements. Artists are therefore, not as ‘creative’ as they imagine, as they follow certain aesthetic tradition closely that allows little room for models. A remark by Joyce on the difficulty of creative communication explains the tension between artists’ concern on the body in representation and models’ concern on the body. While artists may happily express how they compose the drawing with models, models feel that such discussion may not be up to the point,

as body, not drawing, makes life drawing different from other drawing practices. However, talking about the body openly is not a norm in our society. In the studio, there is even an atmosphere to avoid talking about the body apart from how to draw it. We are either too shy to talk about it or lack the vocabularies to engage in a fruitful discussion, especially when popular discourse on the body is frigid in Hong Kong – too much on appearance, but too little on other aspects. Joyce commented on the culture of studios,

It's so difficult to discuss modeling with them. We have few vocabularies on the *body*. When we don't know how to talk about it, we become silent.

She also talks about the nakedness of a social body rather than the nude in art to show that requiring a woman who is not shy about her nakedness to 'act shy' is simply ridiculous.

I think those poses are so pretentious, but I don't mind. Pretentious means that they emphasize femininity. The poses they require are very feminine. Hey, I am already naked, how can I be elegant?

Models usually feel easier to comply with traditional feminine poses than to confront the artist when he/she openly endorses a narrow aesthetic towards feminine beauty. In doing long pose, models feel that they are more likely to earn money than to be creative and reduce their expectation to be expressive. Although artists often stress their interaction with models through energy transfer (to be elaborated in the later part), verbal communication on the production of the drawing is not common. Some models think that communication is not easy as they do not want to sound

impolite by 'transgressing' their role as a paid employee. This shows that the model is usually not seen as a creator of art who is as important as the artist, but a tool to fulfill the idea of the sole creator, the artist. As Mayhew said, modern life drawing has developed to play a variety of roles in different situations and led to a number of apparently contradictory narratives.²⁵⁸ There actually exists a tension between asking the model to be creative and to fulfill the idea of the artist at the same time. It can be argued that models' creativity contributes to the works of short-pose artists. However, when models have 'too much' creativity, they may hinder LP artists from drawing what they want, as novelty of pose is less important. Yan said,

I can communicate with the artist if I know him. This is embarrassing if I don't know him. I am not interested as this concerns monetary issues.

Maybe I think too much. *He doesn't need my ideas very much,* theoretically. I cannot demand others to communicate with me.

When a model detects that the artist endorses classical feminine beauty very much, she is more likely to see this as an attack of their bodies and feel angry. A classical female body does not need to be very slim. She needs to have an even proportion and has 'shape', i.e. 'beautiful' breasts and buttocks to accentuate her body curve. Slightly fat women are acceptable as long as they have 'curves.' A woman with a tomboy look, a flat chest and/or small buttocks is worse for artists who uphold Classical aesthetics to a great extent, because she is neither curvy nor feminine. Some LP artists are loose when they choose models for practicing, but are stricter when they draw the real work. Florence once encountered a ruthless old artist and felt angry. Although many LP artists have preferred body shapes, they are very polite to the models and do not judge

²⁵⁸ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 43.

their bodies openly. Her case is exceptional.

There was an old artist who chose models. He didn't draw Rosemary as she was too short. He didn't draw me too. Perhaps my breasts are not big enough and my proportion is not good enough... He is so weird... If he doesn't like to draw me, don't draw!

The narrow range of aesthetics and the physical demand of long pose limit artistic self expression of models. However, devoted models may not disdain long pose completely and see its value as a training of their bodies and a chance for meditation. Melody said that she enjoys long pose as it calms her down.

I may be very busy and stressful, or bothered by relationship or work problems before I arrive at the studio. But once I arrive, I enter another state of mind for the next two three hours. The atmosphere created by a group of people drawing brings me to another state. The situation is silent and calm... If it is a long pose... I feel very calm during 30 minutes. I calm down myself and do introspection... I enjoy it very much.

Mandy talked about how long pose trained her body.

Modeling experience is a training of my body, both endurance and the acknowledgement of my body status. For example, how should I put my limbs to support my body? I think my endurance is stronger after modeling.

Possibilities of bodily exploration during short pose

Short pose is also called croquis or fast, loose sketch, based on either a moving or rapidly changing model. It was one of the experimental approaches practiced in French free ateliers in the late 19th century.²⁵⁹ It is the major form of life drawing practiced in art schools in the West and in Hong Kong nowadays. The requirement of a great range of poses does not intend to make life modeling theatrical, let alone feminist. Yet, artists' encouragement of different poses and theatrical elements, the possibility to improvise and greater audience response make it similar to theatrical performance. As mentioned in the introduction, art educator Nicolaides is opposed to rigid objective seeing in observational drawing and endorses a humanist and empathic approach to drawing as a form of feeling and connection. It promotes a form of observational drawing where perception intimately is tied in with an experience of the artist's own body and feelings.²⁶⁰ The exercises in Nicolaides promote spectatorship that challenges the distance of voyeurism or the abstracting qualities of geometric plotting. He also encourages short pose as one of the practices to achieve the aim. For him, physical sensations, within and between the bodies of the artists and models, form an intrinsic part of how seeing is explained. This represents modernist progressive approaches to academy style teaching of fine art.²⁶¹ The emphasis on affective seeing and embodied connection between the artist and the model has considerable influence on how short pose is practiced in the studio and artist-model interaction.

As the creative role of the model becomes more important and the model is less seen as an object than a person interacting with the artist emotionally, short pose

²⁵⁹ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 102.

²⁶⁰ Kimon Nicolaïdes, *The Natural Way to Draw: a Working Plan for Art Study*, (Boston : Houghton Mifflin Co., 1969)

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 197.

stimulates models to think about to what extent they can be subjects in life drawing. Aesthetic reflexivity focuses on the creative, self expressive elements of being and is valued highly among models who are creative workers or aesthetically inclined.²⁶² This is why the expressiveness of short pose brings intense satisfaction to devoted models.

A large range of poses

The ability to generate a wide range of poses is appreciated by artists. The model usually generates a pose and changes the pose as the time is up. In a two-hour section, a model may do more than 10 poses. It is better if these poses do not replicate. Artists usually do not refuse a pose. Although the acceptance of unconventional poses among SP artists varies, they are generally more open minded than LP artists because they are less constrained by classical aesthetics and academic drawing. While feminists believe that women have a more limited bodily compartment than men in everyday life, female models are less hindered by gender roles during posing.²⁶³ While some male models dare not to pose too femininely, female models have a wider range of poses as a masculine pose does not call into question her femininity.²⁶⁴ Short poses are often gender neutral like reading a book, stretching, dance-like gestures and doing yoga. Corporeal styles of short pose are less traditionally feminine and lead to less constrained gender roles. Because of the shorter amount of time, models are allowed to attempt difficult poses which cannot be done in a long pose. Very often, they are not asked to do challenging poses but they take the initiative to do so. Models contend that they understand the strengths and flexibility of different body parts more through

²⁶² Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 197.

²⁶³ Sandra Lee Barky, "Foucault, Femininity, and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power," in *Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*, ed. Kate Conboy et al. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 148.

²⁶⁴ Philips, *Modeling*, 78.

posing for different duration of time. If the pose is difficult, posing for ten minutes can be much more exhausting than five minutes. Testing poses one by one is 'so much fun' for enthusiastic models. They show an assimilation of work and play during life modeling. In long pose, the body folded up like a ball is usually not accepted as it is very deviant from what a good pose means in classical aesthetic, and artists think that there is 'nothing' to draw. It is more likely to be accepted in a short pose as it provides an unusual drawing experience. Kitty said,

My body is quite flexible. Some artists like me to fold up like a ball. A French artist and another artist in Central like weird poses very much. He thought that weird poses were funny, like contorting my body into a ball. Let me demonstrate it to you. Very few people like it. They think I should 'spread' my body. He drew me from the aerial view. Very interesting. Let me draw it. I am short. The drawing of me looks like a baby. That's so much fun.

Rosemary said,

There is much more variation and difficulty during short pose. You don't need to hold the pose for a long time. It requires less bodily balance and control than long poses. I can do more lively poses during short pose.

The importance of elegance is downplayed because variety, rather than elegance, is the point of short pose. Although Rosemary has very long hair and looks feminine, she does not like feminine poses. It is through experimenting body movements that

makes her body not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities.²⁶⁵

Dancing helps modeling. I don't like elegant dance very much. Elegance is not something to describe me... I like cool poses, modern... Foreigner artists praise me for my great variation of poses and their rarity... When I am doing different things, I know what my body can do. I like this platform very much.

Sometimes, short pose can be very theatrical if the studio attempts to produce special lighting and atmosphere, and when artists ask the model to make facial expressions during very short poses. This happens more often in Academy of Performing Arts which also teaches theatrical arts. In a life modeling section in Creative Media of City University, candles were lit and ambient music was played. Models got into the mood of theatrical performance easily. Short pose artists are more interested in creating a theatrical visual experience. Mayhew criticizes traditional artists who adopt rigid objective seeing as using trained memory to fill the enormous gap between seeing and drawing. This reduces human perception to a form of ocular authority which is detached from the artist's body.²⁶⁶ It is probable that the art teacher created a mysterious atmosphere to stimulate the feelings of both models and students. Then, the seeing process of the students is interpreted as an embodied and affective experience which is crucial and valuable in itself, and may be transferred to the art work. As the eye cannot be separated from the body, the gaze of the artist is

²⁶⁵ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 512.

²⁶⁶ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 194.

actually richer than the inevitable mediation between the model and the representation of the model in rigid observational drawing.

In conceptualizing the modeling body, psychical and social dimensions are not in opposition to each other but as necessarily interactive. The psychical representation of the subject's lived body as well as the relations between body gestures, posture, and movement in the constitution of the processes of psychical representations are important.²⁶⁷ The principle of physical theatre is similar to the expressiveness in short pose. It is a theatre where the primary means of creation occurs through the body rather than through the mind, compared with traditional theatre which is more text-based (like interpreting scripts).²⁶⁸ A body movement is not a mechanical movement accomplished by isolated body parts only. Exploring one simple movement with total concentration like lifting an arm propels the actor into a new relationship with his/her body.²⁶⁹ A model concentrating on a pose is similar to an actress doing physical theatre. As she has a high awareness while posing, she experiences heightened physical sensibility which gives her an intense feeling of theatrical performance. Mandy is a freelance instructor and performer of physical theatre and this enables her to combine life modeling and acting. Rosemary receives similar training and combines acting and posing whenever possible. She explained her favorite poses which resemble a theatrical style, *butoh*. Although LP artists also like twisting bodies, the twisting has to be carefully calculated to achieve the graceful and harmonic effects like those in *contrapposto*.

²⁶⁷ Elizabeth Grosz, "Refiguring bodies," in *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), 26.

²⁶⁸ Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, (London: N. Hern Books, 2001), 4-5.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

There is a type of Japanese theatre called butoh. Many movements. I like it very much. A lot of twisting movements. Many people don't like it but I like it very much. I dare not pose them in front of traditional people but I do in front of some people. There is a Korean artist in Central. Once I twisted myself like a puppet and he liked it very much.

Butoh is considered as a performance art. This Japanese dance-theatre cult often employs nudity for therapeutic function. It was created after the Second World War performed by avant-garde actors to explore their feelings of alienation or pain in modern society through their bodies which are restricted in traditional dancing forms. Contemplative movement modes are stressed.²⁷⁰ The nude body is occasionally covered with white powder to create theatrical effects. Props like masks and lights are also used. Before exposing their bodies, male performers often wear dresses or feminine props while female performers sometimes shave their heads bald. Transgressive gender performance is one of the theatrical effects to get into the deeper psyche of the actor. The movements of Butoh dancers project an eerie, grotesque aura in which the nude body achieves expressivity through a repertoire of spasms, convulsions, twitchings, sputterings, whirlings, slitherings, stampings, crawlings, and plant-like convolutions of limbs, torso, and head.²⁷¹ The body appears as a strange, alien being and becomes more unusual than its 'normal' state. Through butoh, Rosemary is not only experimenting her poses, but also how her feelings are put into the poses. The emotional participation of the artist is more encouraged in short pose and can be strongly felt by models, giving them a vivid experience of live

²⁷⁰ Sondra Horton Fraleigh, *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen and Japan*, (Pittsburgh, Pa.: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1999), 13.

²⁷¹ Karl Toepfer, "Nudity and Textuality in Postmodern Performance," *Performing Arts Journal*, 18(2007): 81.

performance. When poses are as short as half a minute to a few minutes, poses and movements are more interconnected. A model moves her body until she finds an appropriate pose and stops for a minute or two, then moves again to find another pose. The new pose can be totally different, but it can also be a slight adjustment of the previous pose. For example, the model may shift the angle she is posing so that artists can draw from different angles without moving their seats too much.

For Kitty, psychical processes are connected to what poses are generated. In dance improvisation, imagery represents a fertile source of movement for the dancer who wants his/her movement to be more literally evocative.²⁷²

Sometimes I am a role player. I pretended to be a sculpture in Greek mythology, imagined myself as a catwalk model and dancer to see what pose I can do.

She also invents new poses by thinking of how she should move her body part by part. Isolating parts of the body and moving them separately can help a person explore new movement possibilities, for example, arms and legs can move in different directions or patterns together.²⁷³ As all people have their own movement limitations due to their personality, body type, lack of experience and training, or by entrenchment in previous training, this can help overcome movement limitations of models and widening their range of poses by paying attention to detailed parts of the body.

I will isolate my body into parts. My head has to be like this, so does my shoulder, arms, feet, torso and my bottom. I calculate when I pose. I posed that before and I pose this now. My head shifted to this angle and my back

²⁷² Joyce Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 85.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 103.

was still in the previous pose. Now I change my pose by moving some of my body parts. This creates an impression for the artist that I did many poses. It's likely that I just change the angle and shift a little bit. I cannot think of so many poses.

Improvising movements

Although some models test out their poses in the mirror before a modeling section, improvisation is often employed by models. It is not surprising that many models in Hong Kong and other countries received dance training and some even attempted dance improvisation. Movement improvisation has been considered as a way to get at human impulses.²⁷⁴ Short pose is exciting for some models not only of their bodily movements but also how they explore their emotions and mood change through poses.

Short pose is not equal to dance improvisation but in some ways they are similar. Performers see poses and bodily movements as created through the interaction between the performer's psyche and the external environment, like lighting and music. It is not surprising that models often want to choose their own music to play in the studio if possible, as it is one of the variables affecting their performance. At the beginning of the drawing session, models are sometimes asked to do slow movements for around ten minutes. Then poses ranging from one to five minutes are carried out continually. Occasionally, models are asked by the teacher to move as they want and stop suddenly for a few minutes and repeat for a few times.

As a large number of poses may be needed during the section, models do not find the point of memorizing all the poses before they work. A model may start by one or two poses in her mind, then think of more poses when they are posing. Also, models

²⁷⁴ Ibid., xii.

enjoy the moment of improvising poses according to the environment of the studio, music, their current mood, and their interaction with artists. In such cases, theatrical element and psychic process of the model affect her poses more. Melody said,

I pose according to my feelings during short pose. I don't pose because of who the artists are.

Yan described in detail how interacting with artists leads to unpredicted improvisation.

Short pose is very challenging because I am thinking all the time... I posed once with a feeling of death. My psychological status, my experience and my thoughts affect my body too... I suddenly came up with this pose and I was satisfied with it. I feel like creating.

In discussing dance improvisation, Johnstone argues that movements may be a way in which a mindful body explores the world.²⁷⁵ In improvising, the person is exploring the world in movement. She is taking into account the world as it exists for her here and now she is moving.²⁷⁶ A few days before the commemoration of the Tiananman Square Massacre, she felt sad about the massacre of Chinese students by soldiers and posed like the statue of democracy to commemorate the event. She felt that artists concentrated suddenly and they pointed out the political implications of the pose during the break. She was happy with the artists' speculation. The response of artists is similar to the principle of physical theatre. It accentuates the audience's

²⁷⁵ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Thinking in Movement," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39(4): 403.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

imaginative involvement and engagement with what is taking place on stage.²⁷⁷ For Mayhew, while an artist adopting rigid objective seeing denies his/her own subjectivity, artists who draw using the approach of Nicolaidis can feel the pose in the artists' bodies, promoting an empathic connection with human subjects.²⁷⁸ The role of the model is like a mime actress who does an expressive pose but keeps silent. The artist is then, encouraged to guess the feelings and implications of the pose to stimulate creation.

In improvisational dance, thinking in movement is not limited to thinking in dance movement; hence, everyday life gestures which have a certain culturally recognized meaning are often included.²⁷⁹ Models do not need formal dance training in order to improvise. What they do in daily lives can often inspire them. In improvisation, sensibility to bodily movements is more important than acquiring traditional dancing techniques. This allows models who are 'non-dancers' to explore their bodies during modeling. Sandy recalled how modeling made her more conscious of her everyday gestures and considered putting them into modeling,

I rarely look at the mirror. But after modeling, I look at myself in the mirror and hold my head in my hand. Should I do this pose next time? This affects how I pose.

Joyce, who claimed that she was insensitive to her bodily needs before modeling, said,

²⁷⁷ Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, (London: N. Hern Books, 2001), 5.

²⁷⁸ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 204.

²⁷⁹ Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Thinking in Movement," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 39(1981): 404.

I notice what I do every day. For example, how I put my feet when I sit. I find it quite comfortable and think of trying it during modeling.

In some rare situations, two models are employed at a time and are required to do some duo movements and poses. As employing two models is too expensive for most artists, this usually occurs in an art academy. I saw twice when I observed two models working together in the life drawing class in the City University of Hong Kong. In the first lesson, Mandy posed with her female friend while in the second lesson, she posed with a young male whom she met for the first time. He was a friend of a friend of Mandy. The students were the majors of Creative Media. The teacher was an illustrator and graphic designer. For her, the most important thing of the classes was not to grasp the proportion of the figures accurately. Instead, students should be able to observe the bodies quickly and feel the energy of the bodies and express them through fluid lines on the paper. This concurred with the higher importance of embodied and affective seeing in short pose. The lesson was divided into several sections. First, they were asked to pose together for about forty minutes. Then, they were asked to interact with each other's bodies. The teacher said 'stop' suddenly and models stopped correspondingly for half a minute or more. This was repeated for a few times. In the third section, models posed individually, starting with movements and stopped suddenly for a short time: As Mandy has been learning dance improvisation, she was very excited during the performance. Both she and her first partner received theatrical training, and they were very happy about the idea. Such performance is very similar to contact improvisation, in which the ongoing flow of energy between the two bodies is stressed during improvisation. They often yield

rather than resist, using their arms to support but seldom to manipulate.²⁸⁰

Intersubjectivity is established by the dancers as they work with and investigating physical forces as weight, gravity, momentum, leveraging and resistance while continuing to remain in sustained physical contact.²⁸¹ A shared experience of movement between two models is achieved. During the performance, common strategies of contact improvisation are employed like weight dependency, in which exchange of weight between models occurs through lifting, leaning on, rolling over, pushing, and pulling one another in the name of movement and dance.²⁸²

In the second section, Mandy and her partner needed to have considerable trust in each other as weight dependency and body touch were involved. Ambient and energetic music was chosen by the teacher and Mandy respectively. They improvised as the music started when bodies started to touch, push and lean on each other. When the melody was livelier, their movements were faster, poses more energetic and joyful. When the tone was heavier, their movements were slower and more contemplative. As music has a strong power to suggest movement styles, rhythm and energy, models can learn to play with the music by listening and reacting to music attentively.²⁸³ They were suddenly stopped by the teacher for one minute or more and continued. It was not very important for students to grasp the nude accurately. The ability to draw decisive strokes of the poses within an extremely short time was more important. As contact improvisation embodies the social ideologies of the early 70s which rejected traditional gender roles and social hierarchies, dancers consider the experience of touching and sharing weight with a partner of either sex or any size as a way of

²⁸⁰ Cynthia Jean Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 8.

²⁸¹ Lori Gabrielle Felton, "Structuring collaborative improvisation: reflections from contact improvisational dance," (PhD diss., University of California Santa Cruz, 2001).

²⁸² Joyce Morgenroth, *Dance Improvisations*, (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), 8.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 117.

constructing a new experience of the self interacting with another person.²⁸⁴ In the second lesson, the sections were the same but she needed to have close contact with a male model. She was not embarrassed about it as nudity or body contact with the opposite sex should not be a hindrance of the improvisation experience. He was a first time model and his body looked stiff when he was asked to improvise with Mandy. She then took a more active role to move his body when they were improvising poses together. Unexpectedness in contact improvisation is higher as the model does not know what her partner is going to do next that she needs to respond immediately to whatever happens. It created high theatricality that students paid a lot of attention to the performance. They even reported that the visual effect was too mesmerizing and exciting that they could not concentrate on drawing. The tension between seeing and drawing will be explained in the last part of the chapter.

Greater interaction and audience response

Greater interaction and audience response is experienced by many models during short pose. As poses change more often and more vigorously, they are more likely to trigger the feelings of artists. Such response shows that not only the lived bodies of the model, but also that of the artists, are important during a modeling section. This resembles the emphasis of energy of the actor in physical theatre. The intensification of energy on stage forces a strong link with the spectator.²⁸⁵ The link leads to reciprocal current of exchange between actor and spectator.²⁸⁶ This can be accomplished through doing unusual or expressive poses as they provoke the spectators' imaginative participation. Scholars find that spectators were able to detect

²⁸⁴ Cynthia Jean Novack, *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American culture*, (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), 11.

²⁸⁵ Dymphna Callery, *Through the Body: A Practical Guide to Physical Theatre*, (London: N. Hern Books, 2001), 27.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 103.

the intended emotion that was transmitted by the performances of dance movements.²⁸⁷ Grief performances were mostly likely to be detected, followed by anger and then joy.²⁸⁸ Models who start their poses from their emotions are often able to affect the audience. Melody said,

A model is consciously expressing her emotion in the studio. This is a performance.

When the emotions of the poses are detected by artists, they often show embodied responses. The artists may have amazed facial expressions. The gaze and hands of artists will be more focused when they encounter an unusual pose. Their bodies will be moving around quickly and anxiously, seeking to find the best angle. After the session, artists may clap hands or praise the model for her performance. Some artists said that they imagined themselves as the model to feel the difficulty and energy of the pose. They fantasize that they are posing as models when they draw to feel how the force is distributed on the model's body. Such practice makes artists more sympathetic to the model's pose. They are also more emotionally affected by the pose, which can be reflected by their facial expression and bodily response. Reports of artists show that rigid objective seeing is not likely to operate perfectly if they are immersed in the performance of models. Feeling the pose of models can actually enrich their visual experience and imagination. Affective and embodied seeing may occur in both LP and SP artists. However, my interviews with artists show that their emotions are more easily triggered when models are doing short pose. SP artists also

²⁸⁷ Antonio Camurri et al., "Recognizing emotion from dance movement: comparison of spectator recognition and automated techniques," *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 59(2003):222.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

talk more about their empathy for the pose and emotions of models. For many models, such response is very rewarding as it shows that her poses are able to touch and stimulate the artists. Sensitive models sometimes decide on their poses according to the attitude and response of artists. Kitty said,

If they are talkative and lively, if they look energetic, I will give them active and stretching poses. If they make me feel bad, if there is no connection during the conversation, I will not put much effort. I give them stereotypes and quiet poses.

The relaxed informality, sense of 'fun' and a commitment to play help to bring out a creative environment.²⁸⁹ In Hong Kong, SP artists are generally younger and/or foreigners who show a more relaxed manner. For example, they may create a party like atmosphere like playing lively music, providing snacks and red wine, and starting a casual conversation with models. Models feel that their creativity is more likely to attract friendly response from lively artists than artists who look dull and reticent. Many models agree that the Academy for Performing Arts is one of the best places they have worked. First, the pay is higher than the average salary. Second, teachers are very appreciative of creative poses and students are more experimental during drawing. Students of Theatre Design may need to take drawing courses. Courses like Scenic Art, Set and Costume design require some drawing skills. Classes are usually held in a relaxed style where models are encouraged to be expressive and students are expected to develop their individual styles. Not all students in the Academy need to draw life models but some of them do. Some poses are as short as one minute. Models are encouraged to do facial expressions and unusual poses, i.e. poses people

²⁸⁹ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 87.

do not do in their everyday life, which make the whole performance more theatrical. At the end of the performance, teachers and students clap hands and thank for the great show of the model. The model feels very respected and appreciated, and in a more equal position in art creation. Yan said,

If most of the people are paying attention, I will try more varied poses to stimulate them... I am not very good at changing poses but I don't want to do average poses. If there is a distance between the stage and the artists, I may attempt to stand closer. But this is not often the case. If the teacher has a lot of ideas, I will follow. If the teacher lets me express, I will express. This is mutual agreement and it makes me feel free to do what I want. After all, it is a job. I don't know them well. My poses have to be designed for their level. I cannot just do what I want to do... If I create an unusual pose, artists get very nervous and find an appropriate place to draw. If I have special ideas and affect them, they will be more focused. There is a strong feeling of live performance. They work much harder when they like the pose.

Mandy said the response of passionate artists showed that models were treated as performers rather than merely a tool. They feel that they can accomplish artistic self expression through poses. This gives them more incentive to perform.

I am happy in APA because teachers appreciate my short pose and try more possibilities. They thank my attempts and don't treat me as a tool. They think that I respect the job very much and I am open to new things...

Students are interesting because they show their curiosity. The show cannot be completed without their response.

Interacting with younger art students is especially important to give them poses according to their skill levels. Entry level students mostly draw basic poses like standing, sitting, reclining and holding things in the model's hand. Students with a higher level can draw more unusual body poses and poses with more twists and contortions. Yan always guesses how open minded the artists are and improvises poses which may interest them. She considers that she is able to stimulate creativity and inspiration through interacting with artists.

I have plan A and B. If they like special poses, I pose A. If they like ordinary ones, I pose B. I guess their inclination according to their response... If they seem to like a certain kind of pose, I will change from this pose to another to stimulate them. I started from a standing pose and descended my body gradually to create different layers of poses.

The intense achievement stemming from touching the artists shows that meaningful forms of self-realization cannot be achieved outside interaction with others.²⁹⁰ Satisfaction of models does not only come from doing creative poses, but also how such poses are able to stimulate the imagination of artists. Creative self is socially prescribed and embodied in bodily performances and modes of self-presentation.²⁹¹ The openness of SP artists often creates a creative workplace which is able to invigorate the creativity of models.

²⁹⁰ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 119.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 86.

Is the model 'put inside' the painting through interacting with artists with her body?

Despite the fact that artist-model interaction influences the performance of models, the 'effect' of such interaction on the artwork is dubious. Models like to say that they are able to 'put themselves' inside the artists' drawing because they transfer their bodily energy to the artists. The assertion of their energy allows them to think of themselves not as objects like oranges on the table. Both LP and SP artists emphasize how the energy of the model helps create a better work. This is what makes life drawing more exciting than drawing still lives. Artists generally have a hard time explaining how it leads to a particular effect of the work. However, how concentrated the model is during posing affects the mood of artists. Chu told her experience as an artist before she modeled. She complained about how a sleepy model bored her as she drew, and was confident that she was a good model.

An energetic model affects the emotion and leads to a better atmosphere.

Models and artists are interactive.

Many other artists in my interviews said the same. An energetic model does not necessarily mean that she moves all the time. A model who uses a great deal of energy to keep her pose can be felt by artists through her steady glance and sustained posture. Models believe that their bodies are communicative during modeling because of this. Melody said,

Modeling means that you use your body to start a conversation.

For outsiders, such silent interaction sounds mythical. Some models believe that concepts of meditation can explain why their bodily feelings during modeling can be detected by artists, leading to an impression of energy exchange between artists and models. It is quite often for models to use breath control during modeling to overcome their tiredness and numbness. Joyce said,

I practice different breathing styles during modeling... I think modeling recalls my body sensations. Muscular pain or bone pain. I can concentrate on my breath when I feel the pain. I can hear my heartbeat when I feel weak... It's like meditation.

Intense body sensitivity during modeling is caused by bodily discomfort. Breath control and meditation are often used to overcome the discomfort. Such bodily status is very similar to the use of diaphragmatic breathing during yoga practice. It is a kind of deep breathing method to get over a difficult pose during yoga and to achieve meditation. The modeling body is similar to a body doing yoga. It is able to overcome our habitual tendency in our awareness of our bodies to separate the outer body in contact with the external world from the inner body that which we carry around inside ourselves. Because of the separation, 'the objects of external sense become the focus of our experience, so that we tend to privilege that aspect of our body that is accessible to the external observer perspective.'²⁹² However, a concentrating model does not separate feeling the inner body from observing the external world, i.e. the artists. This is why the model feels that she transfers her energy to the artists, and therefore, the artwork. Detecting the feelings of the artists is connected to the

²⁹² Emily A. Impett et al, "Minding the Body: Yoga, Embodiment and Well-being," *Journal of NSRC*, 3(2006): 42-43.

heightened awareness of her body to feel the pose. A passionate model is concerned about staying energetic during work than merely keeping the outer look of the pose. She feels that artists who can feel her energy will concentrate more and do a better drawing. In the Academy of Performing Arts, a paid break for an hour is given to models who work for the whole day. Mandy considered this as a respect for the models' needs to revive energy after exhausting work.

However, such temporary breakdown of feeling the external and internal world through concentrating on the pose does not mean that the model's subjectivity is put into the drawing. The artist may be interested in drawing a particular model, but the tradition of female nude in art is not interested in putting female subjectivity through drawing the model. Traditional and contemporary art training does not teach artists about female subjectivity despite the frequent presence of women in art. The female nude in art throughout Western art history conveys different meanings but it is usually not about the body of a particular woman, not to say her subjectivity. For example, the nude was a prerequisite of history painting in the 18th and 19th century in art academies in Europe.²⁹³ Preparatory sketches and sometimes detailed studies that preceded them were nude figure studies of the historical characters. Figures were finally clothed in antique costume in the final stages of the painting.²⁹⁴ The abundance of women in Modernist art does not mean that their bodies signify 'women.' The formal characteristics of the nude have often been represented as a pretext for modernist experimentation with form, like cubism, expressionism and surrealism but not women.²⁹⁵ In traditional art history books, the nude is described as 'it' rather than 'her.'²⁹⁶ Even when Realist artists observe the appearance and intrinsic

²⁹³ Pam Meecham and Julie Sheldon, *Modern Art: a Critical Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 87.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 98

qualities of the model in detail, the key is to infuse them with the artist's creativity and emotions to 'elevate them' into a work of art.²⁹⁷ The model's body has to be elevated by the artist in order to be an art. The interaction between the artist's body and the model's body does exist, but it does not mean that female subjectivity is important in female nude in art. To represent the model they see in front of them in figurative art is the most important objective, if not the only objective, in most life drawing sessions. Seeing is necessary in life drawing but usually subordinate to drawing. It is not because artists are self-centered. The practice of using the female body for representation in art has a history of denying or ignoring female subjectivity. This part will be further discussed in Mandy's attempt to put feminist performance art into modeling.

Case study of Mandy: What happens when a model attempts to put feminist performance art into life modeling?

Although short pose is appreciated by many models, its relation with feminist performance art is uncanny. They are happy to find the place to express themselves in life modeling, but does it mean that life drawing is able to respond to the question of female subjectivity in feminist performance art? A case study of two modeling shows demonstrates why adopting ideas of feminist performance art in modeling causes tension and excitement in artists.

The two performances, called 'Model Drawing Shows' (the Shows), were held in private studios. The first was performed by a male performance artist, Guan, a feminist performance artist and model, Mandy, Sandy and me. The second was performed by Mandy and me only. Two groups of artists were invited by the models.

²⁹⁷ Tsang Kai Hon, *Sketches of nudes by Tsang Kai-hon* (畫裏真真：曾繼康人體素描), (Hong Kong University Art Museum: Hong Kong, 2007), 13.

The first group of artists composes of six young students of major in Creative Media in the City University of Hong Kong while another group included ten artists with different age and levels of life drawing experience. The former happened to be all female while the later had similar proportion of men and women. As Mandy found students in the City University very interesting and open minded, she kept contact with them after the modeling work had ended. As they expressed their wish to do life drawing again, Mandy considered seriously about including them in the Shows to increase mutual understanding.

Before the performances, three models had a discussion with me about how they wanted the shows to be done. It first started as a mutual drawing event among models proposed in the group discussion. Later, models suggested organizing an unprecedented event in which models took a more active role in life drawing and facilitated the communication between artists and models. Among them, Mandy was the most enthusiastic model and spent a lot of effort on organizing the event. She called it 'Modeling Shows' as she wanted to say that life modeling was actually an active show by models to convey messages to artists. We also exchanged emails to invite other models and artists to join and discussed our expectations on the Shows. Mandy and I first explained to the artists that the performance was supposed to be different from usual life drawing sessions. The poses and the pace would be decided by models. They were also expected to hold discussion after the section. Meanings of life drawing, the female body and artist-model relationship were the core questions. We charged lower than usual fees for life drawing lessons. Both performances lasted for around two hours respectively. They were photographed and the first one was video recorded.

In the first performance, Mandy, Sandy and I participated. Mandy also invited a male performance artist (Guan) to give a short individual performance. Mandy first

announced that artists were expected to have a different experience of life drawing and follow the programmes the models had designed. Artists were informed of the uniqueness of the Shows from ordinary drawing sections before they came, but she reminded them once more. Three models did a short pose respectively for 10 minutes. Then Guan gave a short performance. He was almost totally naked (he hid his penis) and acted as if he was a female by doing feminine gestures extremely slowly. Then, four of us took turns to pose together (sometimes a duo, sometimes a trio). In the end, everybody was posing. We started from short pose to slow movements. Contact improvisation was used frequently between Mandy and Guan. They leaned on the wall and depended on the weight of each other to make a wide range of poses. Artists were free to choose whatever model and angle they were interested to portray. In the end, artists spread out their drawings in the studio and discussed with models about how they drew and how they got the inspiration. We discussed for about an hour. Artists talked about how they thought of life drawing and life models, while models shared with artists how they came up with the ideas of the Shows and poses.

The second performance was simpler. As four models posed a great challenge to artists, we decided to reduce the number of models involved. Mandy and I were the only models. We posed individually for 15 minutes, then we posed together. I moved extremely slowly while she moved faster, and she affected how I posed through putting her weight on me and moving my body parts. It lasted for two hours. Similar discussion was held for around half an hour.

The critique of the female nude in art by feminist performance art

The possibilities of exploring the female body in short pose attract devoted models. Although they identify with the objective of life drawing to a considerable extent,

their high self-reflexivity leads to the critique of long pose. Short pose does open a space for a critical review of the classical aesthetics of the female nude, artist-model interaction and detached objective seeing. However, some models contend that direct communication between artists and models is still minimal in most cases and they have little say on the rundown of a session. As some models see themselves as coworkers, they find mutual understanding between artists and models important. This is why they are interested in taking a more active role in organizing a life drawing activity. Models do not talk about feminist performance art explicitly, but their intention and format of the Shows resemble feminist performance art. Performance art is one of the ideas which helps both parties reflect on the relationship between artists and models and the meaning of drawing the female nude. They raise the question of how far bodily exploration can go and how active the model can be in life drawing. Feminist performance art challenges important ideologies inherent in the female nude in art. The greater demand for female models compared to male models in the modern period largely arises from the culturally constructed category that 'woman' as object, the basis of the Western system of representation. Because of such operation, actual women are rendered an absence.²⁹⁸ Hence, although actual women are employed in life drawing, they are used to satisfy the 'woman as sign' in the art tradition which unavoidably denies or ignores the ability of the model to speak for herself. Yet, women's performance art is intended to criticize the phallogocentricity of patriarchy and its signifying systems through the performer's body.²⁹⁹ Putting feminist performance art into life modeling inevitably triggered uneasiness, puzzlement and amazement of artists during the Shows. Performance art is rooted in the radical and experimental anti-art gestures of the avant-garde in the early twentieth

²⁹⁸ Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 218.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 219.

century.³⁰⁰ It is also a practice that disrupts and disturbs boundaries as ‘an ever evolving and shifting area of live cultural practice.’³⁰¹ Performance artists usually position themselves outside of and antagonistic to mainstream practice. It is a rejection of Modernist forms of practice and systems of power perceived as masculine and a resistance to established hierarchies and the notion of art as commodity.³⁰²

Performance art by women is a response to the art scene which marginalized women as artists and manipulated the body of ‘women’ in representation, and women performance artists have sought to insert the female self into art practice.³⁰³ Because of the high proportion of women being enrolled in modern art education in Hong Kong, the biological sex of artists doing life drawing is not a major concern of models. The inherent ideology of life drawing is more pressing for them. As explained above, female subjectivity is usually not important in both Classical and Modernist art. Feminists criticize the use of female bodies by largely male artists to justify their notion of high art dominated by patriarchal values and misogynist ideologies. For example, they criticize the sexist content of artists like de Kooning and Renoir.³⁰⁴ Some women artists working within a male tradition of representation tried to produce images which disrupted the conventions of a genre, for example, Suzanna Valadon, a model and artist.³⁰⁵

Female performance artists often restage the female body to dismantle dominant constructions of women.³⁰⁶ As Dolan explains, nakedness is often employed by

³⁰⁰ Helen Potkin, “Performance art,” in *Feminist Visual Culture*, eds. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska, (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 75.

³⁰¹ Lois Keiden. “Showtime: Curating Live Art in the 90s,” *Art & Design*, 12(1997): 38.

³⁰² Helen Potkin, “Performance art,” in *Feminist Visual Culture*, eds. Fiona Carson and Claire Pajaczkowska, (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 76.

³⁰³ Ibid.

³⁰⁴ Lise Vogel, “Fine Arts and Feminism: The Awakening Consciousness,” *Feminist Studies*, 2(1974): 18.

³⁰⁵ Rosemary Betterton, “How Do Women Look? The Female Nude in the Work of Suzanne Valadon,” *Feminist Review*, 19(1985):3.

³⁰⁶ Ibid.

feminist performance artists to articulate women's newly heard voices, by evincing what was considered a symbolic reclamation of women's subjectivity through the body.³⁰⁷ Mandy has used her nakedness or near nakedness in her performance for many times to engage in social, political and religious issues. For her, this is an extension of her performance to the realm of fine art.

Mandy does not dismiss the representation of women in art as totally problematic. While criticizing sexist elements in female nude in art and practices of life drawing in history, feminist art teachers like Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik do not deny the function of life drawing and attempt to make the relationship between artist and model more equal. For example, practices are used to destabilize rigid objective seeing which often objectifies models and ignores their feelings and subjectivity. Students are asked to imitate the model's pose before drawing to identify with the feeling of the model. Teachers can ask students to draw nude self portraits and discuss the gaze and aesthetic distance.³⁰⁸ Mandy's stance was similar. She made an effort to bring artist-model relationship to the center of the life class by infusing elements of feminist performance art. She recognized that students could learn more about the human body and drawing techniques through life drawing. Life models and artists are coauthors of a piece of art. The lack of communication in usual life drawing sections makes some models feel that they are not treated as equals. Her comments reminded us of the dumbness of models mentioned by Mayhew. 'It is arguable that the marginalization of artists' models outside the studio, and within the art-worlds of educational institutions, is based on a generalization of the silent

³⁰⁷ Jill Dolan, "The Dynamics of Desire: Sexuality and Gender in Pornography and Performance," *Theatre Journal*, 39(1987): 159.

³⁰⁸ Leslie Bostrom and Marlene Malik, "Re-viewing the nude," *Art Journal*, 58(1999):47.

performance of posing to an essentialized view of models as dummies: unseeing, unspeaking, non-subjects.³⁰⁹ She said,

Before I became a model, I thought there would be a lot of communication. Artists and models would talk about what they wanted *and what I wanted*. But it didn't exist. I feel like dumb. My body is dumb.

As Mandy considers her body as a medium to communicate with artists through movements and poses, the lack of exchange of ideas between artists and models during modeling makes her body dumb. While private studios draw long pose more than short pose and art academies do not have life modeling classes very often, models usually work with LP artists. The procedure of life drawing in long pose is usually quite pragmatic that artists only demand models to do an easy to keep pose for a period of time and keep drawing. Artists and models do not discuss poses, viewpoints on art, drawing experience and modeling deeply in most cases. For her, her body can no longer speak as modeling work often becomes too mundane and practical that allows little room for exploration and innovation. As female nude in art is not about the subjectivity of female models, whether her body 'speaks' or not is important – the (male) artist speaks for her or speaks through her. The design of programmes of the Shows and the emphasis on communication after the Shows were to make her body speak. The speaking body is used to disrupt the usual practice of a silent model waiting to be represented on a piece of paper.

The naked social body in the studio was, therefore, brought up as a topic of discussion so that the modeling body would not be reduced to an object for representation. The common use of nudity in feminist performance art, paradoxically,

³⁰⁹ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 195.

is to frustrate fetishistic practices and assert an alternative viewing practice.³¹⁰ To render an alternative viewing practice possible, Mandy and I stressed that artists should discuss the female body (instead of the drawings only) and the seeing process after the modeling section. The aim of the Shows is not merely to put the bodies of models into representation, but to share experiences between artists and models. Both parties are seen as creators of a piece of work.

However, as artists were too used to the habit of capturing of the naked body they saw in the studio, they still prioritized drawing in the Shows even when new rules were introduced. The mode of the performances made them frustrated. Mandy tries to speak her body through how she moves during improvisation. The first performance was composed of several 10-minute short poses and movements. Although Mandy and other performers attempted to move 'slower', artists lamented about their difficulty to depict them. Models and artists have very different perception of time during a drawing section. A minute of painful posing is very long for models but it is almost nothing for artists. Models always think that they are moving very slowly, but artists think that they are too fast. Although short pose downplays objective seeing, it is still largely a practice of observation drawing which depends on the relative stillness of the object being portrayed. While half a minute is enough for experienced artists to make a very brief sketch, models moving constantly for more than 10 minutes is too challenging for a group of young students with little experience of drawing short pose. In responding to the frustration of artists, Mandy did not really deny the 'right' of artists to represent her. She emphasized the role of the artists to view outside their normal ways of seeing in the studio and downplayed the importance of a coherent drawing. Her description of the exclusion of scars by artists

³¹⁰ Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 227.

in Chapter 2 shows that even a seemingly coherent and accurate drawing involves the exclusion of certain features of the body and does not completely resemble reality. Therefore, it is not a problem to draw fragmented lines to express the energy flow of moving bodies. Life drawing may even abandon representational drawing altogether, e.g. by using abstract colours and lines to express artists' feelings triggered by models' movements. Artists might interpret the Shows as a rare occasion to draw more than one model at a time and depict models doing uncommon poses. The briefing before the Shows may not be enough for artists to understand how female subjectivity can be investigated and understood in life drawing. As capturing the female body in representation was still a major concern of most artists, the inability to draw a coherent posing figure caused puzzlement. In the middle of the contact improvisation in the first Show, some artists stopped drawing and looked doubtful. In the second Show, Mandy agreed to compromise by doing longer poses and moving slower. Although artists still regretted about the high speed of models, the tension between moving bodies and drawing bodies was relieved by slowing down the pace of the pose.

Intriguingly, artists were at the same time fascinated by the Shows despite their difficulty to capture the bodies. In the discussion section of the Shows, artists commented, 'when I am watching, I cannot draw. The movements are so beautiful.' Despite higher importance of seeing in short pose, it is still subordinated to drawing in most cases. Here, the spectator role of the artists overrode the drawing role. Response from artists shows that when embodied feelings are 'too strong' in the seeing process, they find it too difficult to concentrate on the drawing. This coincides with the findings of Mayhew that artists conducting rigid objective seeing deny artists' bodies to prioritize artists' eyes (which are considered as directly connected to the brain and rationality) so that drawing can be rational and undisturbed. As duo

movements in life drawing were dramatic and rare, artists reflected that they could feel the energy flow of models and were mesmerized by it. The Shows did lead to an alternative viewing practice for artists.

Nevertheless, whether it led to changing practices during life class was unknown. As interpretation of performance art is not solely in the hands of the performer, the female body can be reappropriated for meanings quite other than those originally intended.³¹¹ Although models talked about the unequal relationship between the male artist and the female model in history during the Shows, artists might not necessarily reflect on their enjoyment of looking at nude women bodies and power relationship between artists and models. The scene was captivating for them because young and slender moving bodies were aesthetically pleasing for most people. Although the male performance artist was not conventionally 'handsome and fit', the ambient music, tender lighting, fluid improvisation and non-aggressive bodily movements made the performance easily accepted by artists. Although we emphasized on the active role of models, the idea of 'the artist as the active creator and models as a tool fulfilling the artist's wish' might be too entrenched in some artists' mind and difficult to be rooted out. The Shows could be seen as an exceptional case where alternative viewing experience was once and for all. It was not sure how artists responded if more subversive bodily practices and movements were performed. What would happen if Mandy took out her tampon during the performance? What would happen if bodies touched each other erotically? What would happen if a model shouted in anger and acted painfully?

Despite the limitation of the Shows, discussion was carried out quite successfully. It is observed that less experience in and lower identification with academic life drawing of artists lead to higher acceptance of the variety of life modeling

³¹¹ Nead, *Art*, 68.

performances in most cases. Artists receiving long term training of long pose may have better eyes for accurate observational drawing, but they may find rapidly changing models intolerable as they disrupt their usual viewing and drawing practice. Artists in the first Show are mostly students who have no training of life drawing apart from the few lessons in the City University. As the art teacher aims at creating unusual visual effects and practices of life modeling, they do not have a very clear idea of what academic life drawing is. One of them said that she liked drawing lively models as she found it very boring to draw on computers in ordinary lessons. For her, models were more than still lives as they often triggered strong feelings inside her. Female artists in the first Show felt comfortable to share their experience of seeing the nude. A female artist admitted that she never saw naked male bodies and the sight of a male performer taking off his pants was breathtaking for her. They also talked happily about why they wanted or did not want to be a nude model if there was a chance. Although artists admitted that empathy with the model stimulated their creation, they considered that getting naked in public was an insurmountable barrier. In fact, throughout the first performance, artists were welcome to 'join in' whether naked or clothed yet nobody joined. Models also attempted to 'leave' the stage and approached the audience to disrupt the line between the performer and the audience.

Before the Shows, Mandy proposed that models were coauthors together with artists, so the ownership of the painting should be a topic of discussion. This made an artist anxious as she never doubted that the drawing was not 'solely' hers. As the bodies were moving too fast for her and she felt inappropriate to ask the models to slower their pace (especially when artists were told to expect an alternative experience before the Show began), she felt very uneasy about her relationship with models. The 'safe' practice of the active artist and the passive model was suddenly disrupted. She told me that she was troubled by the power relationship between artists

and models which she never thought about before. If artists treat models nicely and appreciate their hard work, are they still oppressing models just because artists want them to fulfill the idea of the painting instead of allowing them to do what they want? In her words, 'I did not want to "exploit" models but traditional life drawing seemed to have such a risk. Yet, I cannot draw properly in Shows like that. What can I do?' When a model has 'too much say,' the priority of drawing in the way the artist wishes to be is challenged. After stating her concern, she told me that she would withdraw from the Shows. She added that drawing from life models was 'too complicated' for her, and doing self-portraits made her more comfortable.

It was not easy for artists to discuss sexuality openly, especially their sexual feelings. Even the Shows is meant to be open to all possibilities, an artist expressing his/her sexual desire for a model explicitly might cause contempt and fear among other artists (and perhaps models). Before the second Show, the owner of the studio warned us 'not to do anything pornographic' because a male performer and two female models would be involved. (Guan did not come to the second Show finally)

As mentioned, the centrality of the female body in performance art positions a woman and her sexuality as speaking subject.³¹² Mandy was curious about discussing sexuality and putting few sexual elements in the Shows. Yet, the sexual elements of the Shows were not overtly explicit for fear of scaring off artists or leading to negative consequences because of their proximity to pornographic performance. The sexuality in both performances became obscure or 'poetic.'

Mandy slept on my body and used her very short hair to caress my neck in the first Show. She also licked her knee and played with the armpit hair of Guan. There was also a lot of bodily contact between her and Guan. In the second Show, Mandy and I

³¹² Jeanie Forte, "Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism," *Theatre Journal*, 40(1988): 226.

also had some contact improvisation. Body contact between two naked bodies, whether intended to be erotic or not, often leads to heterosexual or homosexual interpretations due to the usual practice in our culture to connect naked bodily contact with sexual acts. The female desire is the most disruptive in the psychoanalytic mode of subject construction in which desire is articulated as exclusively male.³¹³ Mandy was attempting to explore her desire through bodily movements and bodily contact with other models. This is transgressive in a life drawing session which is historically appropriated for mostly male pleasure and male-dominated ideologies of representation of women in art. Women are considered as lack which only reflect man's desire. They are not permitted or even conceived of as having or owning their own desire.³¹⁴ Yet, the effect of asserting female sexuality in the Shows was unknown, as the performance of female sexuality has been always intended to serve the desire of man, not hers. Even if feminist performance artists like Karen Finley explored her sexuality through explicitly erotic performances, they were absorbed easily by mainstream culture and used for heterosexual voyeuristic pleasure. As artists did not openly discuss their sexual feelings during the discussion, it was difficult to explore how artists experienced their sexuality (or negation of sexuality) during modeling sections. Even if open accounts were available, their words could not be taken as face value because of social desirability effect.

There was serious discussion on how the Shows should be charged. As life modeling is usually understood as paid work, the major task of life models is to satisfy the demand of artists instead of models' creativity. Even if creativity is an essential component of some work (like designers), fulfilling the request of the employer is usually 'more important' than that of workers if they contradict. Facing

³¹³ Ibid., 225.

³¹⁴ Ibid.

the need of the client, creative workers may need to compromise their ideas. A helper said that it might not be fair for artists to pay but have little power to decide on how the Shows are run, and proposed that they should be free or charge less. However, Mandy emphasized that being a performer and a worker at the same time was unproblematic, and audience always paid to watch performances which they did not have total control. Paying for the Shows indicated that artists were interested in the performance of models and respected their performance as a legitimate form of paid labor. In the end, we agreed on charging less than half of the usual price of model fees as we wanted to encourage artist participation.

Mandy is very interested in transforming the Shows into an exhibition. It is not sure whether the exhibition can be held, but our discussions on the exhibition bring out the problem of the relationship between live performance and documentation. Although videos and photos of the performances were taken, they are handled very carefully. Only models were able to keep the photos and there was mutual agreement on how the photos could be viewed and shared. Merely showing the drawings, videos and photos in an exhibition does not clearly explain the aim of the Shows, and meticulous curating is needed. Because of the conservative policy towards the public display of nudity and representation of nudity in Hong Kong, an exhibition of this kind is likely to stir voyeuristic gaze from the mass media and hinders feminist messages of the Shows from bringing to light.

Conclusion

Modern life drawing is not as patriarchal and hegemonic as some feminists criticize. Modernist techniques of life drawing are popularized in the twentieth century and have been retained in contemporary life classes. Contradictions and incoherence of values and practices proliferate in the studios cannot be clearly

explained in a few words.³¹⁵ Detailed analysis of what actually happens in the studio shows that a simplified model of unequal power relationship between the male viewer-artist and the female model is inappropriate and ignores the complexities of models who try to assert their subjectivity and comply with certain rules at the same time. Artists and models are generally polite to each other. Artists do not always hold the most classical view towards feminine beauty, nor do they treat models as still lives all the time. Although the pressure to maintain legitimacy of nudity in the studio exists, artists have different standards regarding measures of regulating sexuality and public nudity. These leave female models room to explore their subjectivity, bodily movements and even sexuality in a practice which is known to be male-dominated throughout history. A detailed analysis of models' performance in short pose shows that more affected seeing of artists often leads to higher empathy and interaction between artists and models. However, deep communication is generally lacking in most modeling sessions that makes more devoted models demand more mutual understanding between artists and models. Although I demonstrate the major differences between LP artists and SP artists in life drawing and how they influence the performance of models, they should be considered as general features influenced by the trend of life drawing and art education in the West in general, instead of determinative of how individual artists treat life modeling and models. For example, an art teacher may teach traditional observational drawing to his/her students using long pose, but he/she may prefer short pose personally, and/or care about the feelings of models and appreciate their artistic sensibility. It is also possible that some SP artists may not pay enough attention to the pain of models when they are doing difficult poses and reduce short pose into a competitive exercise in speed and hand-eye co-ordination.

³¹⁵ Mayhew, *Subjectivities*, 176.

The stigma of life modeling in Hong Kong is diminishing. Therefore, more women afford to consider this as a choice to combine paid work and artistic self expression, especially among well educated ones. However, life modeling is still easily understood as exhibitionism or sexual work in Hong Kong by outsiders. Models who are creative workers and aesthetically inclined are more willing to share their work with like minded friends and even introduce jobs to each other, leading to the higher proportion of creative workers in life modeling and the relative discreteness of the job in the mainstream society. This is similar with the case in the US.³¹⁶ The case study of Mandy shows that the importance to assert female subjectivity through the body is a result of self-reflexivity of some models. The Shows demonstrated the unsettling yet exciting relationship between representation of women in life modeling and feminist performance art, and between seeing and drawing.

³¹⁶ Philips, *Modeling*, 81-82.

CONCLUSION

In the thesis, I analyze how better gender equality, individualization of women and changing social situation in Hong Kong in recent decades have led to less stigmatization of life modeling, larger number of local models, better working conditions and better pay. This has greatly increased the number of local women entering life modeling as a choice to earn extra money and reflect critically on how social taboos on public nudity and contemporary standard of female beauty affect their social conditions of existence, hence, potentially to change them.

Individualization leads to ‘not just a flattening, but a deepening of the self’ as avenues of self-reflection and choice are opened up by detraditionalizing impulses.³¹⁷

Detraditionalized and individualized social environments are characterized by the necessity of choice and the ongoing search for meaning.³¹⁸ With a greater chance to enter higher education and loosening of traditional social roles for women in recent years, Hong Kong women are now better equipped with the knowledge and capital to choose their lifestyles and engage in self reflection. More experience in working in studios helps models understand the aesthetics and practices of different artists and differentiate their performances. Although passionate models usually have a strong identification with the objective of life drawing and discipline their bodies accordingly, they do not have a mechanical view of their bodies which only follow the will of artists. Contrary to the popular belief that models are less knowledgeable than artists, they often reflect critically on the embodied feelings, values, practices and gender stereotypes of life modeling, as well as the power relationship between artists and models. However reflexive they may be, they are usually silent in

³¹⁷ Scott Lash and John Urry, *Economies of Signs and Space*, (London: Sage, 1994), 31.

³¹⁸ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 123.

discussing such views with artists, probably due to the marginalization of life models in art and their understanding of their roles as 'appropriate' paid employees, i.e., work, don't ask! It can be concluded that artistic expression for models does exist and even flourish occasionally, but it is also limited, and subordinated to the control of different artists. Even passionate models attempt to relieve the possible tension between being an obedient worker and a creative performer, and prioritize monetary award when room for expression is limited. Kitty said that she already got the best of modeling and was determined to quit it, as she found that artists were not as creative and open minded as she imagined.

Models' motive behind life modeling influences greatly their working attitudes and how they think of the work. As they engage their bodies in their work in a form of bodily reflection, life modeling is seen by many models as a way to ponder on how the aesthetics in life drawing is different from hegemonic beauty standards. By avoiding popular techniques of the body to 'beautify' themselves and endorsing a 'naturally beautiful' body aesthetic, models contend that they are able to contest the oppression of hegemonic beauty standards on women's bodies. As a result, many models report to have an improved body image. Although Nead argues that the representation of the female nude in Western art aims at containing the female body, my study on the subjectivity of life models shows that women who choose to be represented on a piece of art does not mean that their bodies are contained and oppressed by the male-dominated art tradition. Analyzing life drawing as a social practice rather merely a representational practice coincides with the insight of Margaret Mayhew who researched on life drawings.

I would propose that life drawing needs to facilitate a movement away from a habitual emphasis on representation or on confining a responsive figurative engagement to the external appearance of bodies. If we can expand our understanding of the human body to include the emotions, movements, desires, reactions and failures passing between those drawing and those being drawn, then maybe life drawing can become... a means of moving beyond our own fallible attempts at self mastery and physical representation into something else.³¹⁹

A majority of life models in Hong Kong and Western countries nowadays have received tertiary education, and among them many are creative workers or aesthetically inclined people. Using the insight of Banks who proposed the growth of aesthetic reflexivity in cultural work may have led to the reinvigorated pursuit of aestheticized life projects based around cultural production and art for art's sake, I discover that more than half of the models interviewed consider life modeling not only as a job but a part of their aestheticized life projects. They do not represent all life models but do present a visible feature of modern life modeling that deserves discussion. Their choice of work and lifestyle shows that they attempt to reconcile between earning a living and obtaining satisfaction through art or cultural production. In order to live a rich cultural or artistic life, many of them are consciously rejecting a more secure, conventional and stultifying life by quitting their 'repetitive' full time job and/or finding a job, whether full time or part time, which can satisfy their pursuit of artistic and creative values. As mentioned in the introduction, models who do not work so discreetly are more willing to be interviewed, and among them many are creative workers or aesthetically inclined people. Such phenomenon may lead to

³¹⁹ Mayhew, *Naked*.

possible sample bias which is difficult to avoid completely. Such attitude coincides with the findings of Banks that creative workers ask for aesthetic, 'authentic' and 'meaningful' forms of post-traditional identity.³²⁰ The ongoing pursuit of 'internal goods' from work is as important as external rewards.

Second, the wish of models to incorporate creative impulses in work and their identification with the practice and objective of life drawing have led to the emphasis on staying still and good poses. McRobbie's notion of passionate work is very useful for understanding how the self-disciplinary yet affective dimensions of life modeling are connected. Motivated by the desire to perform more creatively and artistically than other models, devoted models voluntarily take on extremely exhausting discipline which brings them intense satisfaction. Yet, by doing so, they are also more likely to hurt their bodies. The lack of medical and job security may put them in a precarious situation. The job safety of life models is thus, often depended on the good will of artists who are considerate of the fatigue of models. Some models realize the potential exploitation and attempt to form informal leagues to ask for a better treatment and higher pay. Some models in the West have formed unions to fight for their rights as their status as independent contractors, low pay and unpleasant working condition have negative consequences to their earnings and health.³²¹

The concept of immaterial labor, i.e., indistinguishable lines between work and play caused by collapsing boundaries, can be used in life modeling nowadays to explain why the possibility to maximize self-expressiveness through interacting with artists and creating poses are so attractive for devoted models.³²² From my observation and interviews, devoted models who interact with artists successfully

³²⁰ Mayhew, *Naked*.

³²¹ "Nude models at Philly art school join union," The Associate Press, <http://www.thefreelibrary.com/Nude+models+at+Philly+art+school+join+union.-a0101467933>, accessed on 16th June, 2010.

³²² Maurice Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in Makdisi S et al ed. *Marxism Beyond Marxism*, (Routledge: London, 1996), 133-146.

show an attitude of blurring work and artistic creation. They look excited and talk with artists enthusiastically on how they create their work and even their everyday life. This can be exemplified in the words of Sandy, 'I felt like being paid to appreciate pieces of art work on that day!' This is why models often feel like they are performing or playing with their bodies during short pose as SP artists generally allow more artist-model interaction. The possibility to get along with a group of artists is also an enriching experience for them, as an aura of possibility and belonging can be experienced through modeling for a long time and meeting more artists. It is beneficial and supportive of a sense of well-being and life-affirming effect as models feel that they can establish relationships with like-minded people. Such attachments can act to restrain the pursuit of external rewards at the expense of internal ones.³²³

A fundamental question arises while the thesis explores how models acquire meaning and satisfaction: if life models report so many limitations in life modeling which prevent them from achieving self-actualization and self-expression, why do they still choose to work for life modeling? Models sometimes explain that public nudity removes the constraints of clothes, leading to their acceptance of and comfort with their bodies, together with the transgression of social norms. However, analysis of the studio shows that social taboos regarding sexuality and nudity are still present, if not more entrenched, to regulate nudity in the studio. Interviews of models also reveal that models are extremely aware of how such taboos affect their bodily performance. This question is very hard to answer, and I attempt to answer it by comparing the experience of models in nudist camps and the studio.

As BAO is an organization of both nudist activities and life modeling, it is not surprising that that some models are also interested in public nudity. Rosemary once

³²³ Marks Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 123.

took part in nudist activities, like indoor nudist dining and outdoor sunbathing and swimming. She recalled that many nudists did not act naturally as they did not know each other before and were very conscious about their nudity. They dined together just because they shared the same hobby (getting naked in the public), but they were not at ease when they dined together. They talked and behaved awkwardly and unnaturally in the meal. Such experience was unbearable for her. To make it worse, she found that some male nudists joined such activities as their main objective was to gaze at naked women bodies 'for free.' This really humiliated her and she quitted nudist activities afterwards.

When discussing female nudism, Barcan argues that nudist places produce negations of 'ordinary' modes of looking (like excessive gazing on naked bodies and objectified gaze at sexualized body parts). Nevertheless, they also produce new modes of looking, however provisional and temporary these new modes may be. These are imbricated in spatial, communal, interpersonal and ideological practices.³²⁴ 'Even though subjects enter a nudist space with cultures and habits of perception structured from within a dominant regime, it is nonetheless possible for a different regime of perception to obtain within the con.'³²⁵ I propose that the objectifying gaze of female bodies and the extremely conservative (yet overwhelmingly curious) attitude towards nudity in Hong Kong mainstream culture are so strong that they influence the nudist culture in Hong Kong. Such culture expels and discourages women from participating in nudist activities. The residues of 'ordinary' modes of looking may be still present and new modes of looking have not formed a strong ground in many local nudist settings. Compared with some nudist settings, the life class studio is a site where desexualization is successful, and an alternative mode of

³²⁴ Ruth Barcan, "The Moral Bath of Bodily Unconsciousness: female nudism, bodily exposure and the gaze," *Continuum*, 15(2001):309.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*

looking can be established. Although this restricts models' expression to a considerable extent, it contributes to a feeling of safety as being nude in Hong Kong. This is extraordinarily important, as Hong Kong is a sexually conservative place which punishes 'disaccordant' sexual and dressing behavior of women by unfriendly and judgmental gazes, at the very least. Previous studies found that gender role identity and stereotyping still lagged behind social realities in Hong Kong, despite rising levels of socioeconomic participation and education level of women. For example, blaming victims of sexual violence for not dressing properly is still common.³²⁶ 'The conservative studio' (in the words of models), thus strangely provides one of the rare choices for women who feel comfortable with public nudity, but do not want to be seen by ordinary modes of looking, to embark on a new bodily experience.

For further research on life modeling, researchers may investigate the subjectivities of male models to provide another perspective of life modeling. As more men than women ask Simon for modeling work, it would be exciting to explore how male models view public nudity. Informal talk with models and artists seems to show that male models are less concerned with body image, but this is yet to be proven. Poses of male models can also be explored to see to what extent artists and models uphold gender dichotomy of body stylizations in classical art.

Models talk to me about how they explained modeling work to their lovers, family members and friends, and they tried to explain the sweetness and bitterness involved. These are prolific accounts on their struggles of choosing and disclosing a job which is still misunderstood and sometimes stigmatized in society. However, I do not have the space to discuss them in detail in the thesis. They can be used, for example, to

³²⁶ Fanny M. Cheung et al., "Gender Role Identity, Stereotypes, and Attitudes in Hong Kong," in *EnGendering Hong Kong society: a gender perspective of women's status*, ed. Fanny M. Cheung, (Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1997), 209-226.

explore how women strategically use their bodies and body talk to test intimacy and trust with their significant others and how narrating life modeling serves as an enriching or therapeutic experience for some models.

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Appendix I: A brief introduction of models interviewed

Table 1

Name of model	Age	Appearance	Background	Job
Florence	Early 40s	Under 160cm and weigh under 90 pounds	She did clerical work for a long time and received professional training in the Academy of Performing Arts; has great passion for acting. She also poses nude for photographers occasionally	Freelance life modeling and dubbing
Mandy	Mid-30s	Above 170cm and slim	She has been a freelancer for many years and she is a self-trained performance artist. A university graduate and married.	Freelance theatre work and part time NGO work
Sandy	Mid-30s	Between 160 and 170cm and very slim. Quite tanned.	She is a fervent organic farmer and a lover of nature. A university graduate.	Teacher
Chu	Early 50s	Above 170cm, average built	She has been a housewife for many years until her divorce. She has a daughter and has never worked full time. A strong willed artist.	Freelance artist and art teacher

Yan	Late-20s	Under 160cm and slightly plump	She has been a social worker for years and is very interested in documentary making and showing. A university graduate.	Part time research assistant
Melody	Mid-30s	Around 165cm and slim. Widely known as a 'beauty' among artists.	She has not done full time work until recent years. A university graduate.	Full time NGO work
Kitty	Mid-20s	Under 160cm and slim. She described herself as a girl with a big head and small body.	A devoted social activist. A university graduate. Wants to teach in the future and has decided to quit modeling.	Full time NGO work
Joyce	Mid-20s	Around 160cm and slim	She studied in a university but quitted. She is	Full time NGO work
Mimi	Mid-30s	Around 160cm and average built	She came from mainland China a few years ago. She is divorced and lives with her young daughter. She did some service work before she received social security.	Receives comprehensive social security assistance (CSSA)
Rosemary	Mid-30s	Under 140cm and slim. Very long hair.	She has been doing clerical work alongside with performance art and life modeling for more than 10 years.	Clerical work

			She also poses nude for photographers occasionally, but prefers to hide her face while working.	
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