The Performative Body

by

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Introduction

My thesis has been divided into three parts in order to look at ideas concerning “écriture feminine”\(^1\), the performative body, and the broader issues concerning sexual politics. For this process I examined the theories of Helen Cixious with regard to the space and writing; Judith Butler’s idea of gender and performativity; as well as incorporating ideas related to contemporary performance art. Furthermore my own writing and performance is growing as a body of work parallel to my thesis, this will be presented in another book, which will, in turn, implicate the relationship between theory and practice.

The first chapter of my thesis explores the definitions of Feminine Writing”, I examined the book *Three Steps on the Ladders of Writing* by Helene Cixous published in 1994. I chose her to study because she is the first feminist who introduced the theory of Feminine Writing. I was so inspired by her writing that I began to write about myself. She said: “We have to write about our story, our history, and ourselves. I believe that is a great example of one woman’s voice.

In the second chapter I moved from feminine writing to the female body. I constructed my study in three sections: first, I compared Kenneth Clark and John Berger’s notion of the nude and the naked; second, I examined the presentation of the body in Chinese

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1.“Écriture féminine,” literally “women's writing.”\(^[1]\) more closely, the inscription of the female body and female difference in language and text,\(^[2]\) is a strain of feminist literary theory that originated in France in the early 1970s and included foundational theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Monique Wittig, Luce Irigaray, [3] Chantal Chawaf,\(^[4]\)\(^{[5]}\) Catherine Clément, and Julia Kristeva,\(^[6]\)\(^{[7]}\) and also other writers like psychoanalytical theorist Bracha Ettinger,\(^{[8]}\)\(^{[9]}\) who joined this field in the early 1990s.\(^{[10]}\) Generally, French feminists tended to focus their attention on language, analyzing the ways in which meaning is produced. They concluded that language as we commonly think of it is a decidedly male realm, which therefore only represents a world from the male point of view.
culture; third, I explored the interior and exterior that creates the idea of nudity.

Finally, in last chapter Judith Butler’s perspective on gender and performative became my theoretical preference for performance art. The six artworks I selected are visualizations for first two chapters. Not only do these chapters explore feminine writing and the performative body, but they also determine my curiosities of my own body and voice. In the conclusion I present the observations of my own identity.
Chapter 1: Her Voice

*Helene Cixous*

The woman who writes like a painter;
The woman who writes like a painting
The concept of Feminine Writing (in China we translated as: Body Writing) was introduced by Helen Cixous. I am going to examine in this chapter: writing by Helene Cixous.

Cixous has a ladder. Her ladder is writing.
I will begin with: ‘H’ this is what writing is ‘H’. I speak to you today through two languages. I have drawn the ‘H’. You will have recognized it depending on which language you are immersed in. This is what writing is: ‘I’. One language, ‘I’ another language, and between the two, the line that makes them vibrate; writing forms a passageway between two shores. I was saying: this ‘H’, this ladder is writing. This is how I figure it: the ladder is neither immobile nor empty. It is animated. (Cixous, 1993, p.3)

Reading Cixous’s writing, at first, I struggled to reach her deep thoughts through such poetic and enchanted writing, it seems so easy and enjoyable to read, and I get distracted with all her metaphors and symbols and wanting to paint my imagination. Then I read again, I see different layers of meaning. For example: the first time I read this paragraph above, as an illustrator I was excited the fact she use the letter ―“H” opens the whole book. Providing a pictorial representation. I immediately I put an ―“H” on my sketchbook and I carried on extending this ladder. In my picture a little girl climb up towards to the sky and out of this world.
Then I read again word-by-word and —language jumped in my eye. How brilliant: an animated ladder embodied with — “H” imprints this passage creates a visual metaphor of writing from one language to another. Writing creates language because many thoughts are not in order until you write them down but words can also get lost in translation. So now I think about the two languages I am writing with: English and Chinese.

I read Helene Cixous’s — “H” again. Here, she wrote: — “in French alphabet. If A is
masculine, as B, C, D, E etc. only H is masculine, neuter or feminine at will.” (Cixous, 1993, p.4) I realized that just now I moved from English to French, I passed from one side ladder: —language to another side of the ladder: —feminine theory. And she didn’t stop just there, she continued to dig and I continued to read. Her next example: (axe) she is now describing the pronunciation *hache* as a cutting instrument, an axe to clear new paths. What a romantic explanation. It reads like a poem. Later she added more reasons to why she loves her —writing ladder which is also because she uses her writing ladder to climb work by authors to which she hold a mysterious affinity for. They are Clarice Lispector, Marina Tsvetaeva, Ingeborg Bachmann and Kafka. Through the whole book Helene Cixous has guided us to read all the most truthful, exciting writing by other novelist and author. So now she is writing like a literary critic. In just one page she manage to introduce us her symbolic ladder embodied in —H and explain why she loves this —H through its visual metaphor, pronunciation, written word, as well as the fact that it also has gender, historical change and context in literature. For me the reader, I am already putting connections between, language, writing, graphic, feminine, theory, literary and history. “Helene Cixous’s writing is as much as poems as critical or theoretical statement. —These essays present are not a single subject but a web of intertwined concerns and reflection: on the relation between writing, giving, nourishment, love and life; and on the relation between all of the above and being a woman-or a man.” (Susan, 1991, p.viii) They are not just talking about writing, its life’s extreme deepest sensations leading to a kind of enlightened highly visual creativity.

In the first selection, *School of the Dead*, Cixous writes,

"Writing is learning to die. It’s learning not to be afraid, in other words to live at the extremity of life, which is what the dead, death, give us.” (Cixous, 1993, p.10)

Here she writes like a poem. The following is a list of key words that I found
intriguing: unknown; deepest; truth; fear; weakness; grace; love. These are the deep sensation death give us. Suddenly, I was shocked, staring at my page 11. She was talking about Bernhard begun to write after his poet grandfather dead. She wrote: ‘here the cause of this spring of writing, which occurs as an answer, or an erection, as resistance to castration, is said brutally. But I prefer to talk about it in terms of feminine sexuality. As a vital sparing brought about and ordered by the disappearance of the one who was the source.” What? How is it related to feminine sexuality? Clearly, this is a feminist theoretical statement. Does she mean writing is like female orgasm? The powerful explosion happened after the thing you loved being taken away? She didn’t give an explanation.

One of my favourite lessons from the school of death is in “4. The author’s crime has its legend”. “5. The author is in the dark; or, the self-portrait of a blind painter.” In these two selections Cixous guides us to read the short story: The Oval Portrait by Edgar Allan Poe and The Hour of the Star by Clarice Lispector. Cixous believe both of the authors are legends. What intrigued me is the fact that by studding the works of the two authors, she is arguing the relationships between writing and art, painter and model, truth and lie, death in book and in the author’s life. Importantly she examines both authors from her feminist point of view. She writes: “We live in a feminist era and we protest, women are the ones who pay for the affair. We lost either art or life. The rest is truth… in the final book Clarice Lispector had to transform herself, abandon herself, lose herself in masculine author to point of no return.” (Cixous, 1993, p.32) So here she argues the author’s sexuality makes a difference in writing. I have always been intrigued with the concept of “symbols” and in my opinion Helene Cixous is a true genius “symbols” and their meanings. In this book she differentiates between the writing sensation as “schools” and the writing process as “steps”. She is teaching us life lessons of literature and through her writing she is digging and unearthing the depth of them all. By following her we enable ourselves to pass from one wall of poetry to another wall of feminist theory. In the School of Dream, I read and wrote down the key words
that explain the sensations that dreams gives us: moving; translation; transported; forgiveness and pure. I love when I read, “Foreignness becomes a fantastic nationality.” (Cixous, 1993, p.80) because the concept of forgiveness is incredibly pertinent to my story and self examination. Furthermore, I have always felt like a foreigner (even in my home) but I have never put that thought in context with nationality itself. I continued reading: speed; entrance; forbidden; secret; unknown; feeling; treasure; fear; delight; free; mysteries. Those words shine in each page.

The “School of Roots” entitles writers to go to these nether realms, the dark regions inside our-'selves.' She describes this school as "a place to which the Christian imagination has given a negative connotation, that is, hell, but which, on the contrary, has a joyous (I don't want to say positive in opposition to the negative) connotation in the texts that are dear to me." (Cixous, 1993, p.120) Words stood out to me like: bible; borders; origin; flower. And also the ability to question sexual definition: The sex of a text. The sex of the author, here she compares Genet and Clarice, she argues that Genet —always insists, at once moving, magnificent. At the same time it is disquieting, since in undoes, undermines, and saps a social hierarchy, thought this is in order to replace it with another hierarchy that is libidinal and imaginary.” (Cixous, 1993, p.150) Clarice is the opposite, she strains towards the beginning and end. Cixous writes: —She is not who Genet is, whatever his inclination for mutation, change and travestying, he is a man. Clarice is marked. She marks herself, feels, as a woman.” Cixous addresses the importance of sex by explaining that the —two examples of the affirmation of a type of sexual identity produces ethical effects.” (Cixous, 1993, p.151) Here sexuality becomes the most important root for writing.

But what really is her theory of Feminine Writing?
"Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal. Woman must put herself into text-as into the world and into history- by her own movement.” (Cixous, 1976, p.875) That was Helene speaking in —The Laugh of the Medusa, she adds: “I, too, overflow; my desires have invented new desires, my body knows unheard-of songs. Time and again I, too, have felt so full of luminous torrents that I could burst- burst with forms much more beautiful than those which are put up in frames and sold for a stinking fortune.” Her comparison to writing and a sexual orgasm is apparent. And what a fabulous crazy truth! She adds: “as soon as we come, we go and make ourselves feel guilty-so as to be forgiven; or to forget, to bury it until the next time.” (Cixous, 1976, p.877) I couldn’t help but smile! How can I not love her writing, she is a woman who writes like a painter and also writes nakedly. This close relationship between writing and physical body experience, language and feminine sexuality makes Cixous's concept of Écriture féminine widely know as Body writing or writing with the White Ink. Her text is performative, direct, it returns body itself.

In the next chapter I will compare the representation of Body in Western and Eastern visual culture in three sections. First, the difference between the nude and the naked. Second: presentation of human body in Chinese picture art. Third: the interior and exterior that creates nude.
Chapter 2: Their Bodies

Part One: The nude

Kenneth Clark & John Beger
Kenneth Clark opens his classic study, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form*, by pointing out that:

> The English language, with its elaborate generosity, distinguishes between the naked and the nude. To be naked is to be deprived of our clothes, and the word implies some of the embarrassment most of us feel in that condition. The word "nude," on the other hand, carries, in educated usage, no uncomfortable overtone. The vague image it projects into the mind is not of a huddled and defenseless body, but of a balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body re-formed. In fact, the word was forced into our vocabulary by critics of the early eighteenth century to persuade the artless islanders [of the UK] that, in countries where painting and sculpture were practiced and valued as they should be, the naked human body was the central subject of art.

Clark distinguishes between nakedness and nudity. For him, to be naked is simply to be without clothes. It has nothing to do with art. The nude, on the other hand, is an art form. The subject may be naked people, but the way they are painted makes them nudes. Clark's nude is an art form not sexuality. The art critic John Berger has different notions of the nude than Clark. For Berger, “To be naked is to be oneself. To be nude is to be seen naked by others and yet not recognized for oneself. A naked body has to be seen as an object in order to become a nude.” (Berger, 1972, p.54). In his book *Way of Seeing*, he pointed out the social and historical presence of men and women, he investigated his argument on female nude in oil paintings and modern advertising. Berger's 'body' performs sexuality: “women are the mains subject in one category of European oil painting - the nude. Nude reveals how woman have been seen and judged as

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2. Kenneth McKenzie Clark, Baron Clark, OM, CH, KCB, FBA (13 July 1903 – 21 May 1983) was a British author, museum director, broadcaster, and one of the best-known art historians of his generation. In 1969, he achieved an international popular presence as the writer, producer, and presenter of the BBC Television series, Civilisation.
sight.” Berger gives a range of examples. “Nudes looking at the viewer looking at them; of women looking in mirrors joining in the spectacle of themselves; or of looking into mirrors and being accused of vanity, when in reality they are only satisfying men’s desire to see them naked; and of women’s beauty being judged. Common to all of these images is the sense of the woman being watched; by men in the painting; by herself; by the spectator towards whom her body is often turned.” (Berger, 1972, p.6).

However, Berger also point out to the art of other cultures where nakedness is not so passive and has a degree of sexual equality. As a Chinese woman who grew up in the communist modern China I am searching how “body” is been portrait in Chinese culture.
Part Two: The Invisible Body in Ancient China

*John Hay & Xin Ran*
John Berger point out the sexual inequality that was represented in western art. I can’t help but noticed there is no nude at all in the culture I grew up with: China.

I look at paintings from the ancient China, including major figurative paintings, bird-and-flower paintings. The greatest strength, however, is landscape paintings. The landscape embodies the ideals of the Confucian\(^3\) scholar and the Taoism\(^4\). The concept of withdrawal into the natural world always had been the major thematic focus of poets and painters. Faced with the failure of the human order, learned men sought permanence within the natural world, retreating into the mountains to find a sanctuary from the chaos of dynastic collapse. In picture art I see single figural drifting in the glorious landscape. He set in a tiny boat, flowing; he walk through the gardens, searching; he disappears in the cloudy mountains, waiting. They often alone, never face the viewers. Even the most figurative painting reminds spiritual distance from reality, the folds on their clothes embodied with human figure, they become metaphor of rocks, wind and water, emblems artist's own character and spirit. I learned the traditional techniques of Chinese painting: Bimo, “brush and ink” at early age, they gave tangible substance to shape and surface. I was told: The figures in Chinese art should dispersed through metaphoric ideal natural world, “GuiZhen” means The return to real. The art of mark making embodied the cosmic human reality of Qi, the energy. The body is spirited away. Ancient Chinese artists believe a man's studio or garden could be viewed as an extension of himself, paintings of such places often served to express the values of their owner. So Painting was no longer about the description of the visible world but became a means of conveying the inner landscape of the artist's heart and mind.

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\(^3\) Confucianism is a Chinese ethical and philosophical system developed from the teachings of the Chinese philosopher Confucius (孔夫子 Kǒng Fūzǐ, or K'ung-fu-tzu, lit. "Master Kong", 551–479 BC). Confucianism originated as an "ethical-sociopolitical teaching" during the Spring and Autumn Period, but later developed metaphysical and cosmological elements in the Han Dynasty.

\(^4\) Taoism (modernly: Daoism) is a philosophical and religious tradition that emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao (modernly romanized as "Dao"). The term Tao means "way", "path" or "principle".
However, women were not allowed to go to school in ancient China, so the 'artists' the 'scholars' are all men. The female figures in picture arts are either the servants or concubines reminds in *The Admonitions Scroll* or *The Art of Bedchamber*. 

**Naturalness**
Gu Kaizhi, *The Admonitions Scroll*, 6th-8th century AD, British Museum

John Hay ⁵ explains why the bodies in Chinese art are small, distance and there was no nude: “such body were not represented in art because they did not exist in the culture. And to extend the terminology in keeping with present fashion, the culture itself did not so represent its own body.” (Hay, 1993, p.3) So, what is Chinese Culture? Xin Ran writes in her book *The Good Women of China*: “From the matriarchal societies in the far distant past, the position of Chinese women has always been at the lowest level. They are classed as objects, as a part of property, shared out along with food, tools and weapons.” (Xin Ran⁶, 2003, p.49). In Taoist philosophy women were often given a

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⁵ John Hay :Professor History of Art and Visual Culture

position of inferiority in sexual practice. Many of the texts discuss sex from a male point of view, and avoid discussing how sex could benefit women. Men were encouraged to not limit themselves to one woman, and were advised to have sex only with the woman who was beautiful and had not had children. While the man had to please the woman sexually, she was still just an object. Let’s go back to Berger's argument earlier. “She is born into the keeping of men, and from childhood is taught to survey herself, with the result that her being is split into two, the surveyed and the surveyor. Her own sense of being is replaced by a sense of being appreciated by others – ultimately men. He acts, she appears, and she watches herself being looked at. ‘The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object – and most particularly an object of vision: a sight.’ (Berger, 1993, p. 47).
Part Three: Exterior and Interior, veil and Soul

*Ann Hollander & Helene Cixous*
My performance tutor Nigel Rolfe said: “naked people have no power to the society.” He pointed out the importance of clothes to our culture. Writer Ann Hollander also perceptively remarked: “common to both western and Chinese traditions, and perhaps all others, is the notion that social identity and even individual qualities of person could not be manifested without clothes. Nakedness, it could be said, obscures rather than reveals; and garments define rather than hide.” (Hollander, 1975, p84) She continued relates visual experience to power of language. She wrote: “clothes have the same relation to the body that language has to truth or pure thought. That is they are somehow a necessary form that bodily truth must take in order to be told and understood at all” (Hollander, 1975, p447)

7. Anne Hollander examines in Seeing Through Clothes: the representation of the body and clothing in Western art, from Greek sculpture and vase painting through medieval and renaissance portraits, to contemporary films and fashion photography. First published ahead of its time, this book has become a classic.
Cixous also wrote about female nudity in *Stigmata*. She exams Rembrandt's painting *Bathsheba*:

> “This female nude is not a nude. She is not made-not painted-to be seen nude. Precisely her-Bathsheba. She who was seen. Should not have been seen. She who is perceived. From far. She whom we see is not the mortal object. Not the object of desire and of murder. It is Bathsheba in truth.”

Rembrandt 1654, *Bathsheba at Her Bath*, - Louvre, Paris

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8 Bathsheba at Her Bath (or Bathsheba with King David's Letter) is an oil painting by the Dutch artist Rembrandt (1606–1669) finished in 1654. A depiction that is both sensual and empathetic, it shows a moment from the Old Testament story in which King David sees Bathsheba bathing and, entranced, seduces and impregnates her.[1] In order to marry Bathsheba and conceal his sin, David sends her husband into battle and orders his generals to abandon him, leaving him to certain death.
Cixous adds: “see the incredible Holy Family at the Curtain: it’s about magic: how to make us feel the intimacy of intimacy, we are graced with being shown what is hidden behind the curtain: same gesture as fore gazing at a baby in its cradle: we lean over, pull the sheet aside, the veil, the curtain, taking care not to tear it from its intimacy. Bathsheba in the cradle, sleeps before us, very near, very far from us.” (Cixous, 1993, p.7) The veil, a nothing that creates the nudity. She describe the painting in detail: "what does a naked woman thinking about-her rapport to her body, always the slight attention, like a veil, the glance my way- the glance of the other, of you/ me at me- but no, Bathsheba does not look at her body. She is not before herself. She is not here. She is gone, behind her eyelids. He paints thoughtfulness. This absence in the body. This leave-taking by the soul that leaves the body deserted like a living tomb. We think: we are parting.” (Cixous, 1993, p.8) here, Cixous taking our eyes travel from the exterior: the veil to the internal- her thoughts, the soul behind the eyelids.
Overall, from Clark's body as the ideal art form to Chinese Confusion's body naturalization. From Berger's statement of the unequal relationship exploited by oil painting is deeply embedded in Western culture to the Taoist sexual practice of men taking energy from virgins and use female body to archive longevity and immortality. We see the male dominated culture still strongly influence our society and ways of seeing. However, Ann Hollander point out the importance of clothes and Cixous’s lead us to look through the surface of nakedness into the nude’s mind, the soul. All of the discussion implies how ‘body’ is transforming in our social construction. I am now, in the third chapter will develop the subject of body toward to the performativity of gender, where I found Butler.
Chapter 3: Performativity

Sex and Gender
Simone de Beauvoir & Judith Butler
"One is not born, but rather become, a woman" – Simone de Beauvoir.

Bulter examining Beauvoir's Second Sex: “formulation distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect has been crucial to long-standing feminist effort to debunk the claim that anatomy is destiny; sex is understood to be the invariant, anatomically distinct, and factic aspects of the female body, where gender is cultural meaning and form that body acquires, the variable modes of that body's acculturation.” (Butler, 1986, p.35)

Simone de Beauvoir's claim and Judith Butler's comment on it imply two fundamental dichotomies or fissures in 'woman': that between biological sex and socially constructed gender, and that between woman and the terminology used to describe her. It follows that woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a constructing that cannot rightfully be said to originate or end.

“It’s the culture and historical education that told us what is 'sex' and what’s should be our attitude towards to them. The construal of 'sex' no longer as a bodily given on which construct of gender is artificially imposed, but as a cultural norm which governs the materialization of bodies.” (Butler, 1993, p.xii) Bulter called it the Performativity of gender, she wrote: “for if I were to argue that genders are performative, that could mean that I thought that one woke in the morning, perused the closet or some more open space for the gender of choice, donned that gender for the day, and then restored the garment to its place at night.” (Butler, 1993, p.ix)

9 Simone de Beauvoir, The Second Sex (New York: Vintage Book, 1973), 301
10 Gender Performativity is a term created by post-structuralist feminist philosopher Judith Butler in her 1990 book Gender Trouble, which has subsequently been used in a variety of academic fields.
Gender's Performative in Chinese Folk Story

*Painted skin*
The subject of gender's performative reminded me a folktale from ancient China: *Painted skin*11. It tells a story of a scholar who is attracted to a beautiful maiden and brings her home, only to discover she is an ugly female ghoul who puts on a facial mask to look attractive, after "painting" it daily. This short story like many other tales in Chinese history reflected the negative attitude towards beauty and femininity. The Chinese idiom *HongYan HuoShui*: ruddy face, source of peril, might be translated as 'women are the root of all evil'. Cosmetics, fashion are large part of every women's daily life. In the post feminist era we believe the fact women now are able to consume and appreciate their own beauty is history improved. However, making up a beautiful female surface is precisely performing the gender. Cixous point out in *The laugh of the medusa*: “we are the precocious, we the repressed of culture, our lovely mouths gagged with pollen” (Helene,1976, p.878) for Cixous, the only way for women to really express and free ourselves is writing: “to write. An act which will not only “realize” the decensored relation of woman to her sexuality, to her womanly being, giving her access to her native strength.” (Helene, 1976, p.880) Butler adds: “Sex is a contrived premise, a fiction, then gander does not presume a sex which it acts upon, but rather, gender produces the misnomer of prediscursive 'sex', and the meaning of construction becomes that of linguistic monism, whereby everything is only and always language.” (Butler, 1993, p.xiv) Those two authors bringing the body back to language.

In the final chapter I will exam how body is presented in contemporary art and performance. I will explore six performances in three sections: *Perform the Gender; Culture and Natural; Language Monsters*, those artworks are created by Western and Eastern artists, their art practice are the visualization of the first two chapters.

11 "Painted Skin" is a short story from *Strange Stories from a Chinese Studio* which is a collection of nearly five hundred mostly supernatural tales written by Pu Songling in during the early Qing Dynasty.
Chapter 4: Bodies in Performance Art

Body Boundaries

Maria Abramovic & Ulay
Yoko Ono
“performativity is thus not a singular ‘act’, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repletion. Moreover, this act is not primarily theatrical, indeed, its apparent theatricality is produced to the extent that its historicity remains dissimulated.” (Butler, 1993, p.xxi)

There are many other artists examine the boundaries between the body and its environment: between the individual body and the social or collective body, as well as between the interior and exterior of the body. Amelia Jones and Tracy Warr wrote in their book: The Artist’s body. – Body Boundaries: “The artist’s body becomes a symbol. Frequently the physical (flesh) is metaphor for the metaphysical (emotion. The work grouped here raises issue of power. Control and intimacy regarding the liberties we can and cannot take with our own bodies. It also challenges the moral position of the viewer .who is sometimes given the opportunity to penetrate the boundaries of the artist’s own body and explore the limits of his/her own behavior. Finally. The very boundary between art and its audience-between art and life- is reduced and overtly challenged.” (Amelia and Tracy, 2000, p114)

Performance done by Maria Abramovic and Ulay where they stood naked facing each other in the main entrance, forcing the public entering the museum to choose which naked body to face-male or female- as they squeezed through the small space between the two artist. As each member of the public passed awkwardly between the two naked bodies. They were filmed by a hidden camera and saw themselves being projected on monitors placed near by. Text on the wall by the monitors read: imponderable such imponderable human factor as one’s aesthetic sensitivity the overriding importance of imponderables in determining human contact.
They are performing the gender. They are forcing people to face and controlling their emotions of the gender that has been presented. The bodies being placed in the museum as the architecture space: the door. The physical artist's body is now in a social environment challenging audience's emotion. It's the audience that complied the artwork. The bodies become gendered by the viewer's eye. Reflects to Butler's theory of gender's preformativity. She wrote "The relation between culture and nature presupposed by some models of gender construction implies a culture or an agency of the social which acts upon a nature, which is itself presupposed as a passive surface, outside the social and yet its necessary counterpart." (Butler, 1993, p.xiv)

Talking about “surface” the performance Cut Piece by Yoko Ono is a statement. Where Ono sat on the stage and invited the audience to come up and cut away her clothes. Covering her breasts with her hands as her garment fell away. Deconstructing the
supposedly neutral subject/object relationship between the viewer and the art object. Ono presented a situation in which the viewer implicated him/her in the potentially aggressive act of unveiling the passive body. Emphasizing the reciprocity in the way that viewers and subjects become objects for each other. “Cut piece also demonstrated the ways in which viewing without responsibility may cut into and destroy the object of perception.” (Amelia and Tracy, 2000, p74) Ono wrote in her own statement: “People went on cutting the arts they do not like me. Finally there was only the stone remained of me that was in me but they were still not satisfied and wanted to know what’s like in the stone.” (Yoko, 1977)
In performance art there is rich history of Covering, painting and extending the body surface, which the choice of covering and painting material become significant. Like the veil in Rembrandt’s painting, the interiors complete the work of art. “The artist’s body is used as a surface for the inscription of a visual language of identification. By staging and adopting an identity through the use of accepted sign and signifiers such as clothes make up and fake physical attributes. Codes of gender and race are investigated” (Amelia and Tracy, 2000, p134)
Culture and Nature

Yayoi Kusama
Song Dong
Culture and Nature

“The body is used as site that can both be penetrated and that can penetrate- and transform- social space.” (Amelia and Tracy, 2000, p114) The idea of body in landscape challenges the viewer’s understanding self and space. Yayol Kusama. The priestess of polka dots wrote in her autobiography: “I was asserting was that painting polka-doc patterns on a human body cause that person’s self to be obliterated and returned him or her to the natural universe.” (Kusama, 2011, p102) This idea is powerfully echoed in her film Self Obliteration.

Kusama, 1968,

Self Obliteration. Pamphlet for Fillmore East,

New York,
Kusama's use of painting the river reminded me another Chinese artist Song Dong, who recently had an exhibition *Wast Not*\textsuperscript{12} at *London Barbican Center*. Song's performance *Water Seal* 1996 shows the artist sat in the Lhasa River in Tibet and stamped the water with a seal inscribed with the Chinese character for *water*. This work was shown as a group of 36 photographs in *Between Past and Future New Photography and Video from China* Exhibition London2006, This performance has great use of symbols: water symbolise time and history, seal symbolise power and ownership. The repetitive action symbolise the helpless human desire to conquer and change nature. As the viewer watching the images we related the landscapes to our mindscapes. The nature reflects our culture.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{water SEAL}
\caption{Water Seal,1996,Collection rtur walther}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{12} Song Dong (Chinese: 宋东, born 1966) is a Chinese contemporary artist, active in sculpture, installations, performance, photography and video. the topic of his widely exhibited installation Waste Not shows the transformation of China's urban environment and the impermanence of change.
Cultural Animal

Xu Bin
Gillian Wearing
There is a performance by a Chinese artist Xu Bin\textsuperscript{13} which also provoke strong action from the audience in Beijing at 1994, this time the artist used the bodies of pigs. The centre of the exhibition space is occupied by a fenced enclosure, the ground of which is littered with piles of books. The performance begins with the appearance in the enclosure of two breeding pigs whose bodies are covered with tattoos in the form of “false scripts” \textsuperscript{14}, the male pig with false English words and the female with false Chinese characters with in this confined space, the pigs cohabit, commune, become aroused, and finally mate.

\textsuperscript{13} Xu Bing (Chinese: 徐冰 b. 1955) He currently resides in Beijing, where he serves as the vice-president of the Central Academy of Fine Arts. He is most known for his printmaking skills and installations pieces, as well as his creative artistic use of language, words, and text and how they have affected our understanding of the world.

\textsuperscript{14} Chinese characters are logograms used in the writing of Chinese (where they may be called hanzi,"Han character") Chinese characters constitute the oldest continuously used system of writing in the world. By nature of widespread use in China and Japan, Chinese characters are among the most widely adopted writing systems in the world.
Xu Bin, *A Case Study of Transference* 1993-94, Exhibited: Performance at *Han Mo Arts Center*, Beijing

When this work was initially performed in Beijing, it revealed an unexpected and surprising dynamic between the spectators and the spectacle. Just before the event took place there was some concern that, once confronted with the unfamiliar cultural environment of the exhibition hall, the pigs would become too nervous to perform the crucial act. But in fact the result was just the opposite: the pigs themselves were completely unfazed, and blithely ignoring the human onlookers pursuing their lovemaking with great gusto. It was rather the audience members who found themselves in an embarrassing and awkward position. What ultimately was exposed was not any sense of discomfort or displacement on the part of the pigs, but the limitations and the inability to adapt by the human audience. Xu states: “*These two creatures, devoid of human consciousness, yet carrying on their bodies the marks of human civilization, engage in the most primal form of social intercourse.***

Xu used Pigs to test and provoke reaction from the speculators. The animals wildly
mating in front of shocked audiences. The books and scripts were flying around, destroyed. Xu is using animal action to awaking our humanly emotions. The spectators are the real performer.

Another female artist who is the master of provoking audient’s emotion. She wears mask, she interviews people behind the mask, she invites us to confront our own “social mask” She is Gillian Wearing. 

Gillian Wearing is English photographer and video artist. Wearing has described her working method as ‘editing life’. By using photography and video to record the confessions of ordinary people, her work explores the disparities between public and private life, between individual and collective experience.
Six characters from Gillian Wearing's video work:

Confess all on Video. Don't Worry, You Will Be in Disguise. Intrigued? Call Gillian...1994, Secrets and Lies, 2009

I saw Wearing's retrospective at Whitechapel Gallery this year, she records the confessions of ordinary people. Her photographs and videos explore the disparities between public and private life, between individual and collective experience. The brutal personal narratives are often revealed behind latex masks, while watching the videos and hearing other people’s confession, I am searching my own memories and secrets.

"The effect is paradoxical. Wearing doesn’t offer a literal likeness of her subjects, since their appearance is disguised. But her films still function like pin-sharp portraiture, because the sense of character that emerges feels unvarnished and true. Wearing suggests that the face we present to the world has a mask-like quality. By confronting this head-on, she captures the psychology behind the public persona. Artifice yields authenticity." (Alastair Sooke, 2012)
Conclusion

Her voice, their bodies, our stories.

This thesis examines three chapters of discovering my identity through a series of studies: Feminine Writing”, Gender’s Performativity, and Body in Contemporary Performance Art.

First, I introduced Helene Cixous as my theoretical guide. In Cixous’s book *Three steps on the ladder of writing* I discovered the relationship between feminine sexuality and writing, the difference between masculine writing and feminine writing.

I then explored Clark and Berger’s argument of the Nude and the Naked. I further explored the representation of the body in ancient Chinese picture-art and women’s cultural roots in multilayered Chinese society, as well as the importance of clothes and
the soul of naked women. The second chapter of Judith Butler’s book *Bodies that matter* led me to explore gender's performativity. I compared Butler’s writing with Beauvoir's theory of “becoming a woman” and also reflected on how Chinese women have been portrayed in folk-stories. In the third chapter I selected and examined six pieces of contemporary performance art. These are the visualization of my ‘body’ and ‘performativity’ theory studies.

While researching for my thesis I have used my own physical body in art practice. Cixous’s concept of “Feminine Writing” and Butler’s theory of “performantivity” became my guidance. I have been writing and performing for the past year (2011-12). My experiences have grown into a body of work that vibrates with my thesis. “ *My thoughts are coming out of my mouth*” is an ongoing essay and film, which contain my diary and the documentations of my performances. I will present this work in a separate book (project???). It will take you to visit my dark childhood memories, the loss of my marriage and the curiosity of a cross-cultured young Chinese woman. You will hear my singing; you will see me painting using my hair as a brush; you will witness a (display) of my skin covered by red lipstick, black tights, blue and white clay and golden tapes.

This is my ‘performative’ body.
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