This creative thesis includes an introduction of the “Gao Xingjian Effect,” a review on the major themes in his work, and theoretical research on diasporic consciousness embedded in his work The Other Shore. The thesis also presents a full-length play – Six Ways of Running which was written under the influence and conception of Gao’s work, and a summary on the playwriting process and production reception of Six Ways of Running. The whole creative process focuses on the theme of interaction and confrontation between the individual and the collective and aims at exploring new possibilities beyond binary configuration.
SEARCHING FOR THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF THIRDNESS

THROUGH GAO XINGJIAN’S THE OTHER SHORE

AND SIX WAYS OF RUNNING

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Faculty of Miami University

in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of Theatre

by

Jia-Yun Zhuang

Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

2004

Advisor ________________________

Dr. Ann Elizabeth Armstrong

Reader _________________________

Dr. Howard A. Blanning

Reader _________________________

Dr. LuMing R. Mao
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title Page.......................................................................................................................... 1

Table of Contents........................................................................................................... ii

Acknowledgments........................................................................................................... iii

Introduction...................................................................................................................... 1

Chapter I: A Review of Gao Xingjian and his Major Work............................................. 3

Chapter II: Thirdness in Gao Xingjian’s The Other Shore.............................................. 16

Chapter III: Six Ways of Running, A Play in Six Scenes.............................................. 41

Chapter IV: The Playwriting Process and Production Reception of Six Ways of Running.................................................................................................................... 115

Works Cited................................................................................................................... 134
Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Ann Elizabeth Armstrong who gives me her advice, encourages me to stick to my goal, and always pushes me to try my best.

I thank Dr. Mao Luming for his provocative and important advice.

I thank all of the casts of two readings of Six Ways of Running, especially Kevin and Melissa who gave me those wonderful and practical suggestions.

I thank all of my grad colleagues.

I thank Jianjun for his great friendship, patience, and support.

I thank my family for their love and care, especially my mom – I love you forever!

Above all, I thank Dr. Howard Blanning who introduces this exciting life to me and who has always been there!
Introduction

Reading Gao Xingjian’s work become a special thing that happened to me after I started my graduate study in the U.S, or to say, in a country outside of China. During my theatre study at Central Academy of Drama (Beijing/China), *Absolute Signal* and *Bus Stop* were mentioned in the class. Either the production concept of *Absolute Signal* or the audience reception of *Bus Stop* was depicted as a “phenomenon” of Chinese contemporary theatre during its time period. However, besides these two plays, we could not know more about the playwright or his other work simply because he was officially banned in China.

After the Nobel Prize announced, the first reaction from the classroom was: the first Nobel winner of Literature is a theatre person. Outside this small circle, however, the award was called into many incisive questions: What is Gao’s nationality? What does he or his work represent? What is his work about? Does he work within the mainstream of Western literature? The negative response from the Chinese government further took the reactions towards this Nobel Prize into a complexity.

The most interesting and problematic part in the “Gao Xingjian Effect,” for me, is that even though we (Chinese readers) had little chances to read Gao’s work or they paid little attention to his work before the award announcement, all kinds of arguments and judgments on this writer would never stop. The intense and endless entanglement of politics and art in this specific case also draws my attention. The different political institutions (socialism/capitalism) or artistic esthetics should not be the origins of those arguments. Then, what stands at the center of the arguments?

During the research on Gao Xingjian, I started to focus on the presentation of the cultural, political, and national identity – Chineseness – which always claims its homogeneous, unified, and authentic fixity. Bhabha’s proposition of “Third Space” as “a contradictory and ambivalent space” actually provides me with a perspective to consider the split between the essentialist demand for an authentic and primordial cultural identification and the strategic identity construction that frames a liminal and hybrid articulation. Conveying Bhabha’s notion from a postcolonial context to the
concept of national/personal identity, I began to rethink the oversimplified binary opposition and assumption embedded in the whole “Gao Xingjian Effect.”

Going through the whole process of my creative thesis, I found that my topic actually focuses on the personal and national identity. Nowadays, identity becomes a word of fashion. One, especially the one from the oppressed and marginalized group, should firmly declare his/her identity and fight against the territorial or discursive domination by the majority. As a matter of fact, identity policy invites and determines the dynamics between different powers. Is identity is full unto itself? From my point of view, identity is “who I am,” but never “who we are” nor “who you are.” Identity should not become an instrumental category of regulatory regime. If cultural representation always involves or is involved into the preconceived idea of identity, then it will trap itself within a dichotomous forever— for example, East and West – and will confirm the borderline of the binary.

It is such consideration that introduced me to this journey of searching for the possibility beyond the fixed identity configuration and took me into a complete study on the subject of the arguments: Gao Xingjian and his work. Chapter I and Chapter II elaborate the major themes of Gao Xingjian’s work, his diasporic identity, and the consciousness of “thirdness” that transcends the fixed binary oppositions and creates an alternative presentation. Following the proposition of “thirdness,” Chapter III and Chapter IV focus on my creative work, a play as the reflection of the theoretical research. The process of writing this thesis helped me understand as well as opened up more questions about identity and the solution out of binary.
Chapter I

A Review of Gao Xingjian and his Major Work

I. Gao Xingjian Effect

Gao Xingjian, a novelist, playwright, painter, director, translator, critic and artist, was born in Jiangxi province, southern China, in 1940. He left China in 1987, lived in France as a political refugee from the late 1980’s, and received a naturalized French citizenship in 1998. In December 2000 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, when he was still virtually unknown outside of academic circles. His neighbor believed that he actually made a living by selling his paintings. After the Nobel award was announced, Gao rapidly and frequently occupied the spotlight, and he was recognized as the first Chinese Nobel literature laureate by the media, even though there was no official representative of Chinese government present at the 2000 Nobel Prize Award Ceremony. Later, the Premier of China, Zhu Rongji, was quoted in the Hong Kong press as having reacted positively to the award. Nevertheless, “state media rushed to deny that he’d ever discussed the issue. And since then, silence” (BBC News).

Not long after, media and audiences became familiar with Gao’s phrase “without isms.”¹ In many of the essays, books, lectures, and interviews of Gao, he always calls himself a “without-ist,” a person “who at least has freedom to choose not to be a slave of any ism” (Gao Mei You Zhu Yi Author’s Preface). Indeed, we could perceive the phrase “without-ism” as a perfect match to his literary pursuits, political claims, and his self-identification as a diasporic and a no political-affiliated Chinese writer, who consistently attempts to shake off the ideological system that has fettered him for a long time.

Although the “self-exile” of Gao Xingjian geographically distances himself from Mainland China, the ultimate foci of his writings are all the time related to his experiences in China, and, even more so, his views and reactions towards the reality of China. Gao Xingjian repeatedly argues that he only pays attention to artistic areas

---

¹ Mei You Zhu Yi, literally translated as “Without Isms,” is a literature criticism and interpretation written by Gao Xingjian, firstly published in Hong Kong, in 1996.
and he has no intention of getting involved in politics:

In other words, what ever the angle, literature must be subordinate to politics, or be under the control of politics – this is precisely what I have been working hard to break away from. My view is the very opposite. Literature is higher than politics, if not actually above politics. (BBC World Service)

The Swedish Academy lauded his novel Ling Shan (Soul Mountain) together with other works, saying that it had, “for an oeuvre of universal validity, bitter insights and linguistic ingenuity, which has opened new paths for the Chinese novel and drama” (Nobel E-Museum). Directly following the proclamation of the prize, however, different voices from various parts of the world came forth to either support, condemn, or question this award. It goes without saying that Gao Xingjian was the center of all those arguments. His novels, short stories, plays, criticisms and essays on literature and other art forms, as well as his efforts to introduce avant-garde concepts from European theatre to the Chinese audience, were nevertheless overwhelmed by the intense complexity of all the political and social debates.

Most of the criticisms of Gao Xingjian’s literary achievements, which come out of political views rather than artistic judgments, could explain at least two phenomena. First, Gao’s artistic work and his political gestures unavoidably entangle each other, even though he attempts to separate them clearly. Secondly, Gao’s spectators are always sensitive enough to pull out the social and political complexities embedded in his texts and his social identity, even when the writer positions himself outside of any ideological debate. One might say that once the text gets its life from an author, it can present and extend itself freely without any constraint. Its author, like Gao Xingjian, has been “exiled.” However, the third possibility might be elicited at this point: the writer can employ ambiguity and manipulate reasoning through his self-positioning to affect his critics/readers/activists’ comprehension, in order to

---

2 Here, I borrow the idea of “the author is dead” from poststructuralist theorist Roland Barthes. In his essay titled “The Death of the Author,” Barthes deciphers the different readings on one text “Sarrasine,” by which he shows that an author only exists as the product of a text or the writing process, not giving any absolute meaning to the text. The author’s function might be soon removed once the text is published: “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author.” Also see Image, Music, Text, 148.
establish a new statement. Before getting into any such new statement, perhaps the
discussion around the “Gao Xingjian effect” should start with a chronicle of the
literary/political life of the writer.

II. Political, or Not

Gao Xingjian became a resident playwright at the People’s Art Theater in
Beijing after he graduated from Beijing Foreign Languages Institute, where he had a
concentrated study in French, western literature, and literary theories – particularly on
modernist literature, and then he earned the degree in French literature. He published
his first novella in 1978 and had a chance to visit France and Italy in the next year.
His education focused on Western culture and his journey overseas inspired him to
create a wealth of short stories, essays, and plays from 1980 to 1987, most of which
were distinct from the mainstream or dominant views in China at that time period.

For instance, Bus Stop (1983) was written in the spirit of Beckett’s Waiting for
Godot, portraying a group of people writing for a bus to take them to the city so they
can fulfill their personal dreams. However, the bus, just like Godot, never arrives. The
play expresses fear and puzzlement among the group and an absence of individual
consciousness. After a few internal experimental performances in the summer of 1987,
the play was soon denounced as a direct criticism of the Chinese Communist Party. It
incurred official censorship and was banned within a short time period. A government
official who was in charge of official culture described the play as the most pernicious
work since the establishment of the People’s Republic. As a response, Gao defined
Bus Stop as “a comedy, but if people don’t have this sense of humor, it becomes an
extremely serious matter, to the extent that the writer should be beaten up, killed, or
sent to a labor camp” (BBC World Service). After that, Gao constantly clarified his

---

3 After Gao Xingjian was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature, the media, critics, and activists
simultaneously invent “Gao Xingjian effect” to describe the endless entanglements of politics and arts in this
specific case. Several essays use “Gao Xingjian effect” as the main subject of their titles, such as “The Nine
Political Hat Tricks of Gao Xingjian Effect,” which is written by Gu Xin.

4 After Bus Stop was banned, a friend (Su Shuyang) of Gao came to tell Gao that He Jingzhi, a poet and a
senior official from the Culture Department of China, criticized Bus Stop as the most pernicious work since the
establishment of the People’s Republic. Even though He Jingzhi didn’t see Bus Stop, from all the reports on the
performances, he believed that Bus Stop was worse than Hai Rui Ba Guan (literally translated as Hai Rui Leaves
Office). Hai Rui Ba Guan was a play produced in the early 1960s, interpreted as a critique of Mao Zedong, and
labeled as a poisonous weed. Many Chinese historians regard an article denouncing Hai Rui Ba Guan in 1965 as
the start of the Cultural Revolution. Also see Mei You Zhu Yi, 181.
standpoint on literature. “If you put literature on to some sort of combat footing, and turn it into combat literature, then it’s the very thing I oppose” (BBC World Service). However, the conflict between his writing and the ideology of Chinese authority has never ended. In the early 1980s, he was easily identified as a target in the government’s “Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign.”

As Gao Xingjian continued his self-claimed politically-detached work, the Chinese government continued to consider his writings politically motivated. One of his earliest plays *The Other Shore* (1986) – which will be further explored in Chapter II of this thesis – was immediately banned by Chinese authorities the same year, yet soon performed in Taiwan and Hong Kong. His plays have not been performed in Mainland China since.

In 1987, Gao Xingjian, as a painter, was allowed to go to Germany on a fellowship. He then vowed never “return to Communist China until the totalitarian system was overthrown” (Lin 14). He settled in Paris, where he continued his painting, and wrote in Chinese and in French. After the June 4th crackdown on Tiananmen Square in 1989, he publicly resigned from the Chinese Communist Party and condemned the acts against the student movement. He also wrote a play set against the background of the massacre. The play, *Tao Wang* (Escape), was originally written for a performing arts center in Los Angeles and he was asked to revise it because it was missing a hero. It seems that, ironically, Gao’s literary work doesn’t serve the politics of the opposite side of Communism well, too. Later, Gao refused to revise to construct a hero and instead withdrew the script. The intention of writing *Tao Wang* is “not limited to denounce the massacre… [L]ife is always on Escape, if not from political oppression, but from the others” (Gao Mei You Zhu Yi 207). *Tao Wang* only speaks what its playwright wants to speak and refuses to be utilized by any political agenda. “A writer is neither a representative of his/her ethical culture, nor a spokesman for his/her people… (s/he) should be alone while he is in front of the

---

5 Before the economic reforms, a political campaign called Anti-Spiritual Pollution Campaign was launched by factions in the Chinese Communist Party Leadership, in order to sort out any unorthodox views of Marxism brought by the “open door policy” in China. The campaign lasted from October 1983 to February 1984, attacking such social problems as crime, corruption, and pornography. See *The China Handbook*, edited by Christopher Hudson.
whole society, using his/her own voice to speak” (Gao Mei You Zhu Yi 11). Several months later, the play had its stage premiere at Kungliga Dramatiska Teatern in Sweden and was kept the original concept of the playwright.

One fact always noted by the media is that Gao still writes in the Chinese language even though he can use fluent French and he politically rejects China under the regime of the Chinese Communist Party. Gao responded to this by saying “certainly first and foremost I was born Chinese and I write in Chinese. I don’t think there is any need to evade this” (BBC World Service). Furthermore, Gao asserted that one should never value a writer according to his political label or his nationality, but his work only.

Although Gao attempted to disassociate those two issues again and again, all the discussions and negotiations around the individual/collective – a direct reflection on the complexity of his literature/politics – can always be identified from both his novels and plays. Many of his works deal with how the masses try to find a way out of emptiness, or how a single person flees from conformity, or how both the masses and the individual are suspended in the middle of nowhere. The deployment of allegorical, non-linear, alterable characterizations, and other unconventional narrative/representation always provide multiple readings on Gao’s works. From my point of view, the theme of the collective/individual will lead to one of the clearer readings.

III. Soul Mountain

Here, I will take his best-known work Soul Mountain as an example. The novel will provide a perfect beginning and several crucial angles to look into Gao Xingjian and his works. Soul Mountain was written in Beijing and Paris from 1982 to 1989, and was first printed in Taipei in 1990 in Chinese. As a reflective, impressionistic, and half-autobiographical work, the novel is based on Gao’s ten-month Odyssey along the Yangtze River and the fringes of Chinese Han civilization. Through the over 81 chapters, Gao Xingjian introduces an intellectual who, trapped and confined by the various theories and isms, was mistakenly diagnosed as a cancer patient. Not long after, the protagonist launched his spiritual
confrontation between life and death. He embarked on a journey into the remote country regions of Southwest China. The journey is also embodied as his self-discovery and redeeming, as well as an essential quest for cultural roots, inner peace, identity, and the meaning of life.

*Soul Mountain* accommodates several discussions of the themes of the individual/collective, minority/majority, and self-identification/political-inscription. On one hand, the journey represents how an individual being recuperates and redefines the value of Self by placing himself within the fate of a nation. From this perspective, the novel can also be regarded as a fully-written dialogue among several individual beings, accentuated by collective memory and national history. On the other hand, the novel intentionally creates a trajectory to unearth the marginalized cultural identities from a hegemonic society. For instance, a mix of folk culture that originated in the southwestern part of China is presented in the novel. Considering those alternative religions or ideologies, Gao claims that:

[Zen, Dao, or Shamanism in China] maintains independent system of religious culture even though each of them was once advocated or utilized by any emperor… [Those religions] have never dominated the orthodox culture nor created any pressure upon the development of Chinese culture and civilization. Rather, they became retreats for the intellectuals. (Gao Mei You Zhu Yi 201)

Therefore, we can also perceive *Soul Mountain* as a journey through that which is alternative, ignored, and oppressed by the officials for a long time, resurfaces and takes on life.

Zhao Yiheng, a scholar from University of London, examines Gao Xingjian’s works from a cultural and aesthetic perspective in *Towards A Modern Zen Theatre: Gao Xingjian and Chinese Theatre Experimentalism*. Zhao also explains how to understand the representation and the significance of sub-culture in Gao’s *Soul Mountain*:

*Soul Mountain* attempts, through spiritual peregrinations, to reveal the other side of Chinese culture that has been cut off by official-mainstream
culture. A series of binary oppositions run through the novel: the Yangtze Reaches versus the Yellow River Reaches the South and the Deep South versus Central China; Zen-Dao-Shamanism versus Confucianism; anti-rationalism vs. rationalism; nature vs. civilization, and finally, the cultural undercurrent vs. the official institution. (Zhao 104)

The negotiation between the individual/collective and any other binary opposition in Soul Mountain is mostly approached through two strategies. First, one can borrow “Pronouns as Protagonists”6 – a title of a critical essay – to describe one of the major features of Soul Mountain, in which Gao creates a series of myths on the characterizations. Secondly, the conceptual closure never arrives in this novel. Once the questions are given; the answers are fleeing towards somewhere else – the other shore. These two main features of Soul Mountain are also important characteristics of other works of Gao Xingjian, which will be examined again in the later chapters.

“Pronouns as Protagonists” illustrates the dynamic between the individual and the collective in a special way. In this novel, the protagonist splits into composite narrators and the narrators alternate “I,” “you,” “she,” and “he.” The protagonist “I” needs to exchange thoughts with other people instead of only being immersed within his introspective monologue or philosophical speculation, so “I” brings in “you” as a reflective self and a conversational partner with whom to dialogue. To escape from solitude, “you” consequently invites “she” – the psyche of women, and creates an analytical distance and a dissimilar perspective as well. As “you” and “I” merge into this intimacy between two halves of one Self, the artistic alienation begins to phase out, whereupon the author lets go of “you” and produces the rise and progress of “he.” As a result, a new spatial relation between those “pronouns” is constructed once more. The use of “we,” which could imply the concept of collective entity, is apparently absent and banned in the entire narrative, in order to resist the surrender of the Self to the collective ideology.

---

6 “Pronouns as Protagonists: On Gao Xingjian’s Theories of Narration,” written by Mabel Lee and collected in Soul of Chaos: Critical Perspectives on Gao Xingjian, is an essay focused on the use of shifting narrative perspectives in Gao Xingjian’s Soul Mountain.
From a certain perspective, Gao Xingjian is playing a game to reject *naming* in *Soul Mountain*. Naming is an act of establishing the meaning of Self or Other. A name is not only a title, but an identity that enables the subject to enter the symbolic. It defines the hierarchy by those who are named, thereby distributes social power. Within a binary system, minorities need to seek their names and reconfirm their features; those in the majority enjoy orchestrating people through classifications, by assigning people their names and then grouping them according to the names.

As a matter of fact, not a single character is mentioned by name in *Soul Mountain*. Literally, every person in the novel becomes an “outcast” of naming/labeling. Coming from those unnamed individual narratives, or from those personal recollections through every fragment of their beings, the memory of a nation failed to create a grand narrative. Also, through all the abstracted interactions among different pronouns and with all the given circumstances (time, space, plots) extracted, such new pursuit of “truth” makes the self-identification rather ambiguous. Therefore, neither the collective nor the individual value is confirmed.

As mentioned before, the idea against the surrender of the Self to the Many, or to the dominant ideological system, is also carried by the abstracted question/answer dialogue. When a question is submitted, the answer secretly flees away and the response points to a new direction. In the middle of Chapter 19, “she” and “you” have a conversation as followed:

[…] I’m terrified, she says.
What are you terrified of? You ask.
I’m not terrified of anything but I want to say that I’m terrified.
Silly child,
The other shore,
What are you saying?
You don’t understand,
Do you love me?
I don’t know,
Do you hate me?
I don’t know,
Haven’t you ever?
I only knew that sooner or later there would be this day,
Are you happy?
I’m yours, speak to me tenderly, tell me about the darkness,
Pangu wielded his great sky-cleaving axe,
Don’t talk about Pangu,
What shall I talk about?
The boat was about to sink,
Was about to sink but didn’t,
Did it sink in the end?
I don’t know.
You’re really a child.
Tell me a story […] (Gao Soul Mountain 115-116)

The alienation between the questions and the answers take the meaning of their conversation to the middle of nowhere. Significantly, the linguistic apparatus and narrative strategies underscore the theme of “escape” the either end, and transfer the meaning to “the other shore.” When the indefinite pronouns constitute the polyphony of narrating selves and flee the linguistic convention, the individual beings flee the repressive social conformity and delight in the notion of searching for selves. In a manner, employing individual’s skeptical and escaping consciousness to confront the collective, hegemony, totalitarianism, elucidates the dynamic between One and Many in Soul Mountain, and in other artistic presentations of Gao Xingjian. As the writer claimed, “fleeing” is one of the approaches that advocates a “Cold Literature,” and a type of being which can be detached from authenticity, national and cultural boundaries, as well as any authoritarianism and oppression.

The Swedish Academy values Soul Mountain as “one of those singular literary

---

7 In Gao Xingjian’s Nobel Lecture 2000, titled “The Case for Literature,” he mentioned that “…Cold literature is literature that will flee in order to survive, it is literature that refuses to be strangled by society in its quest for spiritual salvation. If a race cannot accommodate this sort of non-utilitarian literature it is not merely a misfortune for the writer but a tragedy for the race.”
creations that seem impossible to compare with anything but themselves…In the writing of Gao Xingjian literature is born anew from the struggle of the individual to survive the history of the masses” (Nobel E-Museum). Mabel Lee, the English translator of Soul Mountain, in her essay “Pronouns as Protagonists: On Gao Xingjian’s Theories of Narration,” summarizes that “Soul Mountain is infused with Gao’s perceptions of the individual’s place within the totality of nature, a totality including personal and social relationship” (Lee 238). In Soul Mountain, all the linguistic “games” such as multidimensional narratives, shifts of perspective, and question/answer dialogues aim to search for a new spatial relation between the individual and the collective. The similar themes and writing strategies appear in Gao’s work again and again.

IV. The Other Shore

Taking about the phrase “the other shore,” it might be helpful to preview the play The Other Shore before going into Chapter II – a chapter in which a detailed analysis on the play and behind the play will be developed. Such preview will also illustrate the major themes and representations in Gao’s writings.

In 1986, Gao completed The Other Shore, a play which is, according to the playwright, primarily for actors’ training. However, The Other Shore was immediately banned by Chinese government and was performed only in Taiwan and Hong Kong.

The play begins with an improvised rope game and ends with a group of people uttering some random sentences on stage, desolately. The idea of The Other Shore comes from the Buddhist concept: the lives of human beings are nothing but a process of suffering on this shore. They expect to be delivered and redeemed only by reaching the other shore, a piece of Buddhist land of enlightenment and peace. On the opposite side of the assumption, the characters in the play obtain anything but salvation when they arrive at the other shore. They are trapped by struggles for power and legitimacy.

The playwright rhythmically explores his idea through a serious of analogous “games.” For instance, a “Woman” brings language to the people and is killed by
them soon afterwards; or, the collective card players refuse the dissidence put forward by “Man” and simply persecute and exclude him. Several scenes present the physical or psychic violence from a mob towards a nonconformist in The Other Shore, which portrays the powerlessness and loneliness of the individual being, as well as the strength and the dangers of collectivism. Eventually, the ultimate individualist “Man” is excluded from the game and becomes an outcast, like the playwright himself, and exits the stage with his soul (Shadow).

The Other Shore is another representative example of Gao Xingjian’s works, interpreting the existential predicaments of a modern Self in this world. Compared to his examination of One/Many in the context of the dominant Confucian tenets in Soul Mountain, he balances and confronts the same theme in this earlier work, The Other Shore. With no doubt, the theme and the representations of the majority/minority, the authority/mass, the individual-collective, and the Self/Other are reexamined and reaffirmed in his writings.

Summarizing the information above and giving a panoramic view of the author at this point, one could keep track of Gao’s life, philosophy, and his artistic goals – they have all centered upon voicing Self. First of all, during the Chinese cultural modernity (from 1919 till now), from the suffix use of “realism,” “romanticism,” “modernism,” to the prefix use such as “pri-,” “neo-,” and “post-,” the excess employment of definitions, as well as political surveillance, from Gao Xingjian’s point of view, tightly categorizes and suffocates the creative fields through every single angle. Furthermore, the Chinese writers and their works are easily situated between an inebriation with using those exotic technical classifications and an essentialist appeal to indigenous rally. One can see that the academic-political labels disqualify writers’ individual subjectivities, yet make them either strictly follow those affectations of “ism” in their creative works or reconstruct the historical “canon” for governmental reward. Second, the Chinese intellectuals, from Gao’s view, rarely “separate the idea of politics and arts… nor national conception and independent consciousness” (Gao Mei You Zhu Yi 98-101). The endless social responsibility of intellectuals finally becomes the individual burden and establishes
this national superstition that devours every one. As a result, the Self either disappears or has to fight against the collective myth.

Therefore, Gao chose to escape and to reject the political/cultural reality. His fleeing (from the Communist China) in the pursuit for either geographical distance or the ideological detachment, according to Gao himself, provides him different coordinates of vision. For Gao Xingjian, the new space is not merely a site where he can reflect upon some so-called nostalgia, but a site where his speculations and resistances to all of the “isms” progress in depth.

As he points out: “the future of Chinese-language literature is incumbent on the death of ideology and of excessive ego-centrism” (TAIPEI Times). Gao Xingjian is a writer who believes that literature should not have a social mission. He always insists that writing for him is a need for self-fulfillment and its goal should be the pursuit and portrayal of his own conscience. Furthermore, he calls for a return to the individual and self-reflection along the lines of Zen philosophy. A return to the individual, for him, involves going back to human nature, which is full of weakness, fallacies, anxiety and wanton thoughts – “observing humans and observing oneself yields a clear-minded starting point for literature” (TAIPEI Times). Virtually, the writer’s “escape” also includes his writing style, and leads to a new stage where the attachment to any assigned ideology will be withdrawn.

Nevertheless, the Gao Xingjian’s concern over a mixture of literature and politics is somehow narrow and unilateral. His speculation overemphasizes on the negative effects of the combination of literature and politics, and he only criticizes the oppression produced by discursive practice of politics. The fact that certain political powers are exercised from innumerable points strategically comes from and is embodied in the formulation of literature is ignored or dodged.8

As a matter of fact, literary life is one part of political life. It not only reflects the process and context of political life, but also considerably helps to construct it;

---

8 According to Foucault, power and knowledge are constructed together through the formation of discourse. There is not an institutional force somewhere to define and limit us. However, there are certain practices everywhere that include us. Power is exercised within those practices in some particular ways, say, literary writing. Writing can be regarded as a method of producing and transmitting power. Also see The History of Sexuality, 94.
and vice versa. In other words, certain power not only confines literature, but also is invented and conveyed by literature. The formation and promulgation of literature will involve or be involved into the practices of power. Literature itself is an institutional knowledge, or a cultural product. Regardless of whether or not literature is conveyed by following the authorial intention, the significance of literature will emerge among all the readers, critics, utilitarians, and attackers. The act of taking away the right of developing literature through politics and the act of marking any cultural product only as individual property provide no more than counterevidence that literature, besides its cultural power, can easily unite with politics. From my point of view, literature could not extend beyond any social structure. Rather, it will be involved in this interplay, and be one immanent, interpretative, and productive part in social relations.

Nevertheless, one can see that Gao Xingjian’s politically-detached pursuit has a quality of resistance towards a specific ideology in a particular time period. The debate between literature and politics is partly embodied as the confrontations between the individual being and the collective in Gao’s works. His writings present a special consciousness beyond the unidirectional negation or binary and all-compassing opposition, which construct a complex strategical situation in a particular society. In the next chapter, the play The Other Shore, the messages of the play, and the playwright’s identity will be fully discussed.
Chapter II
Thirdness in Gao Xingjian’s *The Other Shore*

In *The Location of Culture*, Homi Bhabha describes “the Third Space” as an intervention that makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process (Bhabha 37). Based on Bhabha’s notion, I would like to employ a concept of thirdness to look into Gao Xingjian’s *The Other Shore* and explore a type of presentation beside the assumed polarities and any other either/or option.

By analyzing the theatrical devices such as “Multiple Performing Identities” and the “Intervention of Zen,” this chapter will examine the confrontation between the individual and the collective in *The Other Shore*, the ideology behind the binary confrontation, the writer’s state of in-betweenness, his consciousness of thirdness, and the operation of thirdness in the play. Also, this chapter aims to illustrate how one can perceive *The Other Shore* as a type of writing coming out of the “consciousness of thirdness,” and how such writing, with its emphasis on the multifarious and the hybridized, has the ability to undermine the formation of binary discourse and interrogate any ultimate and essential “truth.”

I. A Reading of the Individual/Collective in *The Other Shore*

*The Other Shore* is one of Gao Xingjian’s earliest works. The play was written in 1986 “after Gao returned from his visits in Berlin and Paris, with the specific objective of training student-actors for the Beijing People’s Art Theatre” (Ren 161). During that time period, “Theatre Experimentalism” – a theatre movement which had its momentous activities in China during the 1980s and ended with the Tiananmen demonstrations in 1989 – was in its ascending stage.

To make a study of Gao Xingjian’s writing, it is necessary to mention his status in “Theatre Experimentalism.” To a certain degree, this “Movement” which descended from its participants’ notions of the “Avant-Garde” and “Postmodern” European theatre, introduced audiences and scholars not only to some theatrical reformations but also ideological cogitation. By 1986, Gao Xingjian has already established his prestige and leadership in the experimental theatre movement. His

As the “Movement” gained acceptance and involved more and more dramatists and experimental activities, Gao’s *The Other Shore*, however, absolutely surprised both theatre circle and the Chinese government and soon sent him to “the other shore” of cultural and political society. The play had only one month of rehearsals by the Beijing People’s Art Theatre before it was banned. Since then, Gao Xingjian’s plays have never again been performed in Mainland China. In 1990 *The Other Shore* had its stage premiere at the National Institute of the Arts in Taipei. The performance was in Minnan dialect, directed by Chen Ling-ling. Later at the same year, the Hong Kong Academy of Performing Arts completed the second production of this play in Cantonese dialect, directed by the writer himself.

Some critics regard *The Other Shore* as:

> [...] a play [centered] around the problem of the individual facing the masses – how the individual is tempted towards certain ways of behaving by the masses, how he may also be abused by the masses and forced into certain ways of behaving, and how relationships of power are the key to understanding the individual in society. (Riley and Gissenwehrer 126)

Others recognize this as “a play on how human beings lose their own identity in order to survive in society” (Zhao 131). However, what is attractive to me in this play comes from the “intimacy” between the individual and the collective, which is expressed through contradictions by using several theatrical devices.

*The Other Shore* provides passive images of the individual subordinated by the collective, but all the characters are also indefinite, nameless and so

---

9 *Wild Man* recounts a journey of an ecologist. During his investigation on the environmental destruction, the Ecologist encounters a Wild Man seeker who is engaged in timber business, a country girl who is forced to accept an arranged marriage, and some journalists who are searching for the missing Chinese epic. The three-chapter *Wild Man* is reputed as an Epic drama, in terms of the ritualized themes, grand spectacles, poetic languages, and its celebration related to the experimental theatre movement in China.
interchangeable that the boundary between victim and victimizer is blurred. There are specific confrontations between the individual and the collective, but the decentralized narratives and unrealistic plots through the fragmentation of time and space weaken the necessity and authenticity of such confrontations. In a manner, The Other Shore begins to create an ambiguous moment in which an individual being is wandering between himself and all the others.

The Other Shore creates a series of games. In the first of the series, a group of actors are playing a rope game guided by a leading actor. After the ropes in their hands transform into a river, all the people attempt to cross this river in order to reach the other side. Arriving at this ideal shore, however, they discover their loss of language. A “Woman” puts herself forward and teaches the crowd of people how to speak, but she is strangled by them when they re-grasp the meaning of language. The game ends when a “Man” stands up, reprimands the group of criminals, and is thereby revered as a new leader. In the next game, a card player invites people to gamble and occupies their attention immediately. While pointing out the skullduggery in the game and taking up a reproach against the cheating of the card player, the “Man” is scoffed by the crowd and is forced to have a part in the gambling. This game ends as the “Man” removes himself from the crowd little by little. The third game starts with the dissociation of the “Man” and develops into several internal encounters within this individual, such as the memories of his private life, a meeting with his own shadow, and the mediations and expostulations by a Zen master. At the end of this final game, a “Shadow” quietly drags the “Man” away. The actors are back to be ordinary actors, describing their aspirations and interests. With a baby’s crying, the sound of engines rumbling, and the siren of an ambulance, the play reaches its end.

Each game underscores specific circumstances which both involve and confine all the game players. All the games – the game of playing rope, the game of playing cards, and the game of playing within the “Man” – have analogous patterns and convey similar metaphysical meanings: the individual offers himself/herself into the collective activities; the latter established rules which normalize and homogenize each individual being; the non-follower is destined to be a loner, a self-exiled one.
Following the above analysis, the rope game can be employed as a representative of all the games and be examined as the interactivity among the game players. Rope is a symbol and image of unity as well as a physical tool for connecting; the “Actor playing with ropes” is the one who sponsors the game, announces the rules, and firmly holds one end of the rope. The other “Actors” who follow the order hold another end of the rope. The “Actor playing with ropes” commences with an emphasis upon the orders inside the game:

ACTOR PLAYING WITH ROPES. […] Okay, I want to take hold of this end of the rope. You see, this way a relationship is established between us. Before that you were you and I was I, but with this rope between us we’re tied to each other and it becomes you and I. […] we are like two locusts tied to the same string, neither of us can get away from each other. (Gao The Other Shore 3)

Meanwhile, the rules of the game indicate that the relationship between the participants on each side should be changed according to the competition of strength. One side is strong enough to pull, and another side is thus weaker to be pulled. It is also important to note that the “Actor playing with ropes” is assigned to be responsible for all the participants. He asserts that “I want all of you to hold on to one end of your rope and give me the other end…the rope is like our hands…or like the language we use, or perhaps it’s like looking at each other, or like the thoughts in our minds” (The Other Shore 4). The operation of the rules unifies the goals and thoughts of all the people who participate in the game.

“Hold on to one end” and “give me the other” generates a set of relationships between the authority and the collective. Within this relationship, the authority defines the game and institutes a direct connection with the collective. Nevertheless, the communication between each individual being within the collective is disconnected. The collective has to be regarded as a whole yet the individuality of each one is disabled accordingly.

By its transformation to an entirety, the collective can either follow or overthrow the single voice addressed to them. In the case of the rope game, the people
are still in their initial status and search for a way out so that they volunteer to be incorporated into the resolution of “Actor playing with ropes” – the authority – an entity that can be responsible for all of them. In other words, a corporate group at the collective level necessarily has an authority structure to make explicit binding decisions and orders which lead the group to affirm its belief. As a consequence, the authority takes over and represents the ideology of the collective in so doing. His voice supplants the voice of the collective and becomes the only one.

This is a process of legitimacy, of transforming a legitimate discourse of an individual entity (the authority) into a legitimate discourse of a collectivity, through which the command of the authority is ensured. Legitimacy of authority can significantly be based on beliefs, which are based on rational values, tradition, and other affective reasons. The belief in the play is the other shore.

The other shore, according to Buddhist beliefs, is a land of bliss and enlightenment, and contrasts with this secular shore of birth and death. Supposedly, a mortal will transcend himself/herself to acquire virtues, and be perfected by a Bodhisattva upon arriving at the other shore. In the play, however, the crowd (transformed by “Actors” at this point) is “ accorded a temporary bliss through their loss of language” after crossing the river (Gao The Other Shore Introduction).

The appearance of the “Woman” and her reconstructing of language evoke the climax of the rope game. She wakes the people up, instructs them with firstly pronouncing “me,” and helps everybody retrieve the voice of his/her own. Interestingly, from a certain perspective, this is another effort towards legitimacy. By rescuing humanity and individuality for the people, the “Woman” might acquire a legitimate position in the collective, whether or not it is from her intention. However, the process is not as she expected: the people first develop the spoken language, then discover a communal object of their enunciations – the “Woman” and finally strangle her after their returning to an integrated discursive society.

---

Max Weber – one of the leading scholars and founders of modern sociology – introduces the idea of “belief in legitimacy” in his article titled “The Types of Legitimate Domination.” According to Weber, a stable pattern of obedience must be based on a belief in the legitimacy of the system of authority and so on deference to the source of command in that system. By introducing the notion “belief in legitimacy” I intend to mention the exercise of authority, not only in the play The Other Shore, but also in the writer’s reality.
With reference to the analyses on the power of language, one can perceive such power results in the murder on the “Woman.” The physical aggregation of every individual being and the crystallization of hegemonic discourse are following the reconstructing of language, led by the “Woman.” Here one might examine the connection between language and unconsciousness through a Lacanian lens. In the reformulation of Freud and Jung’s psychoanalysis, Lacan connects and extends Freud’s notion of unconsciousness and Jung's account of the collective unconsciousness into a stage of language, and hypothesizes that the unconsciousness is structured by language.\(^1\) Language constitutes the subject in an unconscious manner by complying with the language code, and finally creates a state of homogeneity – a collective unconsciousness. Such unconsciousness will absorb and repress the real self and leads to the loss of self. During the process of reconstructing language, each person begins to be assimilated and controlled by the collective interests; the communal and social discourse becomes further reinforced and even excludes a dissident “self:” the “Woman,”\(^12\) the one who has a name, who shows self-consciousness, and who stands aside in silence when all the other people are playing with words.

At this point, one can also recognize the whole game of “reaching the other shore” as a ritual, a type of power in which the individual is merely an instrument. The collective unconsciousness, which derives from either the fear of exclusion from language or the wish of being included into the collective entity, needs to achieve a unanimous state through this ritual. In the play, the collective chooses to join in violence. By rejecting and sacrificing the “Woman,” the collective hopes to banish potential dissidents and find itself within a certain implicit agreement and sanction.

However, the murder of the “Woman” doesn’t ensure the systematic manipulation of discourse, and the collective is somehow immersed in its panic and

\(^1\) The notion of “Language as the condition for the unconscious” is examined in Sarup’s “Lacan and Psychoanalysis.” Also see Sarup’s An Introductory Guide to Post-structuralism and Postmodernism.

\(^12\) In The Archaeology of Knowledge, Michel Foucault makes a hypothesis that language or discourse will get its life from authors and disciplines, and even the very nature of education. Once created, the discourse excludes those ideas which fall outside of its boundaries. Ideas that we now accept as true were not considered such until the discourse evolved to allow them in and ideas that were once favored as truth are now rejected as the discursive progression abandoned them.
chaos brought about by the murder. Therefore, in the next stage of the rope game the
crowd selects the “Man” as their new guide. They express that “We need a leader; a
flock of sheep also needs a leader. We’ll follow you” (Gao The Other Shore 14).
“Man,” who, like the “Woman,” has a name which symbolizes that his individual
attributes have not been literally effaced, stands up and tries to reunite the people and
take them out of the chaos of the murder.

After the “Man” becomes the new leader of the collective, he immediately
falls into a state of bewilderment and resorts to his personal memories. Unlike the
“Woman,” he is aware of being discarded by the collective because of his dissentient
voice, and he is aware of being deprived of individuality and subjugated by the
collective discourse. He alienates himself from the collective to regain his
individuality and to avoid being thrown out of the collective.

MAN. What you need is someone who can guide you, to show you the
way, even though once you’ve found a way out, or think you have,
you’d put on a spurt, darting away faster than rabbits. And you’d
abandon your guide without even taking a second look, just like
throwing away a worn-out shoe. (Gao The Other Shore 16)

However, after retreating into his own world, he also realizes those
self-reflective fantasies might not be his refuge. He meets his departed mother, who
embraces him from the world of the dead, but he leaves her by saying “I haven’t lived
long enough;” he sees the girl who always appears in his dream to torment him, and
her image remains illusory and ignores his passionate confession. Through the
transient encounter with the figures in his individual life, he only finds an incurable
and inexpressible feeling of isolation, which makes him scared. His final speech right
before the beginning of the second game is a combination of wrath, fear, and anxiety,
from which he expresses his irreconcilable and contradictory desires:

MAN. You’ve all experienced loving and being loved, possessing and
being possessed. I too, have a right to be in love, to love a woman and
to possess a woman, and to be loved and possessed by her. I’m human
just like you are, so full of desires and ambitions, I’m what you may
call a career-minded man, a man who is competitive yet extremely weak sometimes, and a man who is righteous, compassionate, willing to sacrifice himself and… (He rolls on the ground and wails loudly like a fretting and self-indulgent child.) (Gao The Other Shore 16)

The “Man” suffers within the ambiguous “intimacy:” wandering between being one part of the collective and keeping his individuality. This troubling image lasts until the end of the whole play; in the last bout, the “Man” leaves the stage with a “drooping, blind, and deaf heart;” he refuses to join the game.

In summary, my reading finds the following patterns in the text: 1) A certain discourse which constructs “truth” acquires legitimacy and dominates the collective through a binary system; 2) In the dilemma of reaching “truth,” an individual who is willing to maintain individuality and is gravitated towards legitimacy wants to lead all the others to salvation, to “truth;” 3) such an individual is either removed by the collective as an alien element out of the boundary of discourse or alienates himself into a self isolation.

By employing the pattern above, The Other Shore not only reveals that a discursive power that dominates the collective will exclude the individual dissident in order to approach the collective belief, but also illustrates the temptation of an individual to be involved into such power. Although the play presupposes the existence of absolute truth – the other shore, which is both the individual and collective belief, the truth is continually called into question through the formation of each game, from which one can see that the discursive power (rule) doesn’t report truth, but creates a different “truth,” in which only the discourse itself may be socially constructed and well consolidated. On the contrary, the collective is misled to an illusory shore and lost in chaos; the individual beings stay in the oscillation and wonder whether they will be “colonized” by collective value or “isolated” by retreating towards a self-contained world.

In his Towards A Modern Zen Theatre, Zhao Yiheng points out that when some critics accused The Other Shore of “promoting religion,” Gao responded that what he wanted to represent was “a way that people of the East perceive themselves, a
comprehension with which they try to find a *balance* between the self and the world” (Zhao 131). As a matter of fact, *The Other Shore* illustrates a puzzle and a state of awkwardness embedded not only in the entity of individual/collective, but also in any bipolar system where a truth/norm will categorize a dominating role and a dominated role as well as force everyone to make an either/or choice. “To find a balance,” one might say, points out an outlet away from absolute truth. This outlet exists in an alternative discourse that is based on transformational articulation and a region that is constituted by neither *One* (the collective) nor *the Other* (the individual). At this point, I would like to read *The Other Shore* by borrowing Homi Bhabha’s idea of “Third Space” from his *The Location of Culture*, a concept which is marked by hybridity and represents the acts of encountering cultural differences as well as framing the liminal. Through the concept of “Third Space,” I would argue that the play implies that it is necessary to move away from any “either/or option,” and introduces a notion of *thirdness* that breaks down the homogenous identification and problematizes the authenticity of truth as well.

II. The Writer Gao Xingjian and His State of In-betweenness

1) Ideology and Chineseness

My intention of using thirdness to describe the consciousness of the writer aims to point out the character of such consciousness: it steps off the bipolarity of “one” or “the other” and deals with the in-between categories; it also exploits a liminal space which is ascribed to the domains of ideological displacement and difference. Moreover, the thirdness comes out of a demand to interrogate the “truth” behind the dichotomy. I will firstly examine Gao’s acquired controversial position and the miscellaneous responses towards him after his winning of Nobel Prize, by which one might be able to move into the consideration about thirdness easily.

A Nobel complex has lodged in China, especially in the hearts of Chinese intellectuals, for many years.13 After this prize was finally awarded to Gao Xingjian

---

13 Before any Chinese obtaining the Nobel Prize of literature, among the Chinese writers, critics and scholars, the arguments about the relationship between Chinese literature and the Nobel Prize seem to have lasted for a long time: if Chinese literature should be adored by this prestigious prize, or if Chinese literature should abandon its “desperate pursuit of this prize.” Also see Julia Lovell’s “Nobel Prize and Chinese Intellectuals: Notes
by the Swedish Academy, however, there were all kinds of tremendous disputations brought forward to the prizewinner. Most of them centered around why Gao Xingjian, rather than any other Chinese writer, received the Nobel Prize. A more specific expression focused upon why the one who received the Nobel Prize was a “disputable” Chinese. Gao’s resignation from the Chinese Communist Party, his citizenship in France, and his dissident and diasporic identity, all might have discounted the fact that finally a Chinese was granted such honor. The unhappy reactions towards the award from China can be mainly categorized into three groups:

a) A Political Defiance

The Chinese Writers Association proclaimed that: “It seems that the Nobel Committee has its political criterion for giving the prize for literature, instead of doing so from the angle of literature. This shows the Nobel Prize for literature has virtually been used for political purposes and thus lost its authority” (People's Daily). Besides declaring resentment, the officials of China considered the award was nothing to speak of, because the 2000 Nobel announcement was seen as a political defiance from the Western world towards Communist China. The reproach was largely addressed towards the Swedish Academy, which, accordingly, didn’t serve a “respectable” purpose and abused its power to politicize the “purity” of literature; by taking the side of a dissident of China, the Western world was intervening into the politics of China.

b) An Unprofessional Miscarriage of Justice

Such an opinion reminded Chinese (intellectuals) that Gao Xingjian was not a well-known nor a top-ranking writer in China, but at the most a second or third-ranking author. Some critics attempted to illustrate the artistic distance between those first-ranking writers in China and Gao Xingjian on the basis of their (Chinese) literary accomplishments and in terms of the proficiency and impact on Chinese literary tradition. Thus, the conclusion was made that the Swedish Academy shouldn’t have given Gao Xingjian the award since there were certain other qualified Chinese writers in Mainland China who were better than him. Unfortunately, due to the
unsatisfactory translations of Chinese literary works or deficient attention towards a country of non-Western language, the Nobel Committee could neither genuinely perceive the essence of Chinese literary works nor know more about other excellent writers in China. At this point, Gao Xingjian’s language skill (French) and his location (France) might given him a stroke above other Chinese writers. Also, the whole event was seen as somehow frivolous because one or two committee members’ favor directed the prize. Accordingly, the justice and authority of the Nobel Prize was, at least in this particular case, considered to be disappointedly unprofessional and incompetent.  

14


c) A Purposeful Orientalism

The holders of this reflection brought forth the criticism of Orientalism into play and pointed out that Gao’s work was a kind of exoticisation: borrowing the Western gaze upon Chineseness.  

An image of the writer and his work through Western eyes is portrayed as the following: first of all, as an exiled writer who has lived in the Western world for a period of time, Gao is familiar with the Western literary approach, philosophy, and artistic taste. His commitment to aesthetic modernism and post-modernism, though lacking in “Chinese literary essence,” can be accepted and absorbed by Western readers expediently. On the other hand, Gao’s work is not only “not too similar to Western Literature,” but also has a sort of “Chineseness.” The context, such as the esoteric searching of Chinese minority ethnic groups in the Soul Mountain, the Zen wisdom and koans in Snow in August, and the

---

14 A symposium of Gao Xingjian’s prized work was held in Guang Zhou, in December, 20, 2000. During the discussion, Zhang Ning – a professional critic of Writers Association of Guang Dong province – said that “when the Nobel Prize came out, my reception went through a change process… I (firstly) felt excited because Chinese literature obtained this prize… then I thought ‘so the Nobel Prize was not a miracle anymore.’ We just had a discussion about why Chinese literature couldn’t have this prize. Because Chinese literature hasn’t reached a certain depth; it hasn’t reflected a kind of weightiness… Then, it turns out this is all about – Mark Six lottery – [finally someone] shall get the prize. This is my process (of reception).”

15 The website http://www.booker.com.cn, which is sponsored by People's Daily – the most authoritative newspaper in China, established a seminar on “how far is China away from the Nobel Prize.” An article titled “The Nobel Prize and China,” written by Cao Wei-Xia, points out that “Gao Xingjian’s literary concept is different from ours (Chinese). He uses the western thought in dealing with Chinese business. His [French] major and his literate influence mostly come from French culture. Therefore, for us, although he writes in Chinese, his thought, value and humanism differ from us, but conform to Goran Malmqvist’s (Swedish Academician, one of the Nobel committee members – author’s note). Even though it is not Gao Xingjian (who won the prize), it must be somebody else to win the prize by using Western literature to write Chinese stories.

16 Chinese literary essence is always regarded as some type of literature that aims to keep track of the historical trajectory of China, explore the geographical culture of China, carry the Chinese humanity, and follow the traditional presentation.
lamentation of the Cultural Revolution in One Man’s Bible, successfully and satisfactorily present a complex image of China and the Chinese people. Therefore, such an analysis came to a conclusion that Gao Xingjian’s portrayal of China is only out of the Western standpoint and is thereby virtually superficial, powerless, and fake. Since the writer has geographically and politically dissociated himself from his motherland, he is seen as barely having an authentic comprehension of his home, and his representation of Chinese culture and reality is less important. In short, from Gao Xingjian’s text, the Western readers only find a China they are interested in, rather than an authentic China.

Leaving aside the issue of not only Gao Xingjian’s literary discipline but also the politically-inflected aesthetic values of China and the West for the time being, I would argue that there is a certain kind of “absolute truth” behind the three voices above, regardless of their different questioning points and all the flaws within the arguments. The truth, or to be more specific, the ideology, which constructs binaries and empowers one from the divisions, is Chineseness.17

The reaction of “A Political Defiance” directs itself against a political prejudice from the Western supremacy towards China; thus the writer has already been excluded from the center of the argument. According to the argument, it is improper to relate literature to politics or, more precisely, to a political interference into China. Under the notion of Chineseness, the Western authority is always brought forth as an inimical and imperialistic force on the opposite side, due to the historical, economical, and political accounts. The antithetical concept of West/East operates so intensely that it even takes China and the Chinese people into a complex of self-abasement, self-conceit and narcissism. As the Nobel Prize is recognized as an international and western-oriented cultural honor and since it celebrates the culture represented by the winner, the position of China towards the prize is somehow trapped into a state of restlessness and paranoia: is China willing to say “no” to the

17 Chinese people consist of different ethnic groups such as Han, Hui, Miao etc. Chineseness, theoretically, is an inclusive cultural identity based on acculturation. However, as Rey Chow describes in her article “Introduction: on Chineseness as a Theoretical Problem,” the notion of Chineseness gradually develops into “a kind of cultural essentialism,” and “draws an imaginary boundary between China and the rest of the world.” As a matter of fact, Chineseness creates a kind of culturally imagined homogeneity.
West and refuse to join this global game; or is China willing to say “yes” to the game and try for the first prize, in order to conquer the rival (West) and glorify Chineseness? Such self-contradiction continues and is even intensified after the win of Gao Xingjian.

The second type of reaction, “An Unprofessional Miscarriage of Justice,” deals with a difficult question: who should be the “real” spokesman of Chinese literature as well as have the rights to obtain the Nobel Prize? The qualified Nobel awardees from China, to some extent, are expected to utterly represent the essence, magnitude, and specialness of Chinese literature. What's more, there are those who neither hold a dissenting voice towards China nor give up the identity as real Chinese. While examining the identity of Gao Xingjian, in accordance with the general definition of Chineseness, he is technically ascribed to Hua Ren (People of China), rather than Zhong Guo Ren (People in China). As Hua Ren literally includes the Chinese from all over the world, no matter if they are immigrants, half-bloods, or living overseas, such a notion in fact references the Chinese who live in Non-Mainland China. The ideology of Chineseness further reinforces the difference between Hua Ren and Zhong Guo Ren, not only by the rhetorical or geographical definition, but also by the concept of “pure blood.” That can explain why a qualified Chinese representative, not only on the stage of world literature but also on every other international stage, had better be the one who comes, geographically and ideologically, from the inside family. The “purity of Chineseness” is designated as the prerequisite in such selection.

Similar to the first two arguments, “A Purposeful Orientalism,” which also derives from the categorization of Chineseness, is a protest against the Western gaze. While such a standpoint criticizes a type of function that uses Eastern elements in exchange for a Western appreciation, it also proposes that Chinese should revise ways of expressing ourselves in order to show an authentic image of China, instead of being distortedly understood by Others. Superficially, such an argument aims to renounce the partial and transcendental gaze from the West upon China, to resist oppression and colonization by outside forces, and to break up the fixed relationship between the
subject and the object. Nevertheless, the ideology establishes an antithetical presupposition of Seeing/Seen in the first place, and it develops into the concepts of “who is seeing us (China)” and “how do they see us (China),” finally ending with “how should I (China) be seen.” The self-examination and self-improvement, as well as the invitation to the West of knowing the authenticity of China, unconsciously underlay both a presumption that “we are seen” and a kind of chauvinism that our real Chineseness should be recognized. These two claims not only seduce none other than a new turn of the Seen that thereby doubles the position of China into “Other,” but also put cultural authenticity into an essentialist cultural position in which the fixed practices become iconized as authentically indigenous while others are excluded as contaminated. Accordingly, the opposition of two discursive powers (West/East) is increased and systemic representation (Seeing/Seen) is consolidated. It also bloats the essentialism, although this is a strategic political position in the struggle against Western supremacy. As a result, the Seen will be seen explicitly and purposefully; the Seer will gain a more stable position.

In a manner of speaking, the mutuality of those responses, which grounds on the concept of “Chineseness,” indicates that what is behind the disputations about the Nobel Prize is mainly our (Chinese) concern about acquiring ethnocentrism, discursive supremacy, and winning from the political confrontation. Under such ideology, an individual is needed to stand out and to represent the collective value and power, but his/her identity is also needed to be censored. If his/her identity stays out of the boundaries of the ideology, this individual being should be cancelled from the collective entity.

When looking back on The Other Shore at this point, one can find that the similarities between the text and the reality of the writer are explicit. By creating several games in different levels and with different aims, the text reveals a circumstance in which an individual being is always entangled by the invitation and compulsion from the collective consciousnesses, and the collective is occupied in the chaos of either choosing a leader or dismissing a dissident. Taking a look at the “Man,” one can find that during the whole process of confronting the collective he
steps forward bravely to waken up the collective consciousness, then withdraws himself due to the fear of being eliminated as an alien element, like the “Woman,” and then struggles within his own world because of his loss of a legitimate position in the collective. Vice-versa, the collective is tapped in its agony.

In summary, the introducing of Chineseness aims to identify a homogeneous and categorical ideology behind a binary system from which one can further examine the motif of the text: to challenge such ideology and create a type of consciousness of thirdness.

2) Thirdness

To remove himself from that homogeneous and categorical ideology, Gao Xingjian chooses a state of being exiled. In 1987 after The Other Shore was banned, Gao was allowed to go to Germany on a fellowship, as a painter. He then decided to settle in Paris and continued to write in both Chinese and French. Gao’s self-exile geographically distances himself from Mainland China, but at the same time it also offers him room and allows him to express his experiences in China, his view on China. His exploration of a liminal space, from my point of view, comes out of a type of consciousness of thirdness.

Thirdness is, first of all, a type of diasporic consciousness, an ideological and strategic disaggregation. Thanks to postcolonial studies and related scholarship, the term “diaspora” has been expanded and supplemented, rather than confined by its historical formation. Diaspora, from a Greek meaning of “to disperse,” does not simply point to the dispersed group(s) marked by physical displacement, or the movement of such group. The renewed meaning refers to the people who act on their initiative to move away from the essentialist’s oppression, to utilize the creolized practices, and to interrogate a unified cultural normativity.

Although locations are still important sites of cultural production, the diasporic consciousness doesn’t necessarily depend on physical removal. Such consciousness is a demand of individual articulation with no interference by the dominant ideology, rather than a physical departure from originality. As Edward Said emphasizes in his Representations of the Intellectual, exile can be both “actual” and
“metaphoric,” “voluntary or “involuntary.”\textsuperscript{18} Compared to the notion of exile, diasporic consciousness can be and should be metaphoric and voluntary, which actuates a cultural or ideological displacement. My emphasis upon the non-physical nature of diasporic consciousness aims to reveal its subversion can be linguistic destruction, epistemological intervention, and disidentificatory practice, all of which can hinder the privileged representation which are based on symbol-forming and subject-constitution

Secondly, thirdness is a conscious identity construction; it advocates the operation of de-centralization and de-bipolarity. It is necessary to distinguish “diaspora” and “exile” at this point. In the notes of Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s article “Spaces of Dispersal,” the difference of two terms is investigated as follows:

Diaspora and exile are intertwined in the terms galut (Hebrew) and goles (Yiddish), though the Encyclopedia Judaica, taken as a normative (Zionist) text (it was published in Israel in 1972), sharply distinguishes diaspora and exile: it refers diaspora to voluntary dispersion and exile to forced dispersion, which by definition ends with the formation of the State of Israel – once there is a homeland, those who remain outside it do so voluntarily. Conversely, only the loss of a political-ethnic center and the feeling of uprootedness turns Diaspora (Dispersion) into galut (Exile). (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 320)\textsuperscript{19}

This differentiation points out the notion of “center” and a binary relationship of the centered/marginalized. For instance, the context of exile – uprootedness – is still entangled by “root” which might include an intimacy towards the ex-center or the profit coming from a new center. Such a type of exile, whether it is a physical movement, a spiritual alienation, or an ideological dissidence, is inevitably trampled by hegemony in a later stage.

\textsuperscript{18} Exile, according to Said in his \textit{Representations of the Intellectual}, is fundamentally tied to the notion of the intellectual. The connection with post-colonialism is not easily discernible in this case because exile becomes a larger political gesture to separate intellectuals form those who “toe the line” and those who remain critically resistant to the authorities.

\textsuperscript{19} Kirshenblatt-Gimblett’s article “Spaces of Dispersal” in \textit{Migration, Diasporas, and Transnationalism} suggests that diasporic discourse in this context is strong on displacement, detachment, uprooting, and dispersion—on disarticulation.
In this sense, thirdness can act a crucial part in terms of its rejections to the lure of “going back the center” or “choosing another center instead.” To reach such a goal, the method, according to Bhabha, is to “constitute(s) the discursive conditions of enunciation that ensure that the meaning and symbols of culture have no primordial unity or fixity; that even the same signs can be appropriated, translated, rehistoricized and read anew (Bhabha 37).” In other words, the operation of thirdness is based on hybridizing the homogenous and normalized cultural enunciation as well as intervening the formation of any integrated and dualistic category. Such transgression and subversion will prevent an individual from being a “colonized” subaltern who thinks and speaks for others, and allow him/her to “elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (Bhabha 39).

Foucault claims that: “power and knowledge directly imply one another; that there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations” (Foucault Discipline and Punish, 27). According to Foucault’s argument, power is derived through discourse, and will be promoted by discourse. When power operates in a symbolic discourse, either the dominant discourse or the anti-dominant discourse will eventually regulate the individual into a political agent on the basis of the identity categories that have been already existed. In other words, the oppressive role will gain more power through the formation and repetition of a certain discourse.

The consciousness of thirdness has a strategic tendency to break up any pre-constituted binary notion and to create a problematic identification to interfere in identity categorization and to escape the power system operation. In other words, thirdness is not a counter-discourse, but a state of creative recycling and strategic dispersion that transcends territory, culture, language, and identity. In the spirit of thirdness, the cultural attendant, The Other Shore for instance, renews and reproduces itself through the transformation and diversification on language, subject, structure, etc., by which it undermines the fixed discursive power and creates an alternative presentation.

III. Operation of Thirdness

32
In his *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Foucault argues that *truth* is a social construction of discourse and determined by the system of language. As a restrictive program of knowledge and a system of control, discourse can shape the way of our thinking, fix our (cultural, ethnic, gender) identities, and exercise the power of exclusion (Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 215-237). He also establishes an understanding on discursive formation:

Whenever one can describe, between a number of statements, such a system of dispersion, whenever, between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations), we will say, for the sake of convenience, that we are dealing with a *discursive formation*.

(Foucault *The Archaeology of Knowledge* 38)

In *The Other Shore*, to reduce the discursive force of binary division and untimely resist the truth created by the discourse, the operation of thirdness intervenes and disempowers the discursive formation. My reading of *The Other Shore* focuses on the theatrical presentations in the play such as “multiple performing identities” and “intervention of Zen.” From my point of view, these presentations interfere in some required conditions under which the dominant discourse can be formed and employed. For instance, *ritual* is a condition of discursive formation, which will define the qualifications and roles of who is the speaker and whom is s/he speaking to. Upon utilizing multiple performing identities, roles are exchangeable; the whole formalization is based on supposition and thus becomes suspicious. A discursive object, something that can be spoken through language, is another condition of discursive formation. By the intervention of Zen, discursive objects become scattered, indefinite, and even inexpressible. A steadfast relationship between observers and objects is thereof blurred and even broken, by thirdness. Therefore, my intention of this part is to investigate how thirdness functions in *The Other Shore* and how thirdness unsettles the discourse that dominates a binary representation.

1) **Multiple Performing Identities**

The readers and spectators can easily recognize the employment of the
multiple performing identities in Gao Xingjian’s plays. The line between the actor as a performer and as a dramatic persona always remains indefinite. He also constantly uses his stage directions, as particular explanations on his intention and understanding of identity construction, which generally establish a state of uncertainty. Gao Xingjian calls his continual transformation of theatrical identities a performing “tripartition” (Fong 149): the actor acts himself; the actor acts the character; and a neutral actor who moves into or moves out of his character, through which a play will be presented in different layers.

In the tripartition, the third status merits more consideration, within which the actor is clearly aware of his state of in-betweenness: s/he reveals that s/he possesses self-consciousness, yet s/he is still engaged with his/her character. S/he is virtually in-between performative and expressive. At this point, Gao Xingjian borrows a process, liang xiang, (亮相, which literally means revealing)\(^\text{20}\) – from Chinese traditional theatre. The aim of revealing is to create a liminal situation of the psychological exchange within the Self. It also establishes the alienation between the stage and the audience, by which the audience is encouraged to disbelieve and reevaluate the multiple/hybrid performing identities on stage and the ideology behind those identities.

From the very beginning of *The Other Shore*, the character “Actor playing with ropes” announces the given situation – the game:

**ACTOR PLAYING WITH ROPES.** Here’s a rope. Let’s play a game, but we’ve got to be serious, as if we’re children playing their game. Our play starts with a game […] Before that you were you and I was I, but with this rope between us we’re tied to each other and it becomes you and I. (Gao *The Other Shore* 3)

Since the characters’ names such as “Actor playing with ropes” and “Actors” run through the whole game, the performing identities thus become inconsistent and

\(\text{20} \text{亮相(Liang Xiang) is one important step of performing Chinese traditional theatre. The major characters are required to present a short sculptural stillness as soon as they enter or exit the stage. Liang Xiang aims to reveal the internal spirit as well as the external appearance of the character to audience.} \)
indeterminable. As a result, the “people” in the play, created as the “Diaspora,” have their hybrid identities and stay in dissociation.

Furthermore, The Other Shore is an ensemble work. Except for the “Man” who is a stable character portrayed by a single actor, other characters can be doubled by actors. During the process of performing each game, the actor who plays “Actor playing with ropes” can, technically, become the next “victimized individual.” Then he can exempt himself from that role again, and become one part of the collective in the next game. The identity transformation and recycling is also witnessed by the audience: as the stage direction suggests, the actors may be positioned among the audience or the audience among the actors. As a result, both performers and audience are made aware of the artifice of performativity and hypotheticality.

At this point, one might connect that how identity transformation would affect discursive formation. What Foucault argues is that:

[T]he most superficial and obvious of these restrictive systems is constituted by what we collectively refer to as ritual; ritual defines the qualifications required of the speaker (of who in dialogue, interrogation or recitation, should occupy which position and formulate which type of utterance); it lays down gestures to be made, behavior, circumstances and the whole range of signs that must accompany discourse; finally, it lays down the supposed, or imposed significance of the words use, their effect upon those to who they are addressed, the limitations of their constraining validity. Religious discourse, juridical and therapeutic as well as, in some ways, political discourse are all barely dissociable from the functioning of a ritual that determines the individual properties and agreed roles of the speakers. (Foucault The Archaeology of Knowledge 225)

As I suggested before, The Other Shore can be regarded as a type of ritual. Ritual restricts roles and is restricted by roles. The most important part in the presentation of ritual is neither what is to be said, nor how it is to be said, but who can and who will say it. A clear binary opposition will be established and confirmed by the exclusive definition of roles in ritual: speaker/addressee. The transformation and
recycling of multiple identities in The Other Shore problematizes the above definition and weakens the function of ritual. The speaker is disempowered because he will, in some ways, be transformed into a person who is spoken to. Therefore, the operation of thirdness hybridizes the identities of speaker(s) and addressee(s), and again, interferes in the discursive formation.

2) **Intervention of Zen**

Zen, as a form of Buddhism that developed as the result of Chinese and Japanese influences, is not so much a pure religion as an approach of looking at and experiencing the world. Zen Buddhism basically takes little account of express communication as a way of shaping knowledge or insight; instead, it relies upon the indirect effect of riddles, paradoxical statements, and questions (*koans*) that precisely cannot be answered. Through Jacques Derrida’s thinking about deconstruction, Zen Buddhism is recognized as a critical deconstruction of the transcendental signified; moreover, Zen is always revealed as an irreducible play upon the aggregations of intransitive and paradoxical signifiers. Each way of portraying Zen Buddhism is discrete and incommensurable so that one will be enlightened, as T. P. Kasulis comments, “when one lets go of pre-conceived notions of the self” (Kasulis 122).

To a certain degree, theatre, as a ritual as well as a social practice, will establish some level of acquiescence and acceptance based on a collective consciousness. Intervention of Zen aims to firstly engage a communal interactivity, and then consciously shift the receptive subjectivity in-between communality in ritualization and experience of individuality. The adoption of Zen Buddhism in The Other Shore suggests an alternative interpretation of the relationship between the individual and the collective. The essence of Zen in this play, as well as in others of Gao Xingjian, creates a mixture of subject/object and a process of de-centering/multi-centering. Meanwhile, the intervention of Zen introduces a succession of hybridities in ideology, in language, in rhythm, and in subject matter. Zhao Yiheng offers a perspective to view Gao’s The Other Shore and other works: The Other Shore points (though not yet clearly) to a totally new drama aesthetic of what I shall call Modern Zen theatre. Nevertheless, I think even Gao himself did not
seem to comprehend fully the significance for this new play (Zhao 133).

Here I will borrow “différance” – one of Jacques Derrida’s key terms from his Writing and Difference – as an approach to understand the idea of “Modern Zen theatre” and explain the intervention of Zen in The Other Shore. The meanings of difference are multiple, but “we may note briefly that the word combines in neither the active nor the passive voice the coincidence of meanings in the verb différer: to differ (in space) and to defer (to put off in time, to postpone presence)” (Derrida xvi). According to Derrida, différance is a type of movement through which any language or code or system of reference is constituted as a weave or text of differences. Therefore, nothing is unattached and every word and concept is part of a chain or system, playing in the middle.

The intervention of Zen can be recognized as another presentation of différance”. Zen complicates the signifier-signified connection and implies that anything that is supposedly present actually cannot be presented directly or immediately. In the state of Zen, the signified object is tied in a chain or system and it also can function as a signifier. Therefore something that has been said (object) may not adequately reflect the subject; something that is going to be said by the subject may not be eventually said. As a result, the discursive objects are unable to be confirmed, and so is the discursive formation.

Let us have a look at the text. After the second game of playing cards, the “Man” unconsciously returns to his self-contained world and is entangled by his memory of adolescence. At this moment, a Zen Master enters the stage with his inexpressible messages:

ZEN MASTER. […] after these words the Lord said to the Venerable Subhuti: ‘Well said, well said, Subhuti! So it is, Subhuti, so it is as you say! The Tathagata has helped the Bodhisattvas, the great beings with the greatest help and he has favored them with the highest favor. There, subhuti, listen well, and attentively!...’ (Gao The Other Shore 24)

The Zen Master dislocates himself from the theatrical happening on stage. The repetitive chanting of Zen has no actual connection with the encounter between the
“Man” and his world of *self*, but interferes with all the rhythms, images, emotion, and especially the language patterns in which language progresses into pre-language.21 The intervention of Zen introduces a retrospective commentary and an isolated meditation, by which a complex of what is to be said (object) is created. Also, this intervention brings forth a conceptual closure by constructing a state of alienation through the time intervals and spatial dislocation, which defers the reception of the audience. In short, the differentiation and fuzziness of the signifiers and signified of Zen subverts the grounds of the ideology and hybridizes the elements that constitute the ideology.

Here is another example. The last effort of joining a collective and acquiring a legitimated position of the “Man” is when he attempts to mold a female mannequin after he discovers some scattered pieces. With all his passion and energy the “Man” carefully tries to figure out her leaning position, facial expressions, and physical movement. After his first composition of a human figure, he feels excited and wants to do more. He pulls out more male and female mannequins and arranges them. However, the mannequins gradually find themselves in a kind of collective pattern and the “Man” starts to find “himself hemmed in by the pattern and becomes one of its composite parts, and he crawls busily back and forth in between the mannequins” (Gao *The Other Shore* 37). Then, he is entangled in a process of jumping, moving, and rolling. As he is totally drawn in among them, he gradually becomes weaker, and it becomes difficult for him to get out. After a long while he finally manages to crawl out like a worm, utterly exhausted. At this moment, the “Shadow” (who is also the “Man”) comes up to him, describes the psychological movement to him, and finally affects him:

SHADOW. (*Narrates in a serene voice.*) Then winter came along. It was snowing hard that day, and you walked barefoot on the ice to experience the none-chilling cold. […] You walked into the dark and shady forest. The trees, every one of them, had already shed their

---

21 In his *Towards A Modern Zen Theatre*, Zhao interprets his understanding on Gao’s employment of language and mentions pre-linguistic communication in another play of Gao: *Dialogue and Rebuttal*.
leaves, stretching out their shaven branched like naked women.
Somberly they stood in the snow, lonely and speechless. You could not
help wanting to tell the about your sorrows and torments. […] Your
only wish is to go walking among the tress in the forest until you are
totally exhausted. Then you will collapse somewhere, hoping never to
be found. (Finally Man leans against a tree to take a breath. Shadow
comes closer and closer; observing him.) (Gao The Other Shore 38-39)

In Terry Siu-Han Yip and Kwok-Kan Tam’s article “Gender and Self in Gao
Xingjian’s Three Post-Exile Plays,” a notion of “self-transcendent contemplation (抽
身静观)” which comes out of Zen, is mentioned: “Gao shows a prelinguistic state in
which the self is presented in a state of primordial non-distinction. […] In such a state,
the self is at the same time ‘subject-in-object’ and also ‘object-in-subject’” (Yip and
Tam 218). Obviously, the self-reflexivity and cross-subjectivity communication
confounds the relationship of object and subject. The subject is displaced by being
objectified so that it may transcend itself and become a cognitive subject. It also
produces an undeterminable and problematic object, and again, obstructs the
formation of any certain discourse based on the bipolar interactions of subject/object.

IV. Conclusion

What is the other shore and where is it? In the characters’ minds, the Other
Shore is an ideal land, an imagined community (Anderson 414), where any of them
recognizes himself/herself as one member of the community and presumes that other
members are in the same horizontal comradeship. They have, then, a similar goal and
pursue same truth. Working as a mechanism of normalization and establishing codes
of legitimacy, the imagined community regulates individuals and produces truth that
ensure hegemony, social hierarchy, and domination.

In Encounters with Nationalism, Ernest Gellner points out that “nationalism is
not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do
not exist” (Gellner 169). Here, I will transform the notion of “nationalism” to a notion
of truth, of the collective ideology. The illusion of the other shore, as well as the
collective wish of reaching the other shore, not only masquerades a potential
heterogeneity, but also assimilates and finally diminishes the individual.

The operation of thirdness then reveals the constructive nature the imagined other shore, indicates a new direction to interrogate truth and any binary division, and provides an alternative interpretation on the other shore: a nonexistent or transforming land where it is full of possibilities without dictating which kinds of possibilities ought to be fulfilled. Any compulsory value finally becomes problematic, unrepresentable, and meaningless.

In his “concept of creativity,” Gao Xingjian reaffirms that his basic stance in without-ism:

To be “without isms” is more positive than nihilism, it adopts an attitude towards event, people and the self. This attitude does not acknowledge the existence of incontrovertible general truths. It may be regarded as a form of reasoning…which at least does not acknowledge blind superstitious belief, whether for a religion or for a brute force. (Lee, 253)

Between a substantial being and a sheer nihilist, Gao Xingjian attempts to problematize self/other, east/west, modern/tradition and all those binary systems, and is attempting to reach the Other Shore, a space of thirdness.
Chapter III

Six Ways of Running, A Play in Six Scenes

Characters:
RUN
MR. EVERYTHING
WIFE (MRS. EVERYTHING)
SON (LITTLE EVERYTHING)
A
B
C
D
AUCTIONEER
SISTER1
SISTER2
CONDUCTOR
TRAIN SPEAKER
WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR
HUSBAND
HOUSEMISTRESS
MALE SERVANT
Prelude

(As usual, this play needs a female character whose name is RUN and a male character whose name is MR. EVERYTHING. There are other people who will play different roles in different scenes and will change their roles according to the requirements.

One day in 2003. In a gym.
On the treadmills, men and women are complacently striding, crazily bumping up their mileages, or sneakily planning on their food rewards right after this workout. During the running, they are counting their calories, weights, heartbeats, hormones, ages, salaries, loans, the numbers of their friends, and the numbers of their enemies. Their personal histories are flashing upon their minds while their movements are torturing their entire bodies. You hardly can tell if people become smarter or dumber when they are running.)

April, 2005…the building will be completed…the interior decoration will last two months, and I will move into my new apartment after that spring festival. Never live with my parents again.
B
Never live with her again. No matter how she will howl this time. She is the fourth one. Great shape, looking – I give her a seven. She likes telling lies more than I do.

RUN
350 calories burnt. Congratulations! I’m almost into my anaerobic respiration.

C
War…benefits…oil…gasoline…gasoline direct injection… I ought to change my Jetta 1998 into 2004 model. I ought to do lots of things…head hurts…gasoline direct injection…gasoline…oil…benefits…war…

MR. EVERYTHING
Not to smoke…not to always smoke…not to always smoke in public… not to always smoke in public where there are women around…not to always smoke in public where there are women around…over half a pack… per half-day…

D
Run! Run! People you do have to run! Damn… mortified… everything has been set up… has everyone paid the taxes these years? How and why have I been caught? From 2000 till now…Heaven… how much is that…

A
From 2000 till now, I still live with my parents. Can you believe that?...

B
From 2000 till now, I had 4 girlfriends, 2 jobs, no prize, 1000 life’s mistakes…

RUN
From 2000 till now, from internship to a premier clerk. The law is there to protect the people; I’m one of the people.

C

From 2000…

(smiling)

2000,

(confusedly)


MR. EVERYTHING

2000, my son is five feet, fourth grade. It seemed he didn’t entirely belong to me anymore.

D

From 2000…how much is that…

(speeding)

A

My parents … got married in 1970 …after one year and a half…I was born…we lived together in a small efficiency… with my grandma… she died in 1990…we moved to a two bed-room apartment in 1995…my parents celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2000…five years… five years… five years…

(slowing down)

How many “five years” do I have?

B

Time is running out. You must do the things you have to do.
(speeding)
I would say… anything needs to be moderate. Have a research first.

RUN
Too late. I was busy running and forgot to do any research.

D
“Extra” is the best… extra money, extra food, extra time… except for extra love, and extra tax… You got to be smart.

MR. EVERYTHING
I thought so … well… too late… Abnormal stuff always grows fast than the rest… you know… like a ten-year-old boy…

A
(speeeding)
Owning a house is the crucial thing in your life … Starting a family is the crucial thing in your life, whether in 2003 or 3003.

B
Agree! Scrutinize your family partner first!

C
Agree! Try to be a rich, well-educated, high-class, peace-loving philogynist. Start a family!

D
Agree! What do you think I became a tax dodger… only for myself?

(stops suddenly)
A

Jeez! Finally someone stops.

(slowing down)

December, 11th, 2002. I signed the contract. I bought myself an apartment … I sold myself to an apartment. Someday, in you life, you have to sell yourself to something.

(stops)

B

Telling lies is not appropriate. Not telling lies is not appropriate either. What people said is not necessarily true. Don’t believe it. But you have to listen carefully. December, 11th, 2002, people said your girlfriend did an abortion. You never know.

(stops)

C

December, 11th, 2002, the war jacked up the gas price, brought down the car price. I regretted that I got a 98 used Jetta in 2000.

(stops)

RUN

December, 11th, 2002. When I met you, I never thought things wouldn’t get worked out. You’ve got married…we don’t need a family. I thought we would be easygoing.

(stops)

D

December, 11th, 2002… Things have already slipped away from me.

(stops)

MR. EVERYTHING

Easygoing means freedom; freedom is human rights; human rights belong to politics. Things are never going to be easy. Things got tougher after December, 11th, 2002.
(stops)

RUN

(pause)
My stuff is always tough.

MR. EVERYTHING
The people’s stuff is much easier.

(Lights fade.)
Scene I

Repetition Running – Bothering Yourself

(The stage actually has two locations: a bedroom of a confiscated house; a flat of MR. EVERYTHING. The space and all the props can be shared. In the luxurious bedroom, there is a huge and classic bed. RUN looks around and carefully sits on the bed.)

RUN

The owner of this bed – Mr. Lee Young – is in jail now.

(gesturing)

His present bed is only about this wide. He embezzled one billion RMB from the government… to this bedroom, maybe to this bed. His bed is going to be auctioned. Why would somebody want to buy himself a bed by using other people’s money? And why would somebody want to buy himself a bed which was used to be bought with other people’s money? Isn’t bed a super private stuff?

(pause)

I’m having my internship in a local court. As a clerk, my job is to check off and keep a register of confiscated stuff. For example, I am counting illicit money spent on those sumptuously decorated and furnished bedrooms… all sorts of things. And, as you knew already, I love running. Being an addicted runner, I know very well what the fascinating features of this exercise are. I’ve tried various ways of running in my whole life to make my simple tiny self faster, healthier, and much more special … hopefully. In this play, I’d like to share my running experience with you. And, as you knew, there will be a male citizen in this play.

(MR. EVERYTHING comes over to RUN.)
He lies on the other side of the bed, quietly.)

RUN
We met each other on the treadmill when both of us couldn’t help doing some sneaky and energetic competitions between us. He is a college teacher, a reasonable running partner, and an unreasonable lover. Well, he’s been married for 13 years and has one 12-year-old boy and one wife.

(A boy, the son of MR. EVERYTHING, comes up and takes a huge bag.)

BOY
All yours. Mom said.

MR. EVERYTHING
And you?

BOY
Me? I’m Mom’s.

(The boy exits.)

MR. EVERYTHING
(to RUN)
And you?

RUN
(changing the topic)
Sometimes, I can give myself some strong and clever reasons for keeping this. When we get together, both of us are kind of inspired by the most awkward and luminous
sparks. We have different lives: he lights up and I find my home. Why not give it a try?

MR. EVERYTHING

Marry me?

RUN

Well, marriage is not something talked about on the bed of somebody else.

MR. EVERYTHING

Give me an answer, then.

RUN

(distracting)

Bed – check.

(jumps off the bed)

Dragon canopy bed, detailed carvings, purple sandalwood.

(While she is leaving the bed, MR. EVERYTHING’s wife – MRS. EVERYTHING – comes up.)

WIFE

I gave you the answer thirteen years ago

RUN

It’s the morning when I’m counting a corrupt bedroom of a former official and Mr. Everything and his wife try to complete some details of their divorce. Be careful, I’m absent or physically inexistent to his wife. It would be so cool for us – she and I – to share the different spot and time, for ever. Literally, I’m not the legal member in their
family…ever.

WIFE
(to her husband)
Nobody knows what you are doing. Even I have no idea. If I don’t, do you think anybody else would understand you?

MR. EVERYTHING
Good question.

RUN
Run! Run before the disaster falls; run after the happiness comes back. Running requires skill...How about this...let’s talk about repetition running. The aim of repetition running is to increases the runner's ability to go into oxygen debt, in another word, anaerobic effect.

(As she talks, MR. EVERYTHING gets off the bed and acts like RUN’s assistant, doing whatever she describes.)

RUN
First, you run fast over distances, take a complete rest other than jogging, then even you’re not ready, you have to take the next lap... Due to the increase in distance run and the speed, the runner will be running at a high pulse rate and going to hell, in another word, anaerobic effect.

(MR. EVERYTHING runs towards RUN.)

MR. EVERYTHING
I heard that you are checking off Lee Young’s stuff.
RUN

Right. Guess what I am checking?

MR. EVERYTHING and RUN
(at the same time)
Bedroom!

RUN

Correct! Every time, bedroom!

MR. EVERYTHING

Guess what I’m going to do?

MR. EVERYTHING and RUN
(at the same time)
Paper!

MR. EVERYTHING and RUN

Yep!
(MR. EVERYTHING tries to give her the paper.)

Here you go!
(They laugh and yell like kids, and then keep an awkward silence.)

RUN

At the present time, my Everything is more like a second or third secretary in charge of those trifles during the transition when an old party is being dismissed and a new
one is being built up. Right now, he is in a state of transition. Mortgage, medical, savings, inheritances, and even secrets...He is simply making a round trip between two spaces.

MR. EVERYTHING

Sooner or later, he is going to be sentenced to death...

(He tries to give her the paper again.)

... and according to my assumption, no reprieve will be granted.

RUN

Why?

MR. EVERYTHING

(pointing to the paper)
Sign here. People like him should be executed more than three times. There’s got to be some way to release people’s wrath.

RUN

Hey, people’s wrath has nothing to do with law stuff.

(looking at the paper)
What’s this?

MR. EVERYTHING

This is some law stuff too. Agreement of our marriage.

RUN

Come on. You are divorcing.

MR. EVERYTHING

It’s just an agreement. We’re not getting married right now. Maybe after half a year?
RUN

Why is that?

MR. EVERYTHING

It’s like a preferred account. You don’t have to pay interest until 2005.

(pause)

Ok…this divorce – is not for you. It’s for us!

RUN

Fine. Not now.

MR. EVERYTHING

Not now… until…

RUN

Until…Until…

(aside)

Never expected this divorce. Normally I’m scared by such big and serious terms, such as … us. Anyway, he needs a family; he just needs a family. Even if he gave up one just 10 minutes ago, he always needs another.

(to MR. EVERYTHING)

Until…um…what’s the point in our getting married? Any good reason? It’s like corruption… taking something that doesn’t belong to you.

MR. EVERYTHING

Why is that so evil?

RUN

Why isn’t that so evil?
WIFE
(to MR. EVERYTHING)
This is the paper you need. What you need is such a paper, right?

(MR. EVERYTHING has to run back to his wife.)

WIFE
Shh…! Listen to me, just be quite. I can give you whatever you need because I’m your wife, and that is what a wife will do. I don’t know if she would do the same thing for you after you get together…I don’t know if our son would do the same thing as you did after you get together…

(pause)
Well, I’m here to get some legal stuff done. Such as, our auction…

(At this point, an auction is being held in another location.)

AUCTIONEER
Welcome everybody! We are auctioning 23 pieces of true wooden furniture, in the bedroom, which were bought with the corrupt money, by the corrupt criminal – a former government official Lee Young,

WIFE
I plan to sell our common properties. They’ve lost their meanings without you.

AUCTIONEER
The meaning of this auction is significant. We are ready to use the outcome of the auction to set up a solid foundation of government renewal plan, an anti-corruption in
2003.

WIFE

Our cabinet, toilet table, side table…

AUCTIONEER

The first item is a cabinet. It has one of the most ingenious and balanced designs in Ming furniture. The four refined main stiles are recessed from the top corners and slope gently outward in a subtle, almost imperceptible splay, made by yellow flower pear wood. We’ll start the bidding at 25000 RMB. 25000, 26000, 27000, 28000, 29000, 29000… we have a bid of 29000… anyone else? 29000…

WIFE

And our bed…

MR. EVERYTHING

(MR. EVERYTHING runs towards RUN again.)

She is selling our furniture.

AUCTIONEER

Going once, going twice, sold to this lady with the card number 51. 29000 RMB. Congratulations! Our next item it a small side table…

MR. EVERYTHING

I need a family… and I need my bed!

WIFE

I’ve signed my part. Sign here, then we can be apart, legally.
RUN
I’ve never signed any…why can’t we just simply be together?

MR. EVERYTHING
Legally, I’d like to simply be with somebody, legally.

AUCTIONEER
Red, black and gold painted side table. Scenes are depicted on the back design, made by pine wood. Before we begin, we’d like to say that we greatly appreciate the support of capital court in Eastern district…and we’ll start the bidding at 7000 RMB.

WIFE
(She shows him the divorce agreement.)
Please…

MR. EVERYTHING
(running back to his wife)
I don’t know what to say… but… please wait a little bit…
(running back to RUN)
You got to promise you will sign the paper. If you won’t, I don’t think I have the courage to sign that one first, and I’m still going to move back and forth like a donkey.

RUN
(aside)
It’s such a stupid thing that you can’t offer any promise and it’s such a pity that if you take the first run, you have to take the next one: that’s the rule, and the goal is the paper.

AUCTIONEER
Done! The side table is sold to this gentleman with a card number 25. Pine wood side table, 12000RMB, congratulations!

MR. EVERYTHING

(running back)
I can’t do anything. I got a messy mind.

WIFE

(She suddenly wraps her arms around him from his back, tightly holds his hand, and moves a pen to the paper.)
It’s your turn.

MR. EVERYTHING

I have to think about it.
(embracing her)
Let me think about it.

WIFE

(embracing him)
Don’t.

AUCTIONEER

The next item is dragon canopy bed. This piece of work is truly antique from Ming Dynasty. It’s ornate in design with glamorous openwork dragon-carved panels. The carvings on this canopied bed are extremely detailed, made by the noblest wood, purple sandalwood…

RUN

That morning, Mr. Everything and his wife try to be sweet to each other so they can
run the divorce proceeding as smoothly as they can. Every movement contributes to their memorable and immortal breaking-up…They separate, without signing any paperwork. Paper is magic, a guarantee that leads you to Eden again and again. At least, you need one.

Auctioneer
We’ll start the bidding at 215000 RMB.

Mr. Everything
(Mr. Everything walks towards Run; his wife follows him.)
You silly, nobody is ever alone. You have to be with somebody.

Auctioneer
Offer your bid please.

(Mr. Everything holds and puts up Run’s hand to bid.)

Run
(embarrassedly, whispering)
Jeez! It’s too expensive.

Auctioneer
Good! Please read after me. I, Everything, promise to stand beside you –

Mr. Everything
I, Everything, promise to stand beside you –
…beside a family, beside a two-bedroom apartment with 1000 square feet…

B

…beside your truth and your lies…

C

…beside your body, your heart and your soul…

D

…beside you, your family, your family’s family… your family’s …

MR. EVERYTHING

…only stand beside you! In Happiness…

WIFE

In Happiness…

RUN

In Happiness and?…

MR. EVERYTHING

Misfortune…

WIFE

Misfortune…

RUN

Misfortune, and happiness, and misfortune, and happiness, and?…

MR. EVERYTHING
And in health and sickness…

WIFE

In health and sickness…

RUN

In health and sickness till death…

MR. EVERYTHING

Till death do us part.

WIFE

Till death do us part.

RUN

Do us part … Do us part? …Can I ever quit?

(Lights fade.)
Scene II

Marathon – Run with Others; Run without End…

(RUN is standing on the stage, with all the other characters.)

RUN

I’m here, in the annual capital autumn marathon, amateur group. A marathon is a personal event which one does publicly. If a runner wants to have a tantalizing challenge more of the mind than of the body, a marathon is ideal. A runner will be challenged by others and seen by numerous spectators. So, no way to cheat.

(pause)

The accused Lee Young was only given a life sentence for his huge corruption. The eruption of the People’s wrath was almost coming and all the people feel betrayed by the judicial system. Seems that everybody has seen that purple sandalwood bed. Then, autumn marathon in 2003 has a new title – People’s will… the will of completely deleting any bug in our system. All the runners will get the right to vote as soon as they go through halfway and will vote if they can arrive at the end. I can see all kind of people gathering here. They are running for belief and justice.

(Somebody fires the starter's gun. People are gradually running right at their goal paces. It’s more like collaboration than a competitive sport. People start to make conversations.)

C

What are you going to vote for? Life sentence or death?

Run
I don’t want to think about that.

C

Then why are you here?

RUN

I’m here for running, what do you think?

C

Only for running? Why not pick up a shorter one?!  
(C exits.)

B

What are you going to vote for? Life sentence or death?

RUN

Is that the question of the season?

B

Well, you will have the right to vote when you reach the halfway.

RUN

I just want to run.

B

Silly! Why do you want to run with so many people?  
(B exits.)

MR. EVERYTHING

Try to keep your face and upper body relaxed.
RUN
Ok. Let me ask you first. Life sentence or death?

MR. EVERYTHING
Silly! The answer is obvious.

RUN
So everybody has already decided?

MR. EVERYTHING
No. You think everybody has decided? No. They are here for an answer.

RUN
And…the answer is?

MR. EVERYTHING
Inside the people’s minds. Beware of the crowd.

RUN
(aside)
Once I read that there are two runners, husband and wife, amidst a marathon, supporting each other, running alongside one another, as a team. Always, one will encourage, exhort, lift-up the other. Mr. Everything and I, however, are taking a philosophy course.

MR. EVERYTHING
I saw my son.

RUN
Where?

MR. EVERYTHING

Don’t know.

RUN

She must be here.

MR. EVERYTHING

Definitely. I don’t know if I should find her.

RUN

(aside)
Always, one will encourage, exhort, lift-up the other. Not necessarily two runners; could be one runner and one cheerer.

MR. EVERYTHING

My sisters are here. Over there.

RUN

(aside)
This morning, in the enormous crowd, I met Mr. Everything’s twin sisters. They are around 60 years old and they’ve never been married.

MR. EVERYTHING

Let’s say hello to them. Both of them are very nice ladies.

RUN

Very, very nice ladies, and generous.
(They run towards two ladies who are also running to keep up with them.)

**MR. EVERYTHING**

Hi, this is Run. I’ve mentioned to you before…

**SISTERS**

Hi! You are fast!

**RUN**

You too! You will run with us?

**SISTERS**

Yes. We’d love to run with all of you. We are your cheerers!

**RUN**

You don’t have to do that.

**MR. EVERYTHING**

They will tell us a story during the first half of the race.

**SISTER1**

Conversation could make you relax and pass the time.

**SISTER2**

Like a story before you go to bed.

**MR. EVERYTHING**

Every year.
RUN

Every year?

SISTER1

We’re so proud of you two!

SISTER2

And we are a family.

SISTERS

…That is what a family does.

RUN

Right… Right…

SISTERS

By the way, life sentence or death?

RUN

I…I’m thinking.

(RUN speeds up to distance herself from others.)

MR. EVERYTHING

(following her)

Don’t be rude. Everything in this world will merge into your life. Come on, we are listening to their story.

(Amongst the crowd of marathon runners, the twin sisters begin their story.)
Far away in the land to which the swallows fly when it is winter, dwelt a king who had eleven sons, and one daughter, named Eliza.

And Elisa.

The eleven brothers were princes and each has a sword by his side – oh, I love this story.

The king, a widower father, married a wicked queen, who didn’t love the poor children at all. One day, she used spell to the prince or princes.

Go out into the world… fly like great birds but have no voice.

Then they were turned into eleven beautiful wild swans. They cried…flew away.

Dear Eliza…

and another named Elisa…
(They tell the story like singing a duo. Sometimes they speak at the same time; sometimes they play with the time difference; sometimes they actually sing.)

… walked away from the palace, sorrowfully… she walked, and walked… over fields and moors, till reached the shore of the open sea. She and she noticed how the countless pebbles on the sea-shore had been smoothed and rounded by the action of the water. Glass, iron, stones, your life, my life, his life and her life… everything will be mingled together… She and she suddenly understand. To break the spell on their brothers, Eliza met a fairy named Fata Morgana.

MR. EVERYTHING
Fata Morgana said: your brothers can be released if you have only courage and perseverance.

SISTERS
Yes we do have.

MR. EVERYTHING
Fata Morgana said: your brothers can be released if you can endure all the agony and torment.

SISTERS
Yes we can endure anything.

MR. EVERYTHING
Fata Morgana said: do you see the stinging nettle which I hold in my hand? Make them into flax with your hands and feet. Spin and weave eleven coats with long sleeves; if these are then thrown over my eleven bodies, the spell will be broken.
SISTERS

Yes we will do that.

MR. EVERYTHING

But remember, you must not speak until your task is finished. Any word you utter will pierce through the hearts of your brothers. Remember! Lives hang upon your tongue. Remember!

SISTERS

(at the same time, like a duo)

Eliz(s)a begins her work with her delicate hands. The nettles burnt great blisters on her hands and arms, but she decided to bear it for her dear brothers. Also, she becomes dumb. One day, a beautiful king advanced towards her.

B

(acting out, to SISTER1/ELIZA)

How did you come here, my sweet child?

(SISTER1 shakes her head, without speaking a single word.)

B

Come with me. I'll dress you in silk and velvet, then place a golden crown upon your head.

(SISTER1 weeps.)

B

I wish only for your happiness. A time will come when you will thank me for this.
(B lifts SISTER1 on his horse and takes her to a fair royal city.)

SISTER2/ELISA
Elisa, who had no episode with the King, stayed in the forest. She bruised the nettles with her bare feet and spun the flax. At sunset one coat was already finished and she had begun the second.

SISTER1/ELIZA
The king made Eliza his bride, but the archbishop believed that the girl was a witch…oh, Jeez, the love episode really wastes my time.

SISTER2/ELISA
…and finished the second one not long after.

SISTER1/ELIZA
Woman, you can weave!

SISTER2/ELISA
…the third one…

SISTER1/ELIZA
Although Eliza got married…

SISTER2/ELISA
…the fifth one…

SISTER1/ELIZA
She kept dumb and continued her work.
SISTER2/ELISA
…the seventh…

SISTER1/ELIZA
Every night she crept away into her little chamber and quickly wove one coat after another.

SISTER2/ELISA
…the tenth…

SISTER1/ELIZA
Jeez, you’ve almost finished. I’m still looking for more flax to begin the seventh.

SISTER2/ELISA
The faster, the better.

SISTER1/ELIZA
Eliza had to go to the cave, passed close by ghouls on the tombstones, gathered the burning nettles, and carried them home with her to the castle.

SISTER2/ELISA
Elisa threw the eleven coats of mail over the swans, and they immediately became eleven handsome princes. My story is over.

(She cheers with all the runners.)

SISTER1/ELIZA
The king and the archbishop discovered Eliza’s secret and they believed that she is a witch.
The people must condemn her.

C

Life sentence or death?

MR. EVERYTHING

Run to the halfway. Run to have a right to vote.

SISTER1/ELIZA

… and Eliza continued her task with joy.

B

All the people came to see the witch burnt. As soon as the executioner lifted her out of the cart, she threw the eleven coats of mail over the swans, and they immediately became eleven handsome princes.

SISTER1/ELIZA

Now I may speak, I’m innocent.

C

Bow to her, as before a saint.

MR. EVERYTHING

Yes, she is innocent, kind, and patient.

SISTER1

All the church bells rang of themselves.

SISTERS

…and the birds came in great troops. And a marriage procession returned to the castle,
such as no king had ever before seen.

(Everybody cheers up!)

MR. EVERYTHING
We are almost there. Hurry up! We are going to vote!

(to RUN)
Why don’t you speak?

RUN

(pause)
I think…My muscles are sore and I’ve got a bad side stitch.

MR. EVERYTHING
Oh…poor girl. How do you like the story?

RUN

I’m not quite sure….if I get that right.

MR. EVERYTHING
Can’t you feel excited when you do something good for the people you love?

RUN

I’d love to feel that.

MR. EVERYTHING
If you are a part of our family, you will adore this happiness. Take me as your family.
Cheer for each other till the end.

RUN
Right.

MR. EVERYTHING

And vote.

RUN

Right! And vote!

(aside)

If I sign the paper, I will be a person like his sisters: my life will be rich and plentiful, and full of support that is not only coming from Mr. Everything, but his everything. Just like that athlete couple – arriving at the end point, arm in arm, together fulfilling their collective and individual needs. They accomplish their physical lives together with love, but every marathon has its end. Where is mine?

(Lights fade.)
Scene III

Aqua Training – Lost in Dream

RUN

I smoke; Mr. Everything also smokes. Mr. Nothing has smoked for 50 years…While taking aqua training, I don’t want to touch a single cigarette throughout a whole day. It’s not just because of a simple and universal truth – water extinguishes fire, but also because that water is so generous. Unconsciously, I embrace water with my pleasure and forget that I need nicotine.

(acting out)

Look, everybody, I’m floating in my dream.

MR. EVERYTHING

He left his family when he was 42. But he always felt most comfortable wandering about by himself.

RUN

(aside)

He decides to take me to one of his closest relatives, Mr. Nothing. He is a sort of celebrity, a famous hermit. He used to be a folk-song singer and collector.

MR. EVERYTHING

One day he was run down by a car… He can’t hear, nor speak.

RUN

I’m sorry.

MR. EVERYTHING

He is like my father, mentor, and friend for life.
(Finally, MR. EVERYTHING and MR. NOTHING meet each other. Then, MR. EVERYTHING becomes everything of MR. NOTHING. They talk, by gesturing or keeping silent.)

MR. EVERYTHING
… and he said I was his voice.

RUN
You ARE his voice.

MR. EVERYTHING
He said he wanted to be the nongovernmental voice.

RUN
He said that? Nongovernmental? How can this word be signed? It’s so long.

(MR. EVERYTHING looks up at RUN with a glare of discontent.)

MR. EVERYTHING
You can’t understand what we are doing, can you?

RUN
No. But I think you need a kind of nongovernmental voice.

MR. EVERYTHING
Smart. See, the high court will re-sentence this criminal, thanks to the marathon, and we’ll hold a referendum to change his life sentence. Think about if our
nongovernmental voice can be the initiator of this referendum…

RUN

Why are you so crazy about this verdict?

MR. EVERYTHING

Lee Young is evil.

RUN

He will be judged by the law, not by the people or your referendum.

MR. EVERYTHING

Silly, the law is enacted by the people. Ok, just be quiet.

(MR. EVERYTHING and MR. NOTHING keep talking, by using their special way.)*22

RUN

(aside)

I worship the way they talk to each other. It looks a little bit Zen, a little bit Tao, and a little bit Tai Chi… yet not really.

(to MR. EVERYTHING)

So does he still care about the everyday news?

MR. EVERYTHING

Shh… don’t interrupt us. He said you looked healthy, and I told him you actually smoke.

---

*22 Here, the characters’ using sign language is a theatrical presentation, which implies that some people always use unintelligible and profound interpretations to cover up the truth. There is NO intention to act any kind of DISABILITY DISCRIMINATION.
RUN

Terrific.

(Their gestures and movements become more and more graceful and rhythmical.)

RUN

(aside)
It seems that everybody is floating in the dream...Oh, now I think they are doing Tai Chi.

MR. EVERYTHING

(suddenly)
His last request is to scatter his ashes to the sea. I hope when I deliver his ashes, you are with me.

RUN

Sure... Does he know that?

(MR. EVERYTHING doesn't care about her question. He continues the conversation with MR. NOTHING.)

RUN

(aside)
Calm down, silly! This is a solemn and touching moment. I'm one part of his life, and Mr. Nothing's life.

(At one point, MR. EVERYTHING hands a piece of paper to MR. NOTHING. Then,
their “talking” becomes more intensive.)

RUN

What?

MR. EVERYTHING

I asked him life sentence or death.

RUN

What did he say?

(MR. NOTHING uses a firm and sword-like action.)

RUN

Ok. I got you.

(RUN tries to use sign language.)

It’s really cool…

(signing)

C-O-O-L…super!

MR. EVERYTHING

What are you doing?

RUN

Communicate. He might need more explanations.

MR. EVERYTHING

Can you do that? You… you… you think you can manage that?
RUN

Seriously, no. But by the way, I think the paper he is holding, is upside-down.

MR. EVERYTHING

What the hell are you doing?

RUN

Well, I’d like to – I think – I wish… Ok, I wish at least I could know more about the person of whose ashes I’m going to look after.

MR. EVERYTHING

And I’m trying to finish an important job here. Would you please not disturb me?...and please don’t keep defending that evil man.

RUN

Hey, I just thought if you really believe in nongovernmental voice, you’d better look for …

(whispering)
you know… a guy who… who can…

MR. EVERYTHING

He can’t hear you.

RUN

Fine! You’d better look for someone who can understand you.

MR. EVERYTHING

You think he can’t?
How do you know he can? Basically, the whole thing is just your monologues.

(To MR. NOTHING, she manages to make her understood by signing.)

You think he shouldn’t be sentenced to death, right?

(MR. NOTHING firmly signs “C-O-O-L.”)

RUN

Wow, at least he is learning.

MR. EVERYTHING

Just keep your mouth shut. Don’t destroy anybody’s life without thinking. He is respectful!

RUN

I have no doubt. I just want to let him know what you are ready to do.

(signing to MR. NOTHING)

I hope… if you don’t mind… I hope to tell you the whole thing about that sentence… if you have time…

MR. EVERYTHING

You don’t have to.

RUN

But I’d like to.

MR. EVERYTHING

He doesn’t have time.
RUN

I’m asking him.

MR. EVERYTHING

We can represent each other.

RUN

He doesn’t know what you are talking about, at all!

MR. EVERYTHING

You can’t clearly explain everything to him. Even you did, he wouldn’t understand you.

(RUN suddenly doesn’t know what to say.)

How silly you are! How can you be my family?

RUN

(leaving, aside)

I’m so stubborn. I screwed the philosophical ritual between them, and I ruined another chance by which Mr. Everything can prove that we are soul mates and we definitely should be living together. Being one part of his future, I should know something about him, but not everything.

MR. EVERYTHING

(to RUN)

Hey…hey…don’t pay attention to what I said about the family stuff. I just need his support and signature…everybody does.

RUN
(signing to MR. EVERYTHING)

C-O-O-L.

(aside)

Nowadays, people always prefer those sports in which they can burn calories without
starving, or without exercising, or even without trying … Unconsciously, they reach
their goals without realizing how they got there…what a wonderful thing to do!

(RUN exits. Then, MR. EVERYTHING
and MR. NOTHING stop their talking.)

(Lights fade.)
Scene IV
Using Treadmill – Runner’s High

(On a train. With dim lights. RUN is sitting in a boxcar, among many brand-new toilets which have been confiscated and made public property. Her body starts to resonate with the train’s mechanical rhythm and intermittent motion, as if she is on the treadmill.)

RUN
Without a doubt, running is an addictive behavior, especially when using a machine. Imagine you have desperately used a treadmill for 60 minutes, then you get a near-death experience, a feeling of extreme euphoria. At that moment, everything is worthwhile. Is this worthwhile? … I think I’m addicted to him...

(MR. EVERYTHING suddenly shows up.)

RUN
Why are you here?

MR. EVERYTHING
Let me ask you this question first. Why are you here?

(looking around)
With thousands of toilets?

RUN
It’s a factory for bathroom products, invested by government. Well, it’s a big factory,
and bankrupt. So the products can be…confiscated…

MR. EVERYTHING

But here is boxcar.

RUN

I have to count them. That’s right, counting toilets. My job.

MR. EVERYTHING

OK. So how are you?

RUN

Fine. What are you doing here?

MR. EVERYTHING

Well, I’ve run after the train for the whole night.

RUN

Ah?

MR. EVERYTHING

Just jumped on the board and got the ticket.

RUN

For… me?

MR. EVERYTHING

For us… I thought you decided to leave.
…No…Not yet.

MR. EVERYTHING
When will this counting toilets thing be finished?

RUN
Tomorrow.

MR. EVERYTHING
So you are going back home tomorrow.

RUN
Maybe.

MR. EVERYTHING
Come and sit here.

(RUN has no choice but sits on one toilet. MR. EVERYTHING comes close to her and kneels down, which makes her scared.)

MR. EVERYTHING
(He tries to comfort her.)
Don’t be scared. Relax. I won’t do anything you don’t like, ok? You understand me?
I’ve run after you all the way here and it feels so good. I just want to tell you I can do this all night. You believe that?

RUN
(aside)
Scientists are always interested in runner’s euphoria, in another word, runner’s high. They use rats in the experiments and try to figure out if the crucial brain chemical that brings runner’s high is endorphin: endogenous + morphine, which makes running irresistible.

(to MR. EVERYTHING)
I believe you could.

MR. EVERYTHING
And … I want to apologize.

RUN
You are on drugs?

MR. EVERYTHING
And you are on a toilet… Listen to me. If I can run after you for such a long time and if I can make an apology to you first, at least you can say you want to hear my apology. Can you?

RUN
Yes. I can….I’m sorry.

MR. EVERYTHING
Good girl.

(standing up)

RUN

(aside)
That’s all?

MR. EVERYTHING
Nice collections.

RUN
Yeah… right… well, traditional or commercial style…one-piece or two-piece type…elongated or round front model…gravity-fed or pressure assisted flushing system…and of course the colors are, white, egg shell, or champagne…Which one do you like?

MR. EVERYTHING
Whatever you like. By the way, do you know that criminal was sentenced to death?

RUN
What? That was fast!

MR. EVERYTHING
And he was executed.

RUN
Don’t you think according to the legal procedure –

MR. EVERYTHING
According to the legal procedure, nobody would dare violate the people’s will. The law is there to protect the people and you are one of the people, correct?

RUN
Correct.

MR. EVERYTHING
And I’m here to protect you and I’m one part of you, correct?
RUN

Sounds correct.

MR. EVERYTHING

If I say you are one part of me and you will be one part of me forever, sounds ok?

RUN

(aside)

It’s a merry day. We are sitting on the…toilets, expressing our longing for the new days, and exchanging the oath of love…Whatever, love is enormous and endless, like the endless counting of toilets. While looking at him … and them, I know I’m deeply lost and immersed in love.

(Suddenly, the speaker of the boxcar is turned on.)

VOICE OF THE TRAIN SPEAKER

(in an extremely professionally courteous way)

May I have your attention please!
May I have your attention please!
The No.12 soft sleeper carriage is on fire!
The No.12 soft sleeper carriage is on fire!
The passengers of No.11 carriage,
Could you please prepare to escape?
Please prepare to escape!

MR. EVERYTHING

Don’t worry. We’ll be together.

RUN
I know you would say that.

MR. EVERYTHING

Because we are runners.

RUN

I know.

VOICE OF THE TRAIN SPEAKER

May I have your attention please!
May I have your attention please!
The passengers of No.11 carriage might prepare to escape.
Please strengthen your quadriceps.
Please get your knees extended.
If you have time,
Please have a carbohydrate-rich snack with some protein to reestablish your fluid balance.
And ladies first!

(They are doing the thorough and professional warming up.)

MR. EVERYTHING

This is why I like you.

RUN

What?

MR. EVERYTHING

We’re always running together and you’ve never made me feel
worried…Sometimes…perhaps…

(Before their escaping, they have a wonderful kiss.)

VOICE OF THE TRAIN SPEAKER

The passengers of No.11 carriage,
Please take all of your carry-on luggage and valuables.
Please show your ticket at the gate of your carriage.
To support our rural education,
Please sigh up for mailing list with your telephone number and permanent address.
Thank you for your cooperation.
May you have a safe escape!
Ready all!

(A conductor shows up at the gate and prepares to check tickets. Suddenly, several people sneak out from somewhere in the carriage and get confused about the message. They become panic.)

A
Wait a second. I don’t have a ticket.

B
This is a boxcar. I’ve hidden myself here over 12 hours… without ticket…

C
I’m a straggler on the run.
A
I don’t have insurance and I rarely vote.

B
I’ve never paid my taxes.

C
Can men and women run together?

VOICE OF THE TRAIN SPEAKER
Please wait…Let me check…

(The silence has lasted for a minute.)

VOICE OF THE TRAIN SPEAKER
(pause)
Please wait another second…

MR. EVERYTHING
Open the door. I have the ticket.

CONDUCTOR
Sorry, Sir. Please.

(Unfortunately, RUN has no ticket to show.)

But the Miss has to stay here.

RUN
I forgot my ticket in the sleeper carriage.
MR. EVERYTHING

She is my girlfriend.

CONDUCTOR

Sir, wife is fine. Girlfriend… At present, we don’t have a law to protect girlfriends. Sorry, Sir, we need a paper to approve.

MR. EVERYTHING

(to RUN)

What did I tell you!

RUN

You can run first.

MR. EVERYTHING

Hey, I won’t leave you like this. Here is the paper. Sign it.

CONDUCTOR

Let’s me see. Yes! Miss, you can get through the gate as soon as you sign the marriage agreement.

MR. EVERYTHING

You said we would be together.

RUN

I gave you my oath, not my signature.

MR. EVERYTHING

What’s wrong with you?
CONDUCTOR

Miss, I’m sorry. The law is to protect the legitimated family member. Sir, excuse me, will you escape right now? …

(pause)

You can wait till next group.

(The door is closed right after the conductor exits.)

RUN

I just… I just…

MR. EVERYTHING

Don’t talk! Please!

RUN

(aside)

I’d love to stay with you. I’m just afraid of living with your furniture, your marathon families and your silent nongovernmental voice…It's very easy to prove that running, like morphine, cocaine, alcohol, nicotine, marihuana, amphetamines, and painkillers, is drug. Some rats love running to the extent and they can actually run themselves to death. Some people do the same thing.

(Lights fade.)
Scene V

Backwards Running – All about Direction

(The lights focus on a wedding on the stage.)

WEDDING MINISTER

First bow to the Heaven and the Earth! Second bow to your parents!

(The new couple is following the instructions of WEDDING MINISTER.)

WEDDING MINISTER

Finally, Third bow to each other. Now, let the new couple drink the Happy Union Wine!

(The spectators are so happy for them that they all drink some wine to wish the new couple well.)

(Lights up. MR. EVERYTHING and RUN are watching a play about a marriage in a theatre. In the play of this play, there is a certain woman who had a jealous husband and a very, very handsome male servant in this play. WEDDING MINISTER is transformed to a narrator of the play. When he starts his narration, the other characters of the “play in the play” are pantomiming.)
WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR
After the new couple walk into the bedroom, the male servant stands outside the door, silently.

MALE SERVANT
Her skin is that smooth and delicate, like the fallen petals drifting down the creek in June. I’d love to be a slave of her for ever. I’d never let her feel tired.

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR
Days after days, years after years, everything is just fine. The husband is a lawyer; he goes to the local court everyday. The servant follows his master to the court. The wife stays at home, plays with her time, and waits for her husband.

HUSBAND
(saying good-bye to his wife)
Why do I always worry about you?
(sighing)
I hope I could be with you every moment.

MALE SERVANT
(aside)
I hope I could say that to someone.

HOUSEMISTRESS
Go work, and get back as soon as you have everything done. Don’t take one more stay.

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR
One day in the front of the court, the lawyer suddenly remembered that he’d left his new identification card of the annual lawyer registration at home. He brings that
identification card everyday, without it –

HUSBAND

I’m not a lawyer any more.

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR

This is a huge mistake. How could he use his knowledge of law to help people if he doesn’t know he has such knowledge within him?

HUSBAND

(to the male servant)

Please go get my identification card! Hurry up!

(MALE SERVANT jumps at the task and runs.)

HUSBAND

I can’t lose my identity!

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR

The boy runs away joyfully!

MR. EVERYTHING

He’s having sex with her.

RUN

Don’t be rude.

MR. EVERYTHING

I’m telling you.
RUN

I said don’t be rude.

MR. EVERYTHING

And…

(pause)

I think I saw my wife.

RUN

Ah…

MR. EVERYTHING

With my son…but don’t worry…

RUN

What?

MR. EVERYTHING

They’re not armed…

(pause)

She said I looked thin…and I don’t have my ring on…

RUN

What?

MR. EVERYTHING

She noticed that I don’t have a ring on.
Where is she?

MR. EVERYTHING

On the opposite balcony.

RUN

Are you guys using Morse code?

MR. EVERYTHING

Shh…

(The “play in the play” continues.)

HOUSEMISTRESS

(to MALE SERVANT who just runs back)

Why do you come back?

MALE SERVANT

The master forgot his identity.

HOUSEMISTRESS

That’s too bad.

MALE SERVANT

It’s in the left drawer of master’s desk.

HOUSEMISTRESS

I’ll look it for you.
Was the chicken and lotus seed soup ok?

HOUSEMISTRESS

Good. Use less sugar next time.

MALE SERVANT

I’ll remember that.

HOUSEMISTRESS

(giving him the identification card)

Take it.

(MALE SERVANT runs away with the identification card.)

RUN

You’re wrong.

MR. EVERYTHING

He’ll have a backward running. Wait and see.

RUN

(aside)

Backward running…

(pause)

While comparing forward and backward running, it has been shown that backward running results in:

1. A more erect posture;
2. Increased stride rate, decreased stride length and increased support time;
3. Reduced overall range of motion at the hip joint (greater flexion and lesser
extension);

4. Combined maximum knee extension with hip flexion …

(MALE SERVANT runs back during RUN’s explanations on backward running.)

HOUSEMISTRESS

(pause)
You come back again?

MALE SERVANT
I forgot something, too.

HOUSEMISTRESS
What?

MALE SERVANT
You.

HOUSEMISTRESS
How dare you!

(HOUSEMISTRESS soon walks away. MALE SERVANT is shocked by his words too. However, after several seconds, he follows his housemistress.)

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR
Meanwhile, the husband suddenly realizes something.

HUSBAND
What have I done! I've set cotton wool on fire! For three years. I’ve never left my wife and the servant alone. What have I done!

(He throws off all the things in his hands and starts to run.)

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR
Run! Run! People you do have to run! The servant runs for love. The husband runs out of fear…

(The lights of “the play in the play” fade. This is the end of first act. During the intermission, RUN and MR. EVERYTHING have a meet with MRS. EVERYTHING and LITTLE EVERYTHING “by chance.”)

MR. EVERYTHING
How are you?

WIFE
I’m fine. Just a bit tired.

(She smiles.)

I noticed the referendum you initiated. That is a wonderful thing to do, and it is courageous.

(to RUN)

Don’t you think so?

RUN
Sure.

MR. EVERYTHING

Thanks.

WIFE

I knew you would say the law is to protect the people and we are one of the people… and I’m one of the people.

(pause)

I also saw you in the marathon, but you didn’t see me.

BOY

I was worried about you.

MR. EVERYTHING

Why?

BOY

You looked thinner, and disappointed.

MR. EVERYTHING

I’m not.

BOY

You got remarried again?

MR. EVERYTHING

No.
Why is that?

WIFE

(She places her fingers on his son’s lips and looks at RUN.)

Please take care of him. I hope he has a real family, has a person who really understands him …

MR. EVERYTHING

I saw you that day, in the marathon.

(pause)

I saw you.

(They have to go back to their seats because the second act begins.)

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR

The male servant unintentionally revealed in his adultery with the mistress. When the whole thing was exposed entirely, the male servant was sentenced to death immediately.

RUN

They should run away together. If they were us, they’d have –

MR. EVERYTHING

Silly, there aren’t many places to go.

RUN

Poor boy. You said the law is to protect the people.
MR. EVERYTHING

…the legal people…not all of them…

RUN

So…what’s your point?

MR. EVERYTHING

… I have no point now. Let’s just watch it.

RUN

I think you’re right.

WEDDING MINISTER/NARRATOR

Since the housemistress is a graceful and elegant lady, people become hesitant and argue about how to do with this woman.

(People’s voices are overlapped.)

A

Life sentence or death?

B

Life sentence or death?

C

Life sentence or death?

RUN

Again?
MR. EVERYTHING
But this time isn’t the same…Lots of things have been changed.

(HUSBAND keels down in front of the judge and begs him to excuse his wife’s death.)

HUSBAND
My lord, it’s all my fault. It’s me who asked the servant to go back home when my humble wife was alone. My fault! I shouldn’t have left her…I hated her…but I hope you will let her live. We bowed to the Heaven and the Earth. Or, for the sake of our marriage, please let me just stay with her. Whatever she is alive or…

RUN
It’s a tragedy… but he shouldn’t cry.

MR. EVERYTHING
Yes… but he shouldn’t have left in the first place.

RUN
…You’re still free to leave. No, really. We’ve never bowed to the –

MR. EVERYTHING
(interrupting her)
Shh…

RUN
If you regret this, give me a sign, now.

(MR. EVERYTHING has no movement.)
RUN
If you don’t regret this…us…give me a sign, now.

(MR. EVERYTHING has no movement, either.)

MR. EVERYTHING
You know what…I always thought you were my escape.

RUN
But I think you need go home today.

(MR. EVERYTHING still has no movement.)

RUN
(aside)
I don’t know what I am waiting for. Would you believe me if I said I could do backward running faster than forward? I’m such a liar.

(Lights fade.)
Scene VI

Taking a Rest – Not to Run

(Another day in 2004. In a gym.
On the treadmills, there still are lots of exercising men and women. During the running, they are still counting their lives.)

A
Wooden floor? Or carpet? A polished wooden floor won’t stay long unless you spend time looking after it. All the dirt and grit, you know. I heard some good thing about carpet. But still, you need to vacuum the carpet every week.

B
I can give her all the plants, and CDs, and books...no, no, no, I need some books…and maybe some CDs…

RUN
Another 350 calories burnt. I’m almost into my anaerobic respiration…an anaerobic life…what that could be?

C
Almost all the members in that Jetta club use manual trans. People even make an automatic car into a manual car. They say that is called culture. They say automatic trans is everywhere. So using manual is special.

MR. EVERYTHING
I…

(long pause)
don’t know…

D
…so by the end of next year, I’ll pay the rest of them…I think so…am I right?

A
If I will be moving out in 2006, I should find a better job by 2005. Uncle Pan always says I should work for him and Shanghai is a better place to make money these days. Yeah… Shanghai is cool…Shanghai has more moisture…

B
Yesterday she called again and said she wanted to talk. I don’t want to talk. She said she felt so awful because she cheated on me. She said she would do everything to win me back.

(pause)
I think she can still keep the cat.

RUN
Let me finish this… let me finish this…

C
Jetta 2004,
(smiling)
Jetta 1998,
(confusedly)

MR. EVERYTHING
They all keep running…I can do it…I can do it…don’t think…I can do it…don’t think…
D
…but…did I include the tax I need to pay by the end of next year?...Heaven!

(speeding)

A
Shanghai is big and crowded…Shanghai has good food and has its fashion…Shanghai people are smart…maybe too smart…Shanghai is warm…

(slowing down)
Do I still need an apartment in Beijing then?

B
People say that getting a new customer costs as much as six times that of keeping an old one. Same thing in relationship…This is a nice excuse.

C
(speeding)
Who cares? If everybody uses automatic trans, why do I still bother with the manual?

RUN
I care.

D
No, you don’t.

MR. EVERYTHING
Yes, you do!

A
Listen again! Owning a house is the crucial thing in your life … Starting a family is
the crucial thing in your life, whether in 2003 or 3003.

B
Agree! Scrutinize your lover first! Find out the truth!

C
Agree! Try to be a rich, well-educated, high-class, peace-loving philogynist. Start a family!

(short pause)
…and choose an automatic trans

(short pause)
…or may be manual?

D
Agree! Don’t expect you can get rid of a normal life.

(speeding)

A
Can’t someone stop?!

(slowing down)
April 26th, 2004. I’m thinking about Shanghai. What if my parents don’t like to move with me?

(A keeps running.)

B
Telling lies is not appropriate. Not telling lies is not appropriate either. April 26th, 2004, I still don’t want to listen to what she wanted to tell me. I don’t like any story.

(pause)
I only want to live with her.

(B keeps running.)
C
April 26th, 2004, I’m so bored. Whatever it is a Jetta 98 or Jetta 04, it is a car.

(C keeps running.)

RUN
Let me finish this; just let me finish this!

D
April 26th 2004… Things have already slipped away from me.

MR. EVERYTHING
I can’t finish this!

(stops)

RUN
(to MR. EVERYTHING)
You tired?

(pause)
Well, you know sometimes you need a break during the exercise…I’m tired too.

MR. EVERYTHING
Stop, then.

RUN
Let me finish it.

MR. EVERYTHING
…I can’t finish it…I can’t wait… I don’t want to wait…

(pause)
You know we need recovery. We need buffer our waste products; we need to reduce our muscle fatigue.

RUN
And other things…I told you my stuff was always tough.

(MR. EVERYTHING smiles and leaves.)

RUN
April 26th 2004, right now, on this treadmill I’ve used for one year and a half, my speed is 8 mph; my heart beating is 150 per minute; I’m using the high level weight-loss and fitness program; and I’ve burnt 460 calories in 40 minutes. And you can see me: I’m running by myself and stimulated by my endorphin.

(pause)
I’ll stop in one minute. I hope after my physical body stops, my mind will still run…it’s tough, like all of my stuff…and that’s all.

(RUN walks away but she seems hesitant. After a while, she walks back to her treadmill. She feels awkwardness and mocks herself. She knows once she starts to run again, she won’t care other things too much.)

Whatever.

(She runs.)

– End –
Chapter IV
The Playwriting Process and Production Reception of Six Ways of Running

In the previous three chapters, the following issues have been examined: a general introduction and review on the writer Gao Xingjian and his work (Chapter I), a theoretical research on the *thirdness* embedded in his play *The Other Shore* as well as the playwright’s status of in-betweenness (Chapter II), and a play *Six Ways of Running*, written by myself, which is inspired by the central theme and writing style of Gao Xingjian (Chapter III).

Chapter IV will primarily focus on the creative writing *Six Ways of Running* and its writing process, from the perspective of a playwright. As the last chapter in this thesis, this chapter will be also presented as a bridge between the theoretical research and the creative writing, as well as a summary of my thesis journey. Through the journey, I firstly set off from an original point on a specific playwright, and then acquired opportunities to move into new spheres that allow me to look back at the playwright and his work from some different perspectives.

In Chapter IV, three major subjects will be discussed and examined in terms of constructing a discussion on a creative writing: I. Origins of Conception; II. Strategies of Presentation; III. Production Interpretation and Reception.

I. Origins of Conception

The creative writing of my thesis is inspired by both the theme of *The Other Shore* – the “intimacy” between the individual and the collective, as well as the consideration upon the diasporic consciousness and in-betweenness of this playwright himself. Therefore, I have this specific and strong motif to create a platform for a “game” between one and many.

Indeed, *Six Ways of Running* is a game that includes several queries and speculations such as: can the One believe in or survive alone by himself/herself? How will the Many surround, support or dominate the One in the reality? What is this *thirdness*? Does a practice of *thirdness* give a resolution? This writing becomes a site which contains all those considerations and leads my suspicions and debates to the
Writing *Six Ways of Running* is a fairly new and fantastic experience for me. Since the theoretical rationale (Chapter II) is prior to all the imaginations or compositions of the creative writing, the latter one is more like a process of selecting materials to illustrate and enrich the concepts than a process of hunting for all the random and unexpected inspirations.

To be more specific, three major concepts that have been examined in my theoretical research on Gao Xingjian’s play *The Other Shore* are reconsidered and embodied in *Six Ways of Running*: 1) The interaction and confrontation between the individual and the collective; 2) The discursive power that is formatted by the collective and that has the power to exclude the dissident individual; 3) Thirdness, an ideological, strategic, and physical disaggregation, in other words, a conscious identity construction.

1) **The Individual vs. the Collective**

According to my reading, Gao’s *The Other Shore* is a play that establishes ambivalent and ambiguous confrontations between an individual being and all the others. To design a dramatic frame which can illustrate such relationships, I created an illegitimate love relationship between a male character (Mr. Everything) inside a family and a female character (Run) outside this family.

In fact, the play principally encompasses the main character Run. She always wonders whether or not she should enter into everything of Mr. Everything, such as his family, belief system, and social mission, all of which incessantly and “seductively” convince, assimilate, and urge Run to be one legitimate and reliable member inside the “family” of Mr. Everything.

By using family as a metaphor of the collective in this play, Run has been spontaneously positioned as something “third,” such as a *third wheel* within an affair who is awkwardly entangled somewhere in a triangular relationship. On her physical, mental, and emotional journey, Run cannot but compete and interact with those intriguing and absorptive values of family relationships (power of the collective), and search for her direction.
In addition, the plot around the corrupted official Lee Young is laid to imply the same subject. The movement of removing this literally illegitimate individual not only proves that he certainly must pay the price for what he did, but also represents another bout between one and many. In this case, an imagined communal agreement of punishing the public enemy gives rise to a centripetal and organized campaign, through which the people’s will has been collected and an aggregation of power has been constructed.

In *Six Ways of Running*, the family/collective has the right to interrogate the illegitimate individual entity who is potentially dangerous and harmful to them, at anytime and anyplace: in a public auction, during a family cheering for the Marathon runners, in a questionable hermitage, inside a boxcar where an emergency escape happens, and in a play within this play, etc. Consequently, Run has been confined in these urgent choices all the time. She can opt for being a family member of Mr. Everything and being perfectly legitimized. She can also refuse to be melted into the majority but to keep voicing her own point of view, yet she will be spontaneously categorized as an undesirable minority later on. From my point of view, the process of making choices has no political correctness. Therefore I position this struggle within an affair, and within all the trifles and conditions around this love story as well. By doing so, I attempt to emphasize the interactions between and temptations from each side that my characters have to face.

In *Six Ways of Running*, my considerations of the interrelations between the individual and the collective are also placed on the career and political identities of the characters. Taking Run as an example, her legitimate career is a clerk of court and her job is to check off and keep a register of confiscated items. Her career turns her into one part of legal system, although she is illegal in the love affair. Literally, her responsibility is “counting,” which is one simple yet cumbersome step that she has to repeat again and again, as well as one step that belongs to a complicated and well-developed system in which the collective property embezzled by the individual would be returned to the collective entity. (Although in some real cases, those properties would be secretly transferred to some individuals again.) By giving such a
career identity to Run, I intend to indicate that she is always awkwardly sandwiched between the collective call and the individual value. Furthermore, she has to count and balance all of her choices and directions by all means.

There is a ridiculous question repeatedly asked to Run: life sentence or death. This is not only a question about how to deal with the punishment of a criminal (Lee Young), but also a question of which side one could take, the individual of the collective.

2) Discursive Power

As one of the central issues examined in Chapter II, my interest of writing *Six Ways of Running* also lies in the representation of discursive power, which is acquired and operates through the knowledge and social practices. The following question has been continuously asked by myself during the writing: How does the hegemonic discourse become the communal and social “language?” How does it take the power to assimilate and control the collective interests? How does it exclude the dissident one? To some degree, the setup of character Mr. Everything establishes a concentrated symbol of the issue above.

Mr. Everything believes that law, as a discourse of public discipline and normalization, establishes a communication bridge of legitimacy and provides a mechanism of social integration that can make fair choices. In other words, an individual will be disciplined and regulated through the law. S/he will be also given protection and legalization when s/he is in good faith to the discourse of the community as a whole.

In his private life, accordingly, he needs the marriage agreement, the paper that allows his relationship to be legitimated and warrantable. In his public life, he is a leader in establishing and following the collective value. He is an activist who participates in the Marathon, visits to Mr. Nothing for organizing the referendum, as well as advocates and constitutes the whole “elimination movement” towards the corrupted official Lee Young. He is the one who consciously soaks in and exploits the discursive power formatted by the collective.

As a college teacher, his career is designed as a metaphor of a spokesperson of
the people’s will. Basically, he places himself in a position where he is the representative of and will speak for the people, although such identity is not “legitimately” preconditioned. Mr. Everything doesn’t define himself as an intellectual who stands aside to enlighten the rest of the people, but an activist who is one internal part of a collective, practically takes part in the campaign against corrupted power, and borrows the people’s will and power to eliminate the “social poison.”

In my reading of The Other Shore, the presence of “Man” can be regarded as the representation of a conventional intellectual. The character “Man” stands up to announce the “truth” to the people, but is eradicated by the people as a dissident of dominating discourse later. In my writing of Six Ways of Running, I intend to employ the opposite representation of the intellectuals and to accentuate the significance/power of discourse in another way.

Instead of being absorbed and repressed by the collective unconsciousness led by the discourse, Mr. Everything believes that the power permeates the whole social web deeply and felicitously, so he positions himself as one part inside the power system. Therefore, he constructs his language code to recruit all the other individuals as members of the collective. “The law is there to protect the people and you are one of the people” becomes a safe and invasive suggestion and makes everybody believe that s/he is the one among the mutual agreement. Thereby, the unanimous state and the collective unconsciousness, in my play, are rapidly and successfully achieved in the name of law and order.

3) Thirdness

Running in the play is employed as a metaphor of an interim state of being, during which all the agonies, passions, and speculations are accumulated yet a definite and stable status can hardly be provided. Running, in Run’s words, is driven by the crucial brain chemical: endorphin. By borrowing this definition, I try to indicate that running is primarily a personal and physical action. However, the will and practice of an individual and the collective can never be clearly distinguished whatsoever. Running, as well as every other thing, can be and will be extended by the new
discursive force and running can be and will be regarded as one part of politics. As Mr. Everything explains in the Prelude: “…easygoing means freedom; freedom is human rights; human rights belong to politics. Things are never going to be easy…” (Six Ways of Running 46)

On the other hand, even in this enormous commitment to the collective, running is still a retreat for the individuals. In the stage direction of the Prelude, for instance, people who are doing the running exercise in a gym are unconsciously “counting their calories, weights, heartbeats, hormones, ages, salaries, loans, the numbers of their friends, and the numbers of their enemies. Their personal histories are flashing upon their minds while their movements are torturing their entire bodies” (Six Ways of Running 42). Running in this part is manifested as, once again, a personal resolution confined by a tremendous and mysterious web of time, space, and relationships with others.

Therefore, my intention here is to symbolize running as a hybridized movement with both the collective attributes and the individual desire, and to make up the status of “thirdness.” For example, in each scene of this play, the private life and the social life is purposely and irresistibly interwoven. In the first scene, the government auction for an anti-corruption purpose is mingled together with another private auction of a divorcing couple. When the “rituals” of a collective resurrection and a family's destruction are exhibited on the same stage, the running becomes a type of speculation on this position-taking. Another example will be the vote after the people’s Marathon – a personal running which one does publicly, which further underscores the required participations and possible achievements when all the individuals could fulfill their obligations and goals together.

II. Strategies of Presentation

As one part of a creative thesis, writing itself will be one of the major issues. After establishing the main theme and collecting each inspiration for Six Ways of Running, a mechanism to organize, activate, and present all of the materials is required. In this section, I will divide the strategies of presentation into three parts: 1) Segmented Writing; 2) Allegorical Writing; 3) Aside vs. Ensemble. Specific choices
and strategies of this presentation will be examined.

1) Segmented Writing

*Six Ways of Running*, as the title implies, is a play with six segments. Under the condition of keeping two main plots – 1) the relationship between Run and Mr. Everything 2) the elimination movement towards Lee Young – the play uses six sections to explore one theme. Except for the main characters (Run and Mr. Everything) who go through the whole process of their love affair as well as use their stories to describe those “six ways of running,” the characters in each segment can be freely arranged or withdrawn. Such a setup is mentioned in the stage direction at the every beginning of the play: “There are other people who will play different roles in different scenes and will change their roles according to the requirements” (*Six Ways of Running* 42).

This writing choice is inspired by a great collection of seven stories titled *My Merry Mornings: Stories from Prague*, written by Ivan Klima. In *My Merry Mornings*, a narrator passes through seven mornings, witnesses multifarious circumstances, and experiences different careers and situations in a whole week. He actually turns himself into a connector to associate all the pieces in his life and to make them into a panoramic world. He tells of his encounters that he experiences through all the communications and interactions with different people, including a briber, rapist, cheater, priest, lover, professor, underground intellectual, thief, and any others living under the post-1968 invasion “normalization” regime – another type of Totalitarianism. An omnium-gatherum is vividly performed by means of the narrator’s moving through different scenes, by which his life is also fully expanded and developed. From my point of view, the segmented writing offers one of the most attractive attributes of this collection – the attention to mix all the possibilities and impossibilities and to travel infinities through those trifles in everyday life.

Following the same pattern, the two characters in the *Six Ways of Running*,

---

23 Ivan Klima is a former dissident of Czech and the author of some 20 books. He was born in Prague in 1931. As a child he spent three years in the Terezin concentration camp. In the 1960s, he was an editor of the leading Czech literary weekly, *Literarní listy*. In the 1970s and 1980s, he held a variety of jobs and became involved in independent cultural activities. Klima also remains one of the most outspoken Czech writers in a society undergoing fundamental changes after the Velvet Revolution of 1989.
especially Run, are designed to move through different situations and segmented stories. Through all the encounters with the idle but strong-willed twin sisters, the suspicious hermit, the unidentified and marginalized people, and Mr. Everything’s wife who has an utterly clear identity and position, the life of Run becomes a mass of the continuous balancing, questioning, and choosing between the individual and the collective value.

The main mechanical assistance from the segmented writing, in this specific case, has allowed me to move away from the standard and compact stages of Freytag's Pyramid in which a dramatic climax as well as a conclusive resolution/denouement should be reached at the end. On the opposite side, the segmented writing provides me with some advantages to present the choices in different situations that Run has to face: whether or not she should enter a legal system and accept the legitimacy brought by a marriage/membership; whether or not she should be one member of a family/collective and then place the individual interest on the secondary position if required; whether or not she should believe there is a truth behind all those struggles either for the collective or the individual; whether or not she should move away from such a game of making choices and keep an alienated and skeptical state of being.

After all, from my perspective, this is a play with all the awkward questions and with no definite answer. If one looks back on the repetitive question “life sentences or death” at this point, it might be clear that this is a line demonstrating the accusatory power from the collective towards the individual, as well as echoing the cruelty and absurdity of making an unambiguous choice. Therefore, it is the motif to present such emptiness that brings me to employ segmented writing in my play.

2) Allegorical Writing

During my writing process, I place a lot of emphasis on another writing style of Gao Xingjian – allegorical writing. Gao applies a wealth of parables and metaphors in his work to associate the major themes, as well as pays lots of attention to the dynamics and connections between what is spoken on the surface and what is spoken underneath. By using allegorical writing, Gao Xingjian quests for open and allusive comprehension and definition on the issues that he tries to explore, and attempts to
avoid the conceptual figuration, like what has been mentioned in his play of four scenes Weekend Quartet: “A speakable but not a parable, A parable but not speakable” (Gao The Other Shore, 251).

Allegory, in literature, is the representation of a subject disguised as something else. Usually, allegorical writing uses symbolic means to create a disguised presentation, another way of speaking – which is the original Greek meaning of allegory. Although the symbolic story on the surface serves as a disguised presentation, the interaction between two images of storytelling creates a special dynamic. To a certain degree, the final “performance” is neither the meaning with purposeful deeper level, nor the superficial presentation, but something “third.”

The Other Shore, from a certain perspective, is an allegorical play beginning with the concept of “Crossing River” (to reach a new stage of progress) in Buddhism. The play comes out of a deep consciousness upon the status of human beings, but is presented as a game, without specific time, space, or setting. Both the symbolic characters and the game model indicate the extreme existence and lead our comprehension towards an ambiguous level.

Another inspiration comes from the play Second Death of Priscilla by Russell Davis, which was presented at Actor’s Theatre of Louisville’s 2003 Humana Festival. This is another example of using allegory, or to be more specific, of reconstructing an allegorical fairy tale. The writer transformed “The Three Little Pigs” into a psychological journey of self-remedy and retells this story from another perspective – to a degree, from the perspective of the wolf. The “three little pigs” are changed into three types of strength within one single woman – Aramanda (body), Coquelicot (mind) and Priscilla (soul). At this point, the story is not about the competition among “three pigs” any more, but a psychological competition inside a Self. Even the wolf is absorbed – an external and intrusive force – into Priscilla at the end, which implies that Priscilla completes her journey from a psychological trauma to recovery, and arrives in a new balance.

It is the above associations that inspire me to use abundant metaphors and surreal representations in the play Six Ways of Running, such as the action, wedding
scene, Marathon, fired boxcar, etc. Each of them is set within a realistic setting in the first place. However, when a moment that the decision-making between the individual/collective arrives, the whole circumstances suddenly become part of a magical and absurd world.

Furthermore, inspired by Second Death of Priscilla, I reconstruct the fairy tale “Wild Swans” by Hans Christian Andersen in my second scene. By doing so, I begin with looking at the original subject of the young girl Elisa’s determination, patience and all the insistent goodness from a new perspective, by which the story becomes a discussion on a laborious, summoned, and rewarding individual practice in response to a collective need.

3) Aside and Ensemble

The fascinating dynamics between one and many highly intrigues me in the writing of Six Ways of Running. For me, both the harmonies and the awkwardness between one and many possess a special melody. In other words, the playwriting is somehow similar to a vocal composition that includes solo, duet, chorus performance, and flourishing transitions among them as well.

Based on the above considerations, I decided to give Run opportunities to “speak aside,” by which this character can randomly jump out of the given circumstances and share the truth only with audience. “Speaking aside” or “talking to herself” reveals the dialectic struggle of Run whenever she is trapped by any strange decision-making.

Another consideration of applying “speaking aside” is to create a similar model to the communication between “Man” and “Shadow” in Gao Xingjian’s The Other Shore. In both cases, the main character (Run/Man) alienates herself/himself into some transient encounters that are only within “self,” some of which are self-reflective fantasies, yet some of which are unwilling and isolated disenchantment.

For example, at the end of Scene III “Aqua Training – Lost in Dream,” Run has the following aside:

RUN. (Leaving, aside) I’m so stubborn. I screwed the philosophical ritual between them, and I ruined another chance by which Mr. Everything
can prove that we are soul mates and we definitely should be living together. Being one part of his future, I should know something about him, but not everything. (Six Ways of Running 83)

At this moment, Run has already figured out that Mr. Nothing and any absolute truth behind this famous hermit is actually nothing, so has Mr. Everything known that. For Mr. Everything, however, to hold the referendum and to establish a mutual alliance for eliminating the criminal Lee Young is the most important mission at this point. Also, the reputation and meaning of Mr. Nothing, who is the representative of “nongovernmental voice,” will lead all of the endeavors to a successful point. Therefore, the whole visit is actually a political performance, or a “ritual” that one has to go through to accomplish a further fulfillment. It is at this moment that Run realizes that she is not only a bigoted girl who destroys some parts in her love relationship, but also an anachronism or obstacle on the way of approaching the collective belief. However, she also realizes that she is the one who will admit the feigned reality and will speak out loudly that “It seems that everybody is floating in the dream.”

In Six Ways of Running, the “aside” section is not omniscient, but filled with skepticism, paradox, reluctant and anguished awareness, and some conscious or unconscious confessions of Run. Such a mixture is somehow self-contradictory and exposes the weakness and ambivalence of this character. Some of her speculations which are not supposed to be shared with the Many on stage yet are ironically put on the table of another collective – audience.

The “multiple performing identities” employed in The Other Shore, which I have also examined in Chapter II, is certainly one of the technical calls of writing that pushes me to create an ensemble work. In addition, since I attempt to conduct the psychological and verbal duet between the individual and the collective, the ensemble work which will feature improvisations and vary rhythmic elements becomes a practical emphasis in the writing.

Characters A, B, C, and D compose the ensemble casts at an initial state. As the plots develop and the scenes keep changing, these characters will be transformed
into Auctioneer, Sister1/Sister2, Conductor, Train speaker, Wedding Minister, Husband, Mistress and Male Servant. Moreover, all the members in the ensemble are intended to be presented at every awkward moment and through some hilarious and absurd manners.

To keep from making the group presentation too overwhelming and oppressive, the ensemble work is provided with some comic possibilities and hybrid identities. To emphasize the “intimacy” other than the one-direction power structure between the solo and the ensemble, the latter one is always presented with different representations, though it is also always on the opposite side of Run. For example, in Scene I, the ensemble is the auctioneer and the people in the auction. Their movements effectively accentuate Run and Mr. Everything to an extreme point of making a choice: signing the marriage agreement or not. At the moment when the members of ensemble take oath in the virtual wedding, they seem not to advocate marriage any more:

AUCTIONEER. Good! Please read after me. I, Everything, promise to stand beside you –
MR. EVERYTHING. I, Everything, promise to stand beside you –
A. …beside a family, beside a two-bedroom apartment with 1000 square feet…
B. …beside your truth and your lies…
C. …beside your body, your heart, and your soul…
D. …beside you, your family, your family’s family… your family’s …
MR. EVERYTHING. …only stand beside you! In Happiness…
WIFE. In Happiness…
RUN. In Happiness and?…
MR. EVERYTHING. Misfortune…
WIFE. Misfortune…
RUN. Misfortune, and happiness, and misfortune, and happiness, and?…
MR. EVERYTHING. And in health and sickness…
WIFE. In health and sickness…
RUN. In health and sickness till death…
MR. EVERYTHING. Till death do us part.
WIFE. Till death do us part.
RUN. Do us part … Do us part? …Can I ever quit?

(Six Ways of Running 61)

From one point, characters A/B/C/D are not exactly the members of a group, but transferred into each individual being who has to carefully count the spatial, mental, and physical relationships with others. From another perspective, however, they are still the representatives of the enormous collective behind Mr. Everything, behind the marriage and the process of legitimacy as a whole. Their strange presence complicates the relation which should only include two people and further accentuate the complex between one and the others.

Such awkward situations are also produced in other scenes: during the Marathon running, the twin sisters are delighted to run with their brother and tell him a fairy tale to help him relax and pass the time; during the emergency escape in the boxcar, the homeless and unidentified people suddenly pop out and complain about their illegitimacy. In my imagination, the ensemble work could be an interesting competitor of Run’s speaking aside because every solo moment is always intervened and satirized the group presentation, and so vice versa.

III. Production Interpretation and Audience Reception.

So far, the play Six Ways of Running has already been through two staged readings. The first one was produced within the Theatre Department of Miami University, as an annual staged reading for the visiting dramaturgs from Actor’s Theatre of Louisville (this reading will be mentioned as Louisville reading in the following writing). The second one was produced as one unit of the Celeb-Asian festival (this reading will be mentioned as Celeb-Asian reading in the following writing). Two talkbacks were held after the staged readings, from which I obtained a valuable opportunity to look at my work from an external and objective perspective.

One of the interesting phenomena of the two talkbacks is the remarkable differences between them, although both of them are based on the same script. In the
section of Production Interpretation and Audience Reception, I will explore the cause and response of two talkbacks.

Louisville reading kept a compact rhythm and provided an active acting style during the reading. It was a charming ensemble performing around a group of enthusiastic “sportsmen,” which perfectly conveyed the visualized images that people are either stuck on the treadmill of life or racing towards another possibility. After the performance, the dramaturgs from Actor’s Theatre of Louisville gave me the following comments: It is a successful and intriguing staged reading. The script has a lot of imagination and the reading allows the imagination to come alive. The writing style could be more exaggerated.

The dramaturgs considered the play convincing in terms of the developing relationship between an individual being and the collective, and they suggested that I could further magnify such confrontation. The subplot about the corrupted official Lee Young was also recognized as a structural device which was mixed by some realistic features as well as some unrealistic expressions. They especially felt interested in the characteristic of Mr. Everything’s changeable and somehow awkward position within the family and social power structure. Further developing this character, as they recommended, might lead the whole play to a deeper lever.

They felt impressed and excited by Scene IV (Using Treadmill – Runner’s High). Because of the dramaturgical constructions and implications imbedded in the former scenes, a presumptively fantastic circumstance has already been established. As a result, they received thousands of brand-new toilets and the emergency escape happened in a boxcar well. They believed the existence of toilets was unquestioned and they even considered that staging toilets could either be a spectacular designer’s project, or a simple process of subjective acting. They mentioned that the toilets could be represented as paper boxes or something surreal at all.

Their major consideration was how to make a strong and compact structure in order to push the whole individual/collective conflict towards the powerful dramatic climax. They suggested that I could transform the exterior love story as well as the amateur discussions around running into a supportive part of some collective actions.
For example, they suggested that Scene II (Marathon – Run with Others; Run without End) could be placed as the last scene of the play. Sequentially, Marathon would be recognized as a final collective movement for the sake of punishing a criminal of the people. In other words, “six ways of running” would be turned into several steps of a running training program in which an individual would be qualified in a collective play and play his/her role in a grander absurdity at the end of the play.

Compared to Louisville reading, Celebr-Asian reading had a slow pace, with which the ensemble cooperation was not exclusively apparent. The talkback of Celebr-Asian reading concentrated on the interrogations on the possibilities of the plots. For instance, the audience questioned why the twin-sister cheerers would tell the runners (Run and Mr. Everything) a story during the Marathon and why they would run with them at the same time. Some audience also mentioned that the process of disposing criminal Lee Young didn’t follow a normal legal procedure, and suspected if the play particularly reflected the realistic juristic environment of China. The disputations around the meaning and employment of those toilets in Scene IV were certainly overwhelming. Also, some suspicions were directed against the adoptions of those kinematic terms and descriptions. To sum up, the major topic of the talkback of the second staged reading was authenticity and practicability of what the play was all about.

When the rhythm slowed down, the acting did not take main focus. Instead, the script itself becomes a new center of the performance, whereupon its problematic issues might be discovered and exposed. For example, in the Scene II (Marathon – Run with Others; Run without End), I attempted to borrow the style of female duo to represent the story of twin sisters and to embody the images of them during retelling the fairy tale “wild swans.” However, when the musicality of a rhythmical duo could not be conveyed as expected, the audience began to shift their concentration from the vocal effect to the dramatic structure of the Marathon section, until they started to suspect several details that were in contrast with some realistic assumptions. The discussion around “toilets” could come from the similar reason. The audience was not convinced by the establishment of absurdity in the play, so they held some natural
resistance and suspicion towards the ridiculous setting and story telling.

From a playwright’s perspective, the differences of two stage readings and the talkbacks, regardless some actual performing conditions and limits, introduce me to two considerations: 1) The Final Interpretation of a Playwright; 2) The Intended Audience of a Playwright.

1) The Final Interpretation of a Playwright

We usually presume that setting up a production interpretation is the job of a director, before the performance. A playwright has no authority to interpret his/her work as soon as it is textually completed. I believe in such “rules,” but I also believe that: talking back, after a playwright’s “death” and even after the performance, could also convey the intended concept to the audience, which will be also immediately and strongly examined in this section.

Somehow a talkback is a rather cruel moment for a playwright, another bout between an individual and the collective. The goal of the talkback is to help the playwright be totally engaged with the entire theatrical process as well as acquire some ideas from the audience for a rewriting. Also, I would argue that a playwright’s questions to the audience are also the final interpretations.

From my specific case, the questions connect to some certain expectations of the audience responses, and also imply a playwright’s interpretation in a particular way. The deeper layers of the questions are: What are your perceptions on the parts to which my questions may have related? Have you noticed the playwright’s intentions which are mentioned by the questions? Did those interpretative strategies work for you or you just experience them by listening to the questions? Since the talkback is a public discussion, the audience, as a community of receptors, would express certain “performative honesties” to the play. Therefore, taking advantage of such audience responses will allow a playwright to examine his/her work through an extreme but straightforward method. In other words, the feedback from the audience will either resonate with most of the playwright’s intentions that makes him/her keep working in a certain pattern, or give several overwhelming attacks to the playwright’s work until s/he has to totally give up such ideas. From my point of view, in either way, the final
interpretations by asking those questions to the audience will effectively allow a playwright to become involved in his/her writing, not merely from a self reconsideration, but through a specific public interplay.

For example, if I asked the audience that “how will you react if I prefer to cast an actress with some gothic and punky styles for the character Run,” the audience might have certain suspicions such as: Why will the playwright have such cast preference? Will such gothic or punky figure perfectly match the intended theatrical environment? Then what is this theatrical environment? Will such acting bring the whole play as well as the audience closed to the theme? Then what is this theme? As a matter of fact, the question establishes and emphasizes the intended production interpretations from a playwright’s viewpoint, which would lead the audience to a possible direction to understand or criticize the play. As a result, the audience might prove the advantages of such cast preference and further prove some other theatrical interpretations around this representation. On the other side, the audience might relentlessly claim that there is no effective interpretation conveyed from a playwright to the audience.

2) The Intended Audience of a Playwright

Consciously or unconsciously, a playwright will have his/her intended audience. Being a playwright, one might not want to make any compromise by considering what the market is. However, lacking any sense of intended audience is equal to ignoring the better possibility of communicating the dramatic ideas to the spectators. From my point of view, I neither expect my script to become a desk text, nor a failed example of lacking communication. Therefore, it will be a strategic assistance of writing by consciously asking myself who my intended audience is and taking them as one part of the factors of decision making.

The talkback of Celebr-Asian reading gave a hint that the audience would feel distracted and confused by watching an excessively abstractive or self-expressive work. After finish writing a play, I expect to obtain some recognitions and resonances from the audience, and I would like to use my script to bring forth some positive audience dynamics, which are not only the intra-audience communication but also the
inter-audience communication between the audience and the performers. Therefore, from my point of view, the raw materials, subject matter, characteristics, and philosophical cogitation of a play could begin with but should not only take place on a self-oriented site.

Some confusing and controversial details will invite the resistances and interrogations of the intended audience. How to presume and introduce that confusion and controversy to the audience actually challenges the writing skill of a playwright. A playwright has some responsibilities to prove that any writing choice is derivative from certain requirements of the writing, rather than any pure creative pleasure of the playwright’s Self.

Take Six Ways of Running as an example. As a matter of fact, I placed more considerations on theatrical rhythms and performing choices than on how to bring the audience into those metaphysical or controversial issues. However, the consideration of agency, which decides how my play would effectively deliver its content and theme to the audience, should be equally important. Since my intended audience doesn’t merely include those people who prefer to use their own explanations or visualizations to map out and make up the abstractness, so some considerations seem to be necessary, such as if the structures and story-telling could undertake the performing forms, or if the metaphorical employments in the writing are perceptively legible.

Writing Six Ways of Running, observing the rehearsals and staged readings of the play, and listening to comments from the dramaturgical talkbacks provided me with a complete playwriting procedure in this specific case. It is theatre that, as a special medium, or a cultural and social site, requires me to take part in all of the interactivities among the theatre creators and responders.

In summary, Six Ways of Running is not only a play; it is a one unit of a creative thesis. During the entire process, I firstly chose and explored a theme from another playwright (Gao Xingjian), analyzed and investigated the creative intention and background of the playwright and a particular play (The Other Shore), then conceived my creative writing according to the theoretical research on the play and
playwright, and finally examined the effectiveness of the whole process through staged readings and talkbacks. The journey is a challenge as well as a training program for an apprentice scholar, playwright, and dramaturg. The different steps and directions of the creative thesis resonate with all the participations upon my play, and will open multi-dimensions and references of my future creativities.
Works Cited


