

**The Plays of David Henry Hwang: Queer  
Aesthetics, Selves, Cultures**

Min Zou

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

School of Languages, Cultures and Societies

&

School of English

November, 2023

No jointly authored publications

Intellectual Property and Publication Statements

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

The right of Min Zou to be identified as Author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

© 2023 The University of Leeds and Min Zou

## Acknowledgment

This marks my first attempt to write a book-length piece in English. The writing journey was difficult, requiring constant reflection on my arguments and expressions and overcoming anxiety, self-doubt, and frustration. Therefore, the work underwent multiple revisions and rebuilds.

It is a bit strange to start my acknowledgment with a confession, but this is a thesis about queer things. I am thankful that the project led me to feel more comfortable being strange. To be more accurate, it was my supervisors—Professor Helen Finch and Dr Denis Flannery—who encouraged me to do so. I cannot describe how much I learned from them. As I mentioned earlier, I had (maybe still have) difficulty writing in English, but a more significant problem was my fear of expressing myself, resulting in my early writing being timid and robotic. Aside from personality and cultural reasons, I think it also had something to do with my previous academic training in China; it is better to hide the author than let it out. However, my supervisors saw and caught me behind the text. They suggested I use “I,” bring my voice out, talk about my observations, and expand some seemingly weird associations and ideas. More than this, they allowed me to see my deficiencies. I used to indulge in developing my ideas

without considering the reader's perspective. After realizing this, I followed my supervisors' guidance and attempted to write a thesis like developing a story. The process meant a lot for me and the project.

I, therefore, want to attribute my biggest thanks to Helen and Denis, whose ideas, intelligence, humor, patience, and creativity inspired me a lot. Moreover, they endowed me with the opportunity to finish a Ph.D. at the University of Leeds. During the course, they provided care and consistent support, regardless of their busy jobs and health problems. I feel lucky to form a queer academic family with them (Helen said that Denis is my "academic mom," and she is the "dad"). I cannot complete the challenging job without their help.

Also, I would like to thank my boyfriend, who accompanied me through depressed, anxious, and panic moments and helped me to survive. Thanks to friends who explored interesting academic topics and ran a podcast on queer literature and art with me. Gratitude to the Leeds-Chinese Scholarship Council Scholarship for funding this study. Thanks to my grandmother, she is always with me, forming the strong, resilient part of my inner self. Thanks to my dreams, which let me see spectacles and those whom I love.

## Abstract

This dissertation traces queer aesthetics—the aesthetic expressions and sensations that queer or refuse essentialized perceptions of selves—in David Henry Hwang’s works. From *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988) to the revival of *M. Butterfly* (2017), the Chinese-American playwright continually experiments with boundaries of gender, race, and human identities in a multicultural and multiracial American society. In his works, he reflects on the socially and historically constructive nature of normative identity categories and probes the possibilities of going beyond their confinement.

The dissertation’s deployment of queer aesthetics, an artistic approach yet to be theorized comprehensively, draws from studies on camp aesthetics and sadomasochism, Judith Halberstam’s work on transgender aesthetics, Jose Esteban Muñoz’s discussion of a queer utopian aesthetic dimension, and Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. The dissertation examines queer selves and aesthetics manifested in Hwang’s works from the 1980s to the late 2010s.

I delve into three separate yet interrelated sites of queerness in Hwang’s writing. In the first site, gender and sexuality, I look at the deviant sexual eroticisms and subversion of gender norms portrayed in Hwang’s *M. Butterfly* (1988) and its following adaptations. The second section focuses on the field of race—how the notion is

problematized and dismantled by the playwright's Millennium fantasy on racial fluidity in *Bondage* (1992) and *Yellow Face* (2007). The last dimension concerns the queer potential of human corporeality and the becoming in/human bodies expressed through queer sounds in Hwang's *The Sound of a Voice* (1983) and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988). The transformative gender expressions, camp sensations, and futuristic queer imaginations of subjectivities, desires, and bodies in these works, I argue, allow dialogues and permeation between the "self" and the "other" and evoke a queer aesthetic sensibility.

Keywords: David Henry Hwang; Queer Aesthetics; Queer Studies; Asian

American Theatre; American Theatre

# Table of Contents

<i>Acknowledgment</i> .....	<i>ii</i>
<i>Abstract</i> .....	<i>iv</i>
<i>Table of Contents</i> .....	<i>vi</i>
<i>List of Figures</i> .....	<i>viii</i>
<i>Chapter One</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	<i>1</i>
<b>David Henry Hwang’s Journey of Queer Exploration</b> .....	<b>10</b>
<b>Queer Theory and Aesthetics</b> .....	<b>17</b>
<b>The Tensions Between Hwang’s Plays and Queer Culture</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>Literature Review</b> .....	<b>49</b>
<b>Overview</b> .....	<b>58</b>
<i>Chapter Two</i> .....	<i>67</i>
<i>M. Butterfly and Its Adaptations: Beyond Gender and Sexuality</i> .....	<i>67</i>
<b>Chapter Introduction</b> .....	<b>67</b>
<b><i>M. Butterfly</i> (1988)</b> .....	<b>73</b>
“Life as Theater”: Camp Role-playing of Identities.....	75
Playing with Established Scripts: Camp Parody of Gender and Race.....	80
Our Bitter-wit: Queer Desires and Camp Sensibilities.....	86
Mutation of One Butterfly Pair: Growing Queer Selves and Transgender Aesthetics .....	92
<b><i>M. Butterfly</i> (1993)</b> .....	<b>99</b>
Metamorphoses into Dragonflies: Queer Transformation and Rebirth .....	100
Sadomasochistic Desires and Patriarchal Power Play .....	112
<b>The Revival version of <i>M. Butterfly</i> (2017)</b> .....	<b>117</b>
Dance in the Dark: “Space-Off” Same-Sex Eroticism .....	120
Becoming Butterflies: Queer Rebirth.....	124
<b>The Evolution of Hwang’s Butterfly</b> .....	<b>136</b>

<b>Chapter Three</b> .....	<b>142</b>
<b><i>Bondage and Yellow Face: Camp, Utopia and Aesthetic Fantasies of Queer Race</i></b> .	<b>142</b>
<b>Chapter Introduction</b> .....	<b>142</b>
<b>How Race Is Queered</b> .....	<b>151</b>
<b><i>Bondage: Sadomasochistic Race Play and Camp Aesthetics</i></b> .....	<b>159</b>
<b><i>Yellow Face: Utopian Imagination of Queered Racial Face</i></b> .....	<b>185</b>
Queering Racial “Face” .....	189
Sing a Utopian Big Song .....	196
<b>Chapter Four</b> .....	<b>204</b>
<b><i>The Sound of a Voice and 1000 Airplanes on the Roof : Queerness, Sound, and Corporeal Becoming</i></b> .....	<b>204</b>
<b>Chapter Introduction</b> .....	<b>204</b>
<b>Part One: <i>The Sound of a Voice</i> (1983)</b> .....	<b>214</b>
Introduction .....	214
Hearing the Inhuman: Sound and Queer Becoming in <i>The Sound of a Voice</i> .....	217
Hearing the Other: Silence, Sound, and Intersubjective Intimacy .....	234
<b>Part Two: <i>1000 Airplanes on the Roof</i> (1988)</b> .....	<b>242</b>
Introduction .....	242
“ <i>What Am I Turning Into?</i> ”: Transformative Sounds and Alien Becoming .....	246
Encounters With Alien Hives: Buzzing and a Queer Alliance .....	253
<b>Chapter Five</b> .....	<b>264</b>
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	<b>264</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>271</b>



## List of Figures

Figure 1. Frame grab from <i>M. Butterfly</i> (1993). The watchful gaze of Song's old housekeeper. ....	102
Figure 2. Frame grab from <i>M. Butterfly</i> (1993). One of the voyeuristic shots of Song Liling and Gallimard's private intimacy .....	103
Figure 3. Frame grab from <i>M. Butterfly</i> (1993). One of the voyeuristic shots of Song Liling and Gallimard's private intimacy .....	103
Figure 4. Frame grab from <i>M. Butterfly</i> (1993). Song Liling and Gallimard's kissing. ....	107

# Chapter One

## Introduction

In a scene from American playwright David Henry Hwang's 1992 one-act play *Bondage*, two characters are shown to be covered from head to toe with leather costumes in a "bondage parlor" located in the San Fernando Valley, California. With their bodies hidden in this way, they play several rounds of games, enacting courtship scenarios between Caucasians, Asians, and African Americans. In doing so, they dramatize a process whereby racialized bodies are imposed with stereotypical labels, producing scenes of sadomasochistic humiliation and punishment. After getting bored with the game of combat that exploits identity discourses embedded in "burning social issues" in the 1990s, the play's female protagonist, Terri, utters these words:

The moment you remove this hood, I'll be completely exposed, while you remain fully covered. And you'll have your victory by the rules of our engagement, while I—I'll fly off over the combat zone (Hwang, 2000, p.278).

Foregrounding the world as a combat zone for people assumed to have "essential" differences and the possibility of "flying over" it, the play as well as Hwang's other

works raises questions on fixed self-other oppositions. Engaging with queer theory that shares a similar skeptical and subversive standpoint regarding the nature of identity with Hwang's, in this thesis, I introduce a concept of "queer aesthetics" to explain and explore the norm-nonconforming beauty concerning the formulation of "self" (or "identity") embedded in Hwang's corpus. My research questions include: How do the "queer aesthetics" that rupture normative identities and self-boundaries find traces in Hwang's theatrical productions from the 1980s to the 2010s? How can these aesthetics relate to or produce the selves that deviate from cultural and collective constructions across various dimensions portrayed in Hwang's plays? Additionally, to what extent do the queer aesthetics relate to the changing context spanning from the 1980s to the 2010s in U.S. society?

To better clarify and contextualize my arguments above and introduce the core concepts of queerness and queer aesthetics in the project, a close examination of the theatrical moment in *Bondage* I quoted earlier would be helpful. In the cited texts, the protagonist Terri's call for transcendence of "a combat zone" constitutes a meaningful metaphor for presenting queer selves and aesthetic sensations in Hwang's plays. Thus, a delve into the notion of a "combat zone," which bears great relevance throughout the entire thesis, can provide a good entry point into the primary concerns of the research. To achieve this, I would like to explore first the word "zone." What kind of "zones"

does the character refer to? What would an escape or a refusal of the existence of the combat zones mean to them (also to the audience, as I will argue)?

In OED, one definition of the term “zone” is “a definite region or area of the earth, or of any place or space...also *figurative*” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023a). Other usages of it include “encircling regions” in a geographic context and “something that encircles like a girdle” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023a). These explanations emphasize the word’s definite and enclosing connotations, which can be visually represented in its counterpart in Chinese “区.” As an ideographic language, Chinese expresses the word with a nearly square-shaped character, indicating its meaning of somewhere being limited and surrounded by definite lines or boundaries. The implied meanings of the word I traced (and its compound of “combat zone,” which suggests a definite region of combat) are reminiscent of a Hunger Games setting, where individuals representing districts from 1 to 12 fight against each other for survival in an enclosed area. The association is a somewhat extreme case. However, it may be indicative of social realities if we realize that numerous people are enlisted to (or “hailed to,” as I talked in depth in Chapter Four) represent their “districts” in combat zones and confront each other for the domain of their subjectivity. In this sense, the suffocating zone referred to by Terri in Hwang’s play metaphorically illustrates a battlefield marked by identity conflicts and binary divisions experienced by these

characters in the 1990s. Misunderstanding definite zones as an infinite world, people fight.

The concept of combat zones is a recurring theme in David Henry Hwang's oeuvre. Throughout his writing career, the American playwright best known for his Broadway hit *M. Butterfly* has written about the conflicts between various supposedly opposed sides: the East and the West, homo and heterosexuals, women and men, human and the nonhuman. Like the characters in *Bondage* who are depleted by "outrage" against people who do not share the same identity, the performance's audience was also shown to live in countless combat zones. For example, the cases of "Blacks against Jews in Crown Heights," "The rise of neo-Nazism in Marseilles and Orange County," and Marc Lépine's antifeminist mass murder in Montreal in 1989 are referred to in the dialogues of the play (Hwang, 2000, p.276). The dominance of concepts of gender, race, nationality, and sexuality in and out of the theater of Hwang reminds us that people are thought to be essentially different from each other for their sexual objects, birthplaces, and bodily characteristics. The perceptions of "us" against "others" appear to constitute irreducible barriers too "natural" to overlook, too pertinent to the sense of self to be transcended.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the multi-ethnic immigrant American society witnessed intense issues of racism, sexism, poverty, imperialism, AIDS, and homophobia

(Kushner, 1995, pp.6-7). Until now, the essentialist mindset regarding identity is still ingrained in social ideologies and discourses, permeating people's understanding of themselves and others. When I write the introduction, the China-US relationship is still fraught with tension. The controversy (with flooding racist comments) concerning the casting of a black actress (Halle Bailey) as the heroine in Disney's "The Little Mermaid" has just subsided. And countless pieces of AI-generated art that mostly depict women with oversexualized, disproportionate, and revealing bodies are continuously posted, circulated, and liked on social media, outlining the images of women expected within a patriarchal society.

On the stage of *Bondage*, however, the dominant identity labels and stereotypes are stripped from the play's two actors. Role-playing and shifting various racial and political personas in the sadomasochistic game, they experiment with the likelihood of "becom[ing] all races," including those "that haven't been born" (Hwang, 2000, p.255). The play's defiant artistic exhibition of unmapped and undefined subjectivity embraces a queer disidentificatory<sup>1</sup> stance—the possibility to "fly off over the combat zone" of gender, race, and other social divisions. In this way, the 1992 performance embodies the

---

<sup>1</sup> By "disidentificatory" I mean a potential to resist existing identificatory labels and structures through reusing them or productive queer imaginations. The word is borrowed from José Esteban Muñoz's theorization on disidentification, which indicates a subject's "tactically and simultaneously work[ing] on, with and against a cultural form" (Muñoz, 1999, P.12).

capability of art and aesthetics to queer fixed knowledge of group identity and, therefore, become a realm for various gender and racial groups to achieve dialogue, understanding, and communication.

Hwang's *Bondage*, as well as many of his other works, remind us how art and aesthetics allow us to envision an elsewhere unrestrained from normative reality. In *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999), Elaine Scarry described "beautiful things" as "unprecedented"; they bring "a sense of the 'newness' or 'newborness' of the entire world" (Scarry, 2001, p.22). Similarly, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in her writing about Marcel Proust observes that, for the writer, "the ultimate guarantee of the vitality of art is its ability to surprise," that is, to present the unlimited, chaotic, and ever-refreshing world as what it is (Sedgwick, 2011, p.33). While it seems that beauty and art can carry us to places we have never been before, they actually, as Susan Sontag writes, "return us to the world in some way more open and enriched" (Sontag, 1966, p.28). In other words, they reveal to us the complicities and wrinkles of the world—all the possible desires and dreams in existence, every unparalleled memory and pleasure, and many more that exceed the already known. Thus, the aesthetic experience of "flying off over" the world magically helps us to "return" to it, a place obscured by the worn patterns of vision.

Coincidentally, when talking about the queer potential of sounds, Drew Daniel

keenly notes that to hear the vast queerness surrounding us is “not as a flight from the world, but as a flight into the world,” for “the world itself is queer” (Daniel, 2011, pp.44, 46). The resonance between Sontag’s and Daniel’s statements encourages an investigation *into* the queer nuances of the reality unfiltered by human significations. Besides, it also makes visible how aesthetic perception can be a tunnel for this investigation. Therefore, I was drawn to approach the aesthetic sensibilities that orient to a queer world unblocked by discursive restrictions, a largely neglected lens in David Henry Hwang and queer studies.

The word “queer” has rich and fluid historical and theoretical implications. Examining the root of this word in Indo-European, German and Latin languages, queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick claims: “the word ‘queer’ itself means across,” to “transverse” and “twist” (Sedgwick, 1994, p.viii). The first occurrence of “queer” in *The Oxford English Dictionary* was in 1508, when it was used to indicate something “odd” (Bennett & Royle, 1995, p.187). Near four hundred years after the period, the usage of the word slipped gradually from its early connotations, which were largely undecidable, to referring specifically to homosexuals. As a derogatory slur, “queer” was used to address, injure, demean, and mock sexual minorities. The imposed interrelatedness between oddity to a group of people who show non-straight desire, as Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle comment, illustrates “the ideas that queerness is written on the body



and implicitly identities it with delinquency or illness” (Bennett and Royle, 1995, p.188). In the late 1980s, many LGBTQ activities embraced and reclaimed the insulting term, using it as a source of self-empowerment and a resistance to normative and reductive categories and identities. In this way, the world has taken on a more affirmative and inclusive connotation. As summarized by Jodie Taylor, “Queer can be a political or ethical approach, an aesthetic quality, a mode of interpretation or way of seeing, a perspective or orientation, or a way of desiring, identifying or disidentifying” (2012, pp.14-15). It is open to nuances of the world and the self.

Different from many Westerners who are familiar with the violence once contained in this word, the term left me, a Chinese born after the 1990s, with a somewhat positive impression. For the widely accepted Chinese transliteration of it-- Kuer (酷儿), which is literally a strange combination of the adjective “cool” and a meaningless suffix “er,” sounds “strange” but “cool.” The usage of Ku, or “酷”, as the counterpart of the English word “cool” is commonly seen in modern China. It is frequently used to describe a handsome person with cold expressions and stylized manners or a personalized person (Xian dai han yu ci dian现代汉语词典, 2005, p.789). Therefore, when I first got to know the term queer in Chinese, it seemed to denote a sign of courage to be “cool”—not afraid to be noticed, discussed, humiliated, and isolated for embracing the abnormal in normative society. This translation influenced

my focus of the concept: its “coolness” in challenging enforced social categorizations, in celebrating “eccentric,” “odd,” and “strange” styles, and in opening to the potential and possibilities of our desires and bodies (Cherry, 2009, p.149; OED, 1993, p.41; Muñoz, 2009).

In this project, therefore, queer is not merely about gender and sexuality (its meaning of “gay,” for example) but also other cultural constructions. Disrupting the notion of “subject” itself, the term dissolves the essentialist notions of identities—racial, sexual, gender, and national identities and other categories—into the collection of cultures, power, and discourses (Halberstam, 1995, p.139; Butler, 1999; Taylor, 2012, pp.14-15). This research, then, aims to discuss an aesthetic effect, an anti-essentialist beauty that can be perceived in the free and fluid expression of identities.

In English, the term “aesthetics” refers to “the philosophical study of beauty and taste” and the “philosophy of art”<sup>2</sup> (Munro & Scruton, 2020). The research defines the concept as a study of aesthetic sensibility and experience in the perception of beauty, as well as expressions, styles, and principles of beauty in artistic creation. My study concentrates on the “sense of beauty” or “aesthetic feeling” aroused by queerness in artworks. It resonates with the counterpart of “aesthetics” (or aesthetic) in Chinese -- 美学, which is composed of two characters representing “beauty” and “study/discipline”

---

<sup>2</sup>. An area of philosophy that deals with the nature of art.

and denoting a study of beauty. As such, I use “a queer aesthetic (sensitivity)” to address an aesthetic experience aroused in the collapse of identity and power for both the creator and recipients of such an aesthetic.

Drawing on queer studies represented by Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam, Jose Esteban Muñoz, and camp criticism, this research traces the queer aesthetics in Hwang’s artistic works that allow the fluidity of gender, racial and national identities as well as dialogues and permeation between the self and the other.

## **David Henry Hwang’s Journey of Queer Exploration**

As a Chinese American playwright who stands at the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures in the multiracial society of the 1990s United States, Hwang displayed a deep concern for the issues of cultural conflicts and identity divisions. Throughout his life and art career, the playwright constantly explores the formations and loss of the self as a gendered, racialized, and socially constructed entity.

Born on August 11, 1957, Hwang was the eldest child in a wealthy Chinese immigrant family in Los Angeles. His parents, Henry Hwang and Dorothy Hwang, once lived in Chinese cities (Xiamen and Shanghai) before settling in the U.S. In the 1950s, they studied at the University of Southern California, where they met and fell in love. When Hwang was a child, he had access to Asian heritage through tales and fables told

by older generations. Though having such a Chinese American background, Hwang grew up like other Western children. He mentioned, “We were raised pretty much as white European Americans in terms of the things we celebrated. There’s an odd confluence in my family between a father who decided to turn away from things Chinese and a mother whose family had been converted to Christianity in China several generations back” (Moss-Coane, 1996, p.284). The Hwang family, therefore, had no trouble in assimilating into the local neighborhood and leading a Westernized life.

In the early days of his life in the 1960s and 70s, the playwright hardly encountered racial discrimination or viewed himself as essentially different from the people surrounding him. However, he was conscious of the stereotypical images of Chinese Americans in mainstream culture, which brought him discomfort. As he described, “They [these images] were consistently inhuman: either inhumanly bad (Fu Manchu, Japanese soldiers) or inhumanly good (Charlie Chan, Asian ingénues who died for the love of a white B-movie actor)” (Hwang, 2002). The presumed difference of Asian people, either demonized or idealized in the public imagination, prompted the playwright to question the nature of ethnic identity. His critical view regarding racial issues resonated with his reflection on fixed religious norms. For quite a long period, Hwang was exposed to strict Christian fundamentalism values in his family, which raised his awareness of political dogmas and his objections against them.

During his college life at Stanford University, Hwang set his career goal of becoming a playwright. Regardless of his father's expectation for him to be a lawyer, Hwang developed his interest in theater and playwriting. He immersed himself in reading contemporary dramatic works. The plays of Sam Shepard, Ntozake Shang, Tom Stoppard, Peter Shaffer, and David Mamet, among many others, opened a new world for him and brought impulse to his own writing. He also gained much inspiration from Asian American literature. For example, Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Women Warrior* (1976) was of importance in encouraging Hwang's self-exploration and self-expression as a Chinese American. Hwang said, "As an Asian American, she [Kingston] was the first author who spoke in a voice that seemed special, directly related to me. Before reading her work, I didn't think it was possible to write about my own parochial concerns; they didn't seem to have a place in literature as such" (Lyons, 1999, p.241).

In 1978, during his junior-to-senior year interval, Hwang attended a summer program at Padua Hills Playwrights Festival and gained the chance to work with Sam Shepard. The experience prompted him to write his first play, drawing from personal observations and ideas about Chinese immigrants in American society. The play, entitled *FOB* ("fresh off the boat"), received positive responses and was performed successfully on the stage of Public Theater in 1980.

It was in the same period of time at Stanford that the playwright actively engaged

with Asian communities. According to Hwang, he transitioned from an assimilationist in high school to a stage of being an “isolationist nationalist” (Smith, 1993, p.43). At this stage, he became more aware of his Chinese minority identity and attempted to empower his community by defying dominant racial stereotypes. He found interest in Eastern cultures and philosophy, got involved in political activities, and produced “Asian American protest music” with other Asian students in a band called Bamboo (Smith, 1993, p.43). While it seemed that the playwright embraced an essential and fixed ethnic identity, inherently, he was not convinced of a binary mindset when it came to identity issues. In a 1993 interview with *New York Magazine*, he talked about uncomfortable feelings regarding the reductive ideologies that came along with his investigation of his racial origins. “I’ve never been really politically correct. I have an intrinsic discomfort with anything that lacks complexity. It becomes a Christian fundamentalism of the right or left” (Smith, 1993, p.43). The viewpoint was manifested more evidently in his later life.

As Hwang continued to advance his playwriting career, he kept writing about his Chinese American identity, which often, disappointingly, became a label applied to him. In 1981, after completing his drama courses at Yale for one academic year, he had his second and third plays, *The Dance and the Railroad* and *Family Devotions*, successfully staged off-Broadway. The two plays present Chinese Americans’ real lives in different

aspects. The *Dance and the Railroad* set its focus on the Chinese rail laborers' (Coolies) strike in 1867 and portrays these social minorities' suffering, resilience, and strong willpower to achieve their self-worth. The other play *Family Devotions*, created based on Hwang's personal life, revolves around Chinese immigrants' conflicts in accepting evangelist Christianity and their cultural root awakening. These works reflected the impact of Hwang's exploration of his ethnic heritage. It is, therefore, not strange that the playwright described his first three works as "The Trilogy of Chinese America" (Chua, Z.B., 2018). As Hwang became increasingly known for these plays, he suddenly found that both he and his works tended to be defined exclusively by the "Chinese American" label. This realization catalyzed his reflection on his previous political position: "I became aware that there were certain limitations in the sort of isolationist/nationalist models" (Cooperman, 1995, p.371). In his next two plays, which are more experimental in aesthetics, he explored broader subjects and implanted his question on the nature of identity.

In 1983, Hwang's project inspired by Japanese mythology and literature—*Sound and Beauty*— was released in Joseph Papp Public Theater. It consists of two one-act plays. *The Sound of a Voice*, the first part of the show, explores the possibility of interdependence and understanding across different identity barriers; the second work, *The House of Sleeping Beauties*, a personal adaptation of Yasunari Kawabata's 1961

novella of the same name, discussed the themes of death and youth. The production—especially the first play—reflected the playwright’s revision of the “isolationist model” he took before. Instead of adhering to identity narratives, he attempted to problematize and disrupt them, demonstrating the suffocating consequences of self-other confrontation. In this way, he took a position that I argue is “queer” in the research. As I cited before, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s accounts, the very original meaning of queerness lies in the capacity to “transverse” and “twist” discrete borders (Sedgwick, 1994, p.viii). Investigating the notion of self as shaped and limited by certain ideologies and discourses in his playwriting, Hwang probes the possibility to queer or transcend normative social categories.

The playwright’s tendency to queer or traverse stable identities and their inherent power hierarchy was manifested in many of his subsequent works. After three years of silence following *Sound and Beauty* and a failed attempt to create a play with an entirely white cast, Hwang made his most commercially successful play *M. Butterfly* in 1988—a Tony Award-winning piece plugged into the biased imaginations of the East and West, women and men. As a rewriting of Puccini’s classic opera *Madama Butterfly* (1904), it unsettles the notions of gender and race embodied in the original work with identity ambiguity and fluidity. In addition to this play, Hwang’s experimentation with selves and relationships that transcend social categories was manifested throughout his



later playwriting. For example, the disrupted and alienated human identity in *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1989), the race drag in *Bondage* (1993), and the hilarious turbulences on the edge of the White/Asian division in *Yellow Face* (2007) demonstrate his thoughts on this aspect.

From a college student to a well-established writer, Hwang kept grappling with the matters of self, identity, and what they mean to people. After the conscious awakening of his racial otherness, he attempted to “discover more truthful images to replace the stereotypical ones of my youth” (Hwang, 2002). This earlier strategy turned into questioning the power dynamics and limitations embedded in the notion of authentic identity. That is, to realize the definition of “who we are” as sources of oppression, violence, and confrontation. The playwright’s move away from a stable and ontological understanding of the self is evident as he bridges the second- and third-generation Asian American writers. In the foreword of *Version 3.0: Contemporary Asian American Plays*, Hwang situates himself among “second-wave” playwrights who portray the lives of his ethnic community. As he reviews, the first generation of this area, like Frank Chin, C. Y. Lee and Wakako Yamauchi, laid a foundation for Asian American theater in the 1960s and 1970s. The second wave writers, then, tend to be more focused on breaking down dominant racial stereotypes in search for “the holy grail of authenticity” (Hwang, 2011, p. xi). However, compared with other writers in this

wave who often underscore a sense of belonging to their ethnic group, he is more cautious of and critical of the notion of racial authenticity. In a 2003 article titled “A New Musical by Rodgers and Hwang” published in *New York Times*, he used the phrase again, but in a skeptical way: “I have become less interested in seeking some holy grail of authenticity and more convinced of the need to create characters who burst from the page or stage with the richness, complexity and contradictions of real people” (Hwang, 2002). This shows that his thoughts and work are closer to the third-wave writers, who, in his words, “have largely abandoned the quest for the holy grail of authenticity, since Asian America is neither monolithic nor uniform” (Hwang, 2011, pp. xi-xii). The anti-essentialist understanding of the self echoes the propositions of queer theory. In his works, Hwang’s queer thinking with regard to gender, sexuality, race and human being is expressed aesthetically. As I will illustrate in other chapters, the playwright’s plays allow for an escape from the combat zone of discursive boundaries, evoking queer aesthetic sensibilities.

## **Queer Theory and Aesthetics**

Having introduced David Henry Hwang’s exploration of queer selves and corresponding aesthetic productions, in this section, I will unpack the theoretical foundation underpinning the nebulous idea of ‘queer aesthetics’ developed in the

research. Although researchers have explored the concept from various perspectives, there is yet to be a systematic methodology for it. My use of queer aesthetics, therefore, considers the perspectives of the previous research, fostering a complementary dialogue among them. The theoretical framework is built based on Hwang's highly stylized works, incorporating layers and elements specific to their queer aesthetic expressions. In this way, along the way of my readings and exploration, I consistently delve into the depth of queer aesthetics and formulate an approach that integrates diverse academic accounts, including those not frequently associated with the field of queer studies.

Before I move on and detail the sketch of the approach, I will first elaborate on queer theory. This critical approach inspires my research on Hwang's portrayal of subjectivities and engagements that are at odds with dominant knowledge surrounding identity, such as heteronormativity and racial categories.

Devoted to "voiding the categories of the dominant," queer theory as a way of rethinking the world, an increasingly institutionalized discipline, and a series of intricate and often contradictory thoughts took shape under the influence of post-structuralist philosophy (Cleto, 1999b, p.14). Deviating from ontological philosophy's proclamation about the truth and nature of the self (subject) in the seventeenth century, postmodern theorists shed light on how self-formation and the relevant categories are primarily the results of power operation and social structures. Conventional thinking

about the self, which is epitomized in René Descartes' well-known and influential statement "I think therefore I am," celebrates an autonomous "I" who is capable of thinking freely and making decisions according to "my" will and reason. That is to say, it is assumed that there is something essential and stable about ourselves—what we believe we are and what we are not. The awareness of selfhood or self-knowledge is challenged by scholars who contributed to postmodern theories in various fields, such as Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Gilles Deleuze. While the subject is conventionally perceived as a natural and monolithic being, around which sets of generalizing truths are accepted, these scholars reveal that its formation is indebted to various social and cultural factors. For instance, Freud reminds us that unconsciousness constitutes a significant yet often imperceptible part of ourselves, affecting what should or should not be included in "my" subjectivity.<sup>3</sup> Likewise, claiming "man is an ideological animal by nature," Althusser reveals that the formation of the subject is processed through what he calls an "interpellation" from ideology (Althusser, 1971, pp.171, 173-174). This means that individuals'

---

<sup>3</sup>. This overview of Freud's subjectivity can be well illustrated by Cherry Brigid's interpretation of the psychoanalytic term uncanny: "This [uncanny] is a process of the unconscious mind in that unwanted, painful, unpleasant, distressing or uncomfortable experiences, desires or thoughts are never entirely forgotten, but are 'submerged' and thus preserved – repressed – in the unconscious (and in this respect relate to the monsters from the id and the creatures from the black lagoon of horror cinema). In Freud's model, these unwanted experiences, desires and thoughts are constantly threatening to return to the conscious level of the mind – the 'return of the repressed'" (Cherry, 2009, P.104).

understanding of themselves is largely framed by ideological institutions, which craft identifiable, recognizable social roles and desires, summoning people to assume them.

Among these post-structuralist accounts, Foucault's theories had a remarkably far-reaching impact on the emergence and development of queer theory. In Foucault's academic contributions, such as *The History of Sexuality* (1976), the French philosopher provides a genealogical examination regarding the discursive productions and interventions of sexual identities. He articulates how homosexuality as a deviant practice against social norms gradually forms a significant marker of personal identity at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This label of people, as he points out, was not so effective in deciding who a person was in ancient societies. Foucault writes, "Homosexuality appeared as one of the forms of sexuality when it was transposed from the practice of sodomy onto a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphroditism of the soul. The sodomite was a temporary aberration; the homosexual is now a species" (Foucault, Michel, 1978, p.43). This observation reveals the extent to which the seemingly ontological sexual categories are shaped by power dynamics within a specific context, subjected to educational, penal, medical institutions as well as discourses in daily life. That is to say, what we suppose as a natural fact about ourselves is deeply rooted in the knowledge system and social expectations. Thus, Foucault's formulation around sex questions the existing boundaries between normal and abnormal, hetero- and

homosexuals.

Established upon the rich legacy of postmodern findings and discussions, queer theory is directed at reexamining and challenging per-established concepts and norms that constitute our self-awareness, particularly hegemonic heterosexual enactments. Since its emergence in the 1990s, this academic field has witnessed developments in numerous and diverse interconnected trajectories. In the subsequent section, I will illuminate the theory's intricacies by reviewing its historical background and delineating different queer theorists' reflections on human bodies and selves across varied aspects.

In the 1970s and 1980s, homosexual minorities in the United States made notable political progress in promoting social visibility and social acceptance (Seidman, 1996, p.9). At that time, gay and lesbian communities and organizations such as Gay Activists Alliance tended to adopt a political strategy based on a unified sexual identity. They attempted to elevate social positions and secure equal legal rights by assimilating into the dominant values and systems, a path of struggle still effective and influential today (Spargo, 1999, pp.29-31). The political agenda, however, encountered a set of problems within and outside homosexual subcultural groups. First and foremost, "the myth of a unified and unifying gay and/or lesbian identity" collapsed with increasing incongruities and disagreements regarding racial, gender, and desire issues inside homosexual

communities (Spargo, 1999, p.33). The embrace of an essential and positive political identity inevitably limited desires that did not meet the criteria of that identity, such as that of SM participants, bisexuals, and more individuals with alternative, ambiguous sexual preferences, and caused heated debates and “sex wars” (Spargo, 1999, pp.32-33). The gay movements in the 80s were also critiqued for eclipsing people of color and lower class (Seidman, 1996, p.10). Furthermore, the AIDS epidemic led to a backlash of homophobia in public space, which showed the limitation of “inclusion” politics (Seidman, 1996, p.10). It also triggered more radical and “decentralised” resistance from individuals who were discriminated against and oppressed for the disease (Spargo, 1999, p.34). Under such circumstances, Act Up, Queer Nation, and other homosexual groups were established; they used the insulting word “queer” for self-reference, engaging with LGBT people with diverse differences and defying the dominant logic imposed on their bodies.

In parallel to queer activism’s prominence in the public domain, scholars in the fields of gender, homosexual, and feminist studies also tapped into the theoretical value of the term queer. In a 1991 essay “Queer Theory: Lesbian and Gay Sexualities,” published in the journal *Difference* along with other work emerging from a conference on gay sexuality, Teresa de Lauretis states, “the term ‘queer,’ juxtaposed to the ‘lesbian and gay’ of the subtitle, is intended to mark a certain critical distance from the latter, by

now established and often convenient, formula” (Lauretis, 1991, p.iv). Resisting a singular position of identification embedded in gay and lesbian discourses, the term poses a category crisis to the binary ideologies in normative cultures. It is open for more deviant, multiple, and heterogeneous desires and self-expression. In the 1990s, scholars represented by Judith Butler and Eve Sedgwick made fundamental contributions to the area of queer studies. Aligned closely with postfeminist and LGBT cultural studies, queer theorists at that period were concerned with interrogating the social constructions of normal gender and sexual concepts and revealing the power relations that constitute naturalized identities. To better clarify these scholars’ formulation of queer theory and their theoretical groundwork, it is essential to first introduce key concepts such as “performativity.”

In *How to Do Things with Words* (1955/1962), the British linguistic philosopher J. L. Austin articulated the need to distinguish a kind of utterances that imposes power on the world rather than merely describing or reporting facts. He calls them “performative” utterances. The name originates from the verb “to perform” to indicate “that the issuing of the utterance is the performing of an action” (Austin, 1962, pp.5-6). Austin’s usage of the word “perform” here aligns with one of its definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary: “To do, carry out, execute, or accomplish (something commanded, promised, or undertaken, or (in an extended sense) an action, operation, process,



function” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2023b). So, by saying “performative,” he intends to highlight some cases when words effect as a doing, leading to direct consequences. Listing occasions such as “weddings,” “betting,” and “naming,” Austin demonstrates how performative languages are capable of changing the world. As explained in *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism* (2018), these languages serve to “bring something new into existence, or to modify, create, or establish a certain relationship between people” (Leitch et al., 2018, p.1235). In this way, languages can intervene, transform, and shape reality when they correspond with conventions related to a speech occasion.

Because the term “performativity” has connotations of dramatic performances, it can be easily conflated with “theatricality.” Therefore, I find it necessary to address the difference between the two connotations and clarify my application of the term performativity in this study. To appropriate Michael Fried’s concept in his book *Theatricality and Absorption* (1976), “theatricality” stresses an awareness of and interaction with the presence of the beholder or spectatorship. As Fried notes, French artists in the 1750s and 1760s valued visual arts that display “anti-theatrical” settings, meaning that the figure(s) in paintings is/are “absorbed” in what they do, forgetting the beholders in front of the canvas (Fried, 1980, p.5). In this sense, addressing the presence of the spectator is significant for creating theatricality (Fried, 1980, p.5). However, in

the context of Austin's theories and related research, performativity is a notion that foregrounds the accomplishment of an action with speech. Therefore, my study's usage of performativity denotes the effect-invoking capabilities of words, acts, and social scenes. When I intend to convey the theatrical dimension of the concept, I employ the expression of "theatricality" to avoid lexical confusion.

The idea that language can be operative in causing effects on the world, alongside Derrida's theorization of "iteration," inspired many queer theorists' thoughts on how social discourses shape gendered and sexualized bodies and subjectivities. Building on Austin's work, Judith Butler and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick formulate the notions of "gender performativity" and "queer performativity." Butler articulates that identities such as gender are the result of reiterative discourses. In a famous passage from her monograph *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* published in 1990, Butler writes, "Gender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (Butler, 1999, pp.43-44). The statement reveals the performative operations of normative ideologies circulated in reality, which produce impressions of what identities should be like and consolidate them as natural beings through each repetitive reenactment and performance.

For Butler, the working of gender binarism is dramatically epitomized in drag acts and parodic shows. She states:

In imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself—as well as its contingency. In the place of the law of heterosexual coherence, we see sex and gender denaturalized by means of a performance which avows their distinctness and dramatizes the cultural mechanism of their fabricated unity (Butler, 1999, p.175).

By saying this, Butler is not suggesting that people can change or wear a pre-given gender identity like performers on stage, which implies that they are free to select any gender roles, a common misreading of her accounts. Instead, she intends to accentuate that drag plays visualize ironically the formation of gender as a “fantasy” of an absent original identity—another “fantasy” (Butler, 1999, p.175). In this process, there is no conscious subject or performer; the gendered identities and bodies are acted out through performances and appearance—a doing rather than a being.

Though Butler warns readers not to conflate performativity with theatricality or performance, she pays special attention to the theatrical dimension embodied in gender reiteration. In the preface to the reprinted 1999 edition of *Gender Trouble*, she writes,

My theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so, and that a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power

invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions. In *Excitable Speech*, I sought to show that the speech act is at once performed (and thus theatrical, presented to an audience, subject to interpretation), and linguistic, inducing a set of effects through its implied relation to linguistic conventions (Butler, 1999, p.xxv).

In other words, the procedure of identification can be viewed as taking place in a social theatre, with disciplines and power relations regulating scripts for roles to be performed. Meanwhile, social dramatic practices such as drag, as I discussed earlier, are capable of revealing exactly how this mechanism works.

Sedgwick, then, was concerned more with how affects constitute queer beings and identification. She observed the performative and transformative force embodied in humiliation and stigmatization. The example she offered—“shame on you,” effects a process whereby the speaker confers shame and shyness on another person (Sedgwick, 1993, p.4). The speech of humiliation is performative, for it is not just a statement; rather, it effectively imposes the affect of shame and separates the “abnormal” from the “normal,” thereby constructing its receiver a queer subject position. As Sedgwick explains, the utterance epitomizes a “shame floods into being” moment, “a disruptive moment, in a circuit of identity-constituting identificatory communication,” or a loss of response, recognition, and connection from/of others (Sedgwick, 1993, p.5). For Sedgwick, the performativity of shame primarily lies in how the affect makes space for

a sense of isolated and queer self; it bears on words but more pervasively social scenes involving insult, humiliation, and exclusion. Such “queer performativity” is therefore not limited to homosexuals but also people who are shaped by the disruptive moments of shaming.

Given the historical and social context in which queer theory emerged, it is not hard to find that issues of gender and sexuality constitute a focal point within the research area. As the theory experienced further and often interdisciplinary development, it is shown to encompass exploration and interrogation of broader layers of identification, including race, nation, class, among many others. After all, the term ‘queer’ itself resists being rigidly pinned down; it remains a critical distance from a wide range of discursive knowledge and concepts. As David Halperin stated in *Saint Foucault*, “Queer is by definition whatever is at odds with the normal, the legitimate, the dominant” (Halperin, 1995, p.62). In this way, queer theory draws our attention to *all* bodies, identities, and desires under the mediation and regulation of mainstream discourse, challenging the boundaries of social ideology that constitutes “me-ness.” In my research, then, I adopt a broader sense of queerness. Following my investigation of queer selves and aesthetics in David Henry Hwang’s theatrical works, I expand and explore the subjects of queering to the notions of race and even humans per se. In this regard, decolonial and posthuman thinking that does not belong to queer studies in a

narrow sense inspired me a lot.

For instance, many postcolonial scholars borrow Judith Butler's formulation of gender performativity and question racial identity's naturalness. In Katrin Sieg's book *Ethnic Drag* (2009), the author examines how the cultural masquerade of ethnicity in postwar West Germany discloses race as performative acts. As she explains, "[e]thnic drag includes not only cross-racial casting on stage, but more generally the performance of "race" as masquerade" (Sieg, 2002, p.2). In the introduction of Chapter Two, I provide a detailed queer account of race—how the concept is historically and culturally produced and enlist the human within mainstream-edge and superiority-inferiority hierarchies. Therefore, I will not delve into this topic further here.

From the perspective of posthumanism, many researchers likewise pay attention to queer possibilities of disrupting the boundaries of the human entity. Scholars such as Rosi Braidotti (2013) point out that the binary distinction between human and non-human is underpinned by an anthropocentric value system, which decides who is qualified to be a human subject and who to be excluded as the others. In my final chapter dealing with the transgression of human/alien/ghost identity in Hwang's *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988) and *The Sound of a Voice* (1983), I engage "a new queer methodology" proposed in *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (2009), which combines the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari with queer theory (Storr and Nigianni,

2009, p.8). The queer perspective advocates an “essential”<sup>4</sup> becoming state of bodies formed in connecting and relating, “an open futurity, in terms of virtualities and not mere possibilities” that liberates us from the notion of human (Storr and Nigianni, 2009, pp.8,136).

Although Deleuze is not a queer theorist, his thought can inspire a new path in theorizing the aesthetics of queerness that affirm the experimental creativity of bodies and desires (Colebrook, 2008; Storr and Nigianni, 2009). A notable queer theorization based on performativity (as famously proposed by Judith Butler) accentuates the cultural constructions of subjects and queer selves in (failed) reiteration of normative imperatives.<sup>5</sup> The queerness in Deleuzian thinking, however, lies in its emphasis on the unlimited transformative and transgressive force of bodies and desires, which can produce heterogeneous life forms towards non-identity. This allows us to think about life as not mapped in existing discursive structures; instead, it is always temporary, developing, becoming, differencing, capable of engaging with other bodies and

---

<sup>4</sup>. This perspective proposes “another essence”, which is contrary to see the essence as monolithic. Rather the essence is “imagined as the force of a ‘could have been otherwise’, the principal force that keeps the future unpredictable and thus opens up the capacity of the body to become-other through its encounters with other body-forces” (Nigianni & Chrysanthi, 2009, P.6).

<sup>5</sup> Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr, and Claire Colebrook are among the researchers who propose to employ Deleuzian philosophy in queer theory. Their discussions all addressed the limitation of prevalent queer methodology that tends to regard cultural construction as the only way of self-formation and resistance (Colebrook, 2008; Storr and Nigianni, 2009).

disrupting territories. Deleuze's philosophy proliferates queer theories by conjuring possibilities not defined by established humanistic signification. The tensions between queer approaches formulated by Judith Butler and informed by Deleuze are discussed in detail in the introduction of Chapter Four.

As I approach the queerness and "S/M" (sodomasochistic) elements in Hwang's writings, I applied Gilles Deleuze and Michel Foucault's accounts surrounding sadomasochism in my interpretation. The term sadomasochism was coined with the name of two writers, Marquis de Sade and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, who are famous for their works exploring eroticism related to pain and power. As a nonconforming sex behavior, S/M. is closely associated with queerness and campness with its theatrical, defiant attributes, humor, and absurdity in its process (Pugh, 2016, p.89; Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 1989). Foucault also expresses interest in the fluidity of power embodied in the change of S/M roles: "the S/M game...is always fluid...It is an acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure" (Foucault, 1984, pp.29-30). The S/M elements in *M. Butterfly* and *Bondage*, I argue, enable a particular expression of queer aesthetics.

The theories introduced above are crucial for my readings of queer selves and understanding gender, racial, and human identities as social constructions. In terms of my study on queer aesthetics, my theoretical framework involves camp aesthetic



studies, Judith Halberstam's work on a transgender aesthetic, and queer futurity aesthetics as discussed by Jose Esteban Muñoz, among many others.

### **Theories of Camp**

As “the total body of performative practices and strategies used to enact a queer identity,” camp describes a certain artistic expression of queerness (Meyer, 2005, p.139). In “Notes on Camp” (published in 1964), Susan Sontag describes it as an aesthetic sensibility, taste, and style that expresses a “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration” (Sontag, 1966, p.275). It has an affinity with frivolity, skepticism, and playfulness, which disturbs what is deemed as natural and serious; as Sontag states, “Camp sees everything in quotation marks;” “One can be serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious” (Sontag, 1966, pp.280, 288). As such, a camp lens maintains a critical distance from ideology, norms, and orders in a closed power system, reveling in overplaying the artificiality of concepts and objects.

In the face of the dominant polarized way of seeing the world—defining objects or persons as either abnormal or normal—camp provides a field to display the visibility of unfixed identities and explore the possibilities of queer subjects. Such camp elements as “parody, exaggeration, theatricality, humor” are employed by the marginalized groups to disturb the constructions of “gender, race, class” that energize and sustain monolithic heterosexual, colonial, and other dominant discourses (Sullivan, 2007,

p.193). When examining intricate tensions between camp and queer theory, David Bergman writes, “For [Judith] Butler, the hyperbolic, parodic, anarchic, redundant style of camp is the very way to bring heterosexist attitudes of originality, naturalism, and normalcy to their knees (Bergman, 1993, p.11). This statement foregrounds the subversive power of camp’s excessive style of expression. Through an ironic and playful attitude, camp teases and questions the “originality,” authenticity, or the supposed nature of one’s gender and sexuality in a compulsory heterosexual world (Bergman, 1993, p.11). Indeed, it is a sensibility that undoes dominant meanings by playing out the power relations that create and sustain them.

It is therefore highly noticed that camp is closely linked with gayness. In the introduction of *Camp Grounds: Style and Homosexuality* (1993), David Bergman articulates how camp ties to a homosexual context. He points out that the non-straight “eroticism” of sexual minorities is capable of “throw[ing] into question the naturalization of desire” (Bergman, 1993, p.5). A gay or queer perspective and life experience provide another way of understanding the world. Similarly, Moe Meyer exploits the camp subversive power employed by the gay subculture. For him, camp parody is an effective political tactic in the sense that it allows more queer visibility in a heterosexual society and a challenge to normative gender roles (Meyer, 2005, p.139). Taken together, camp theories apply to my readings of Hwang’s works of *M. Butterfly*,

*Bondage* and *Yellow Face*, which are highly stylized with ironic language, theatrical narration, playfulness, and excess that disturb the binarized and hierarchized sexual and racial categorization. Moreover, it offers a lens for interpreting aesthetic expressions of queer desires in *M. Butterfly*, in which homosexual affection between the protagonists occupies a central position in the whole story.

### **Queer Utopian Aesthetics**

My interpretation of queer aesthetic sensitivities in Hwang's writing is also supported by Jose Esteban Muñoz's theorization of "queer utopian aesthetics" (Muñoz, 2009, p.169). In Muñoz's monograph *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), he explores the aesthetic modes that allow us to find queer potential in the heteronormative present. Inspired by German Frankfurt philosophers such as Ernst Bloch who regard utopia as a critique of the existing world, Muñoz sheds light on queerness as something yet to come—a utopian anticipation that exceeds the limitations of the here and now.

This conception of queer embraces the unactualized potent of human sexualities, desires and subjectivities. It also offers an alternative insight distinct from the emerging tendency of homonormativity, a queer agenda that yields to dominant heterosexual institutions and established binary orders. He examines, in particular, how the utopian force is embodied and animated in aesthetic practices and sensations. As he writes, "The

aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity” (Muñoz, 2009, p.1). Muñoz argues that queer aesthetics indicate a rejection of the repressive and procreative order. The aesthetic domain in Art and fantasy allows a new way of perceiving the world. More importantly, it is charged with the performative power of opening a queer world within the normative reality. In much the same sense, Muñoz invites people to look into the past as a source of future-making. As he illustrated, memories, aesthetic practices, and cultural texts can “do utopia” in the present and orient towards a better future (Muñoz, 2009, p.26).

Aligned with Muñoz’s idea of queer aesthetic utopia, Matthew Isherwood examines, in particular, the link between aesthetic experience, queer desires,<sup>6</sup> and bodily sensation, suggesting that queerness opens an alternative space where “seemingly impossible desires can be imaged” (Isherwood, 2020, p.236). Hwang’s works provide an excellent example of the queer aesthetics accounts above. In the 2017 revival of *M. Butterfly*, for example, the male protagonists’ transformation into two butterflies offers a queer imagination for non-straight togetherness. The scene calls on an ancient Chinese theatrical piece, *Butterfly Lovers*, and reappropriates the past story to cast a promising queer future. In Chapter Three, in particular, I investigate the queer utopia manifested in Hwang’s plays that allow for a transcendence of imposed racial

---

<sup>6</sup> In Isherwood’s article, the term “queer desire” refers to same-sex desire.

identities and norms. These plays spark aesthetic imaginations of an elsewhere within the U.S. socio-political reality in the 1990s, echoing the millennium fantasy shared by many other queer theatrical productions such as *Angels in America* (1991 and 1992).

### **Transgender Aesthetic**

The gender transformation enacted in both live performances and on screen in different versions of *M. Butterfly* (1988-2017) warrants a close reading with Judith Halberstam's discussion of a "transgender aesthetic." In *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (2005), Halberstam proposes and examines a "transgender aesthetic" in subcultural artworks, namely, the aesthetic exerted in alternative bodily state of beings as "in-betweenness," ambiguity, transformation, and mutation (Halberstam, 2005, p.105). For Halberstam, the "turbulent" state embodied in trans-ness creates a promising domain for queer artistic production and expression (Halberstam, 2005, p.104). While the term "transgender" is closely interrelated to material, surgical, and biological forms of gender-crossing, it is referred to by Halberstam as the expression of gender ambiguity, which reflects flexible traits between masculinity and femininity.

In more recent transgender (or more broadly, trans\*) studies, there is also an emphasis on undetermined, uncatchable qualities and border-crossing movements of trans configurations, which cause trouble to gender, bodily, and many other social

boundaries. For example, Mel Chen states, “*Trans-* is not a linear space of mediation between two monolithic, autonomous poles, as, for example, ‘female’ and ‘male’ are. ... Rather it is ... more emergent than determinate” (2012, p.136). Likewise, as Trystan T. Cotten notes in a collection of essays *Transgender Migration* (2012), the concept indicated in the book title suggests a focus on “movements of desire, agency, and generativity without unitary subjects or foundations unitary subjects” (Cotten, 2012, p.2). These ideas underscore where transgender identity crosses over with queerness, which rejects adherence to supposed fixed notions and boundaries. They also help account for the moving and transformative identification and desires of characters in *M. Butterfly* (1988-2017). Rather than presenting two cross-dressers’ performances as desiring another identity, this work and its adaptations arguably demonstrate these characters’ pursuit for transformation per se—a transsexual condition, as described by Kate Bornstein, is motivated by the desire to change from a previous identity (1994). Accordingly, I incorporate transgender aesthetics as one dimension of the queer aesthetic approach of this study, tracing the aesthetic expressions of what Halberstam termed “in-between” bodies and growing “selves” in *M. Butterfly* (1988) and the “transformation” and “resurrection” of the queer subjects in the play’s adaptations.

## The Tensions Between Hwang's Plays and Queer Culture

At first sight, it may seem counter-intuitive to position Hwang alongside queer performances of his era. For Hwang has never publically identified as a member of queer communities, and he hardly directly engaged with queer activism and politics actively. However, this section will explore the tensions between Hwang's plays and queer culture around the 1990s through my interpretive approach—their seemingly fractured but, in fact, inextricably linked relationship.

Let me start by elucidating my first claim. That is, Hwang's works reflect the 1990s theoretical exploration of queerness as a disruption of identity boundaries. In the "Foreword" of her 1994 monograph *Tendencies*, Eve Sedgwick examines the word queer's capacity to suggest a movement of "across":

...something about queer is inextinguishable. Queer is a continuing moment, movement, motive - recurrent, eddying, *troublant*. The word "queer" itself means across - it comes from the Indo-European root -*twerkw*, which also yields the German *quer* (transverse), Latin *torquere* (to twist), English *athwart*. (Sedgwick, 1994, p.viii)

Sedgwick's understanding of queer from its very origin here stresses the word's verb usage and the troubles it brings to what it encounters. To me, this quotation well captures the cross/anti-identitarian promise inherent in the concept of "queer." Another expression I found that accurately encapsulates this trait of queer is from Judith Butler.

In *Bodies that Matter* (1993), Butler calls our attention to the “disloyalty against identity” that can happen when a political signifier is recited, a disloyalty that “works the iterability of the signifier for what remains non-self-identical in any invocation of identity” (Butler, 1993, p.220). The phrase Butler uses— “disloyalty against identity,” is what her formulation of queer theory embraces, indicating the discursiveness and mutability of social signifiers. This phrase, along with Sedgwick’s word “across,” constitutes the definition of queer in the thesis. My use of the term largely lies in its power to cross discrete territories, its rebellion against essential identities, and its fluid vitalities.

In my interpretation, Hwang’s plays from the 1980s to 2010s revel in blurring social categories and exploring the transformative potency of the self beyond gender, racial, and humanist ideologies. In this way, his works formed part of the queer culture around the 1990s, engaging in a parallel dialogue with queer intellectuals’ endeavor to theorize the propensity to across and betray essentialized identity.

However, it is indisputably a hasty move to classify all of Hwang’s works as queer performances. Because queer activism and art blooming in the 1980s and 1990s are, as I will discuss, deeply intertwined with the rebellion of gender and heterosexual normativity. In this sense, the term “queer” is almost conflated with a referent of gay, lesbian, bisexual, trans, and more sexual identities. In *The Routledge History of Queer*



*America* (2018), for example, queer is described as a “loose umbrella term for all those sexually and gender-diverse people, activities, relations, categorizations, and identities that fall outside the norms of either their time and place or ours” (Romesburg, 2018, p.4). Moreover, the book’s section “AIDS AND ACTION” that tells queer history in the 1980s and 1990s almost uses queer and LGBT people interchangeably. Therefore I would like to make clear another point that “queer” within the context of political practice and action often refers to homosexual and other sexual minorities. In this embodied use, Hwang’s multiple versions of *M. Butterfly* display direct connections to queer culture and politics.

In the 1980s and 1990s, the word “queer” was laden with profound political charge and cultural significance, signifying a challenge to “normal” sexual expressions and practices. Queer cultural expressions surged at that time, bringing more visibility to the lives of people suffering from AIDS and identity-based discrimination, whose anger, frustration, pain, and love were not understood by people outside gay circles. The political charge embodied in these artistic expressions shifted the ways gayness was expressed before, particularly in the 1950s in the U.S. As argued by Christopher Reed, postwar American artistic works feature veiled homosexuality as a sub-context, a secret that needs to be decoded (Reed, 2011, pp.158-159). This “sexual secrecy” was, for example, reflected in Tennessee Williams’s plays—*Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955) and

*Suddenly Last Summer* (1958) (Reed, 2011, p.158). Queer artistic works at the end of the twentieth century, however, tended to boldly reference gay themes. For example, the photographs of Duane Michals and Robert Mapplethorpe and visual designs from ACT UP activities presented the personal lives, desires, emotions, relationships, and struggles of non-straight people amid AIDS Epidemic.

In the field of theater, influential queer pieces in US history tend to focus on LGBTQ people's life and desires as a bold challenge to heteronormativity, mostly produced by non-straight playwrights: Mart Crowley's milestone off-Broadway play *The Boys in the Band* (1968), Harvey Fierstein's Tony-winning play *Torch Song Trilogy* (1982), Tony Kushner's epic two-part play *Angels in America: A Gay Fantasia on National Themes* (1991 and 1992), Paula Vogel's *The Baltimore Waltz* (1992), Terrence McNally's *Love, Valour, Compassion* (1995), and John Cameron Mitchell's musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (1998).

Though Hwang is not a member of sexual minorities, his best-known work *M. Butterfly* indeed carries queer undertones that challenge the authority of gender and heterosexual normativity. The play and its film and theatrical adaptations showcase gender ambiguities, homoeroticism, and utopian queer union. In particular, its 1988 performance contains rich camp parodic elements which were also featured in subcultural Lesbian theater troupes represented by The Split Britches, such as the lip-

synching of lines/songs that convey popular heterosexual romantic clichés. Based in East Village, New York City, The Split Britches is a theater company founded by Deb Margolin, Peggy Shaw, and Lois Weaver in 1980. Staging interactive performances that embrace female subjectivities and bold eroticism between women, the group actively engaged with and energized local lesbian communities (Zhang, 2009). Most plays staged are in the form of duo or solo, featuring hilarious camp parodies of heterosexual pop culture, butch/fem role-playing, and cross-dressing that subvert patriarchal gender and sexual norms. The queer elements in *M. Butterfly* that resemble those in camp performances entail a close reading that is long overdue.

In the 1990s, queer reviewers criticized the depiction of gayness in the play for its supposed obscurity. As I detail in the literature review section, queer scholars such as Quentin Lee and David Eng find that homosexuality in the play was largely ignored by its reviewers and researchers, indicating selective and homophobic reception.<sup>7</sup> Though the play is open to queer interpretation, many critics think that this space is limited, for the characters' same-sex relationship seems to be sacrificed in service of the heterosexual roles reversal in *Madama Butterfly* (Saal, 1998; Eng, 2014). Admittedly, Hwang's *M. Butterfly* is limited in its representation of queer/gay visibility. However,

---

<sup>7</sup> Quentin Lee point out the homophobia in “dominant interpretative community” of the play in his article “Between the Oriental and the Transvestite” (Lee, 1993); For David Eng, in his article originally published in 1994, he states “The impetus for the following reading of Hwang’s play originally came from my dissatisfaction with the lack of criticism considering what I see as the drama’s rather obvious homosexual subtext” (Eng, 2014, p.147).

when “queer” is understood as a “disloyalty against identity,” to borrow Butler’s phrase, a vein of inquiry is opened that shows that the play is imbued with rich queer aesthetics that cause trouble to an essentialist understanding of gender and sexuality (Butler, 1993, p.220). Additionally, it is worth noting that the film adaptation and recent revival of the work zoom in on the protagonists’ self-metamorphosis and queer togetherness after death. These versions enrich our understanding of the homosexuality present in the original play. The methodological approach in my study, along with the evolving nature of the play and its recent productions, yields more recent observations into its queer aesthetics beyond the first analysis provided by queer scholars in the 1980s and 1990s.

I have talked about how Hwang’s playwriting connects to contemporaneous queer performances. But it is needed to state that he develops an abstract queer aesthetic independent of much activist queer culture. The queerness I read in Hwang’s plays works as an abstract quality—the disruption and fluidity of identities, which somewhat deviates from queer’s political use as an adjective or pronoun for non-straight identities. So the third point I would like to highlight is that there is a subtle sense of dissonance with the usage of the term “queer,” which makes it seem unfit to place Hwang among queer artists. However, the dissonance does not mean a broader understanding of queer in my study opposes or is disconnected from its embodied usage in the 1990s. In what follows, I will delve into the deep connections between the two.

It has to be said that the awkward feelings of being “unfitted,” “out of place” and “not belonging here” also convey a somewhat queer touch. A friend at the University of Hull, who is also a queer researcher, often discusses this topic with me. For her, a lesbian raised in the Chinese mainland, the queer archive in American history always seemed remote and estranged. And she often had to learn and rediscover queer history in the 1990s, though she never would have the experience and feelings like those who lived through it. In fact, in the U.K., she has never been able to integrate into the local queer community and *meet with others*. For me, this feeling of “out of place” is stronger. I am not strictly queer (as a sexual identifier), and neither is Hwang nor are many of the characters in his books, in the sense that the word is actually used.

While many selected plays in the study may not align perfectly with this usage of queer, they do revel in resisting fixed identities and social norms—another or broader definition of this term ‘queer.’ In “Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory’s Affective Histories”, Kadji Amin addressed the contradiction inherent in the usage of ‘queer’ that at once celebrates “anti-identitarianism and ambiguity” and has “historical reference to same-sex sexualities” (Amin, 2016, pp.175, 178). The uncertain, untamable qualities of “queer” conflict with the demand to pin down it in a specific area or referent. Amin’s discussion, however, leads me to go beyond the “then” versus “now” and “broad” versus “narrow” oppositions. That is, wherever the concept of queer finds its potency in

a new area with its disruptive force, it will always be “haunted by its historical and political moment of the U.S. 1990s in which it emerged,” motivated by the latter’s “political urgency and radical transgression” (Amin, 2016, pp.173, 182). American queer activism at that time was linked to the fact that non-straight populations were widely unaccepted, insulted, and excluded for their violation of “natural” heterosexual social orders. And driven by the pressing AIDs crisis, queer artists attempted to break down the division of normal and abnormal sex and bodies, the “either-or” logic of gender norms, and the oppression from the dominant. And when queer studies encounter broader edgy social issues, they will still retain the rebellious political charge of the queer communities in the late twentieth century.

Therefore, when I explore the potential of queer aesthetics in the domains of race and non/human based on Hwang’s corpus, the broadened queer approach is still “sticky with,” to use Amin’s terms, the radicality of queer struggles in history (Amin, 2016, p.181). This “broader” sense of queer is, actually, not divorced from the term’s cultural and political heritage, for it carries with it the transgressive force of the latter. Through this lens, though Hwang’s many plays do not directly relate to queer performances of his time, the embrace of all possible desires, bodily expressions, ways of engaging with the other, and the resistance of discursive violence and othering in his work actually align with them. Under this reading, the queer value in Hwang’s work is underestimated

or yet to be unearthed.

In this way, my reading also calls attention to those subjects that cannot be counted as “queer” in a political context but experience queer conditions for their incompatibility with a normative identity. In Hwang’s plays, they are the Asian Americans who feel uneasy about their racialized identities and strive to challenge them—with masochistic self-humiliation or failing in desperation. They are the “monstrous” women excluded for violating patriarchal order and the person who finds in shock that he is turning alien-like. These portrayals render visible various violence and predicaments created by hegemonic and reductive identarian discourses that constitute race and the human. By addressing this, I do not intend to expand the political group of queer to include all the existences that live between or across essentialized identities. But I believe it is essential to recognize the presence of these “out of place” subjects, as well as their productive queer force to disturb discursively constructed hierarchies like white-centric racial ideology, patriarchy, and human supremacy. This is particularly important given that these structures are often fabricated with heteronormativity. More of an aesthetic project than a political one, this study is energized by exploring how the aesthetic expressions of queerness (in an enlarged understanding) in Hwang’s plays allow for a possibility to transcend the oppressive

“combat zone”<sup>8</sup> of identity tensions in the 1990s and the present.

My employment of the term queer in the study and its historical and political reference to non-straight sexualities are shown to have deep connections. Despite this, it remains needed to justify, in particular, why I associate some artwork and theories rooted in queer communities with Hwang’s plays that address themes of race. In Chapter Three, I start by offering a comparative discussion of the queer utopia embodied in the work of Hwang and Tony Kushner. The utopian vision in Hwang’s plays mainly concerns the theme of race as a social marker and the possibility of stripping away it. However, *Angels in America* (1991 & 1992) revolves around homosexual characters, as its subtitle “A Gay Fantasia on National Themes” indicates. Regardless of the two playwrights’ different thematic focuses, their works share a common utopian queer drive. That is, both writers envision the possibility of breaking the substantial us-against-other opposition. As I argue in Chapter Three, at the end of *Angels in America*, five individuals form a queer bond across gender, sexual, racial, and political divides. Likewise, Hwang’s *Bondage* (1992) and *Yellow Face* (2007) convey a utopian fantasy where the notion of race and the boundaries it creates between humans can be disrupted and undone. These works collectively lay a critique of the

---

<sup>8</sup> The phrase is borrowed from Hwang’s expression “I’ll fly off over the combat zone” in *Bondage* (Hwang, 2000, p.278). For detailed discussion of the concept “combat zone,” please see the introduction of the thesis.



unsatisfactory reality in the 1990s in the U.S. that is imbued with identity-centric rifts, suggesting a hope that these rifts can be queered in the future or the new millennium.

A shared impulse to refuse existing “knowledge” about our selves and bodies is why I bring the two playwrights, Hwang and Kushner, together in the introduction of Chapter Three. I find their works embody the “queer aesthetic” that, in José Esteban Muñoz’s words, “contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity” (Muñoz, 2009, p.1). In Muñoz’s *Cruising Utopia*, he revisits queer aesthetic expressions around the time of the 1969 Stonewall event and excavates their re-worlding utopianism beyond the prison of reality. Granted, the book centers around personal experiences and memories, underground performing, public sex, and many more moments that engage closely with gay communities and culture in the 1950s and 1960s. Correspondingly, the queer hope discussed in Muñoz’s book is concerned with limited options of living and desiring at that time, specifically heterosexual hegemony and homonormativity. This context may not align perfectly with the utopia of queer race examined in Chapter Three.

However, Muñoz’s aesthetic theorization offers valuable insights for my study. For, in the first place, Muñoz terms queerness as future-oriented, growing, and ever-refreshing, activated by collective wishes. He writes, “Queerness is primarily about futurity and hope” (Muñoz, 2009, p.11). And this queer lens enables us to free the

human from any existing and fixed perception: “queerness in its utopian connotations promises a human that is not yet here, thus disrupting any ossified understanding of the human” (Muñoz, 2009, pp.25-26). Thus, Muñoz’s concept of queerness is open to new modes of existence and relationships imagined in Hwang’s plays. In the second place, my utilization of Muñoz’s theory involves expanding and enriching the queer scope not covered in his discussion. I believe Muñoz’s ideas and elaboration on queer aesthetics and hope, though rooted in a specific historical time and space, need not be limited to that context. In line with his book’s illumination of a promising future of queerness, it will inspire more studies that further develop its research areas, exploring possible actualization of queer worlds.

## **Literature Review**

In the study, I depart from readings that approach Hwang’s productions within the binary frameworks of gender, race, or the human-inhuman divide. Specifically, I attempt to trace his queer aesthetic expressions that bring forth nuances and complexities of selves, desires, and relations.

To date, criticism and interpretation of David Henry Hwang’s works revolve around race, gender, and cultural identity issues from various perspectives, such as post-colonialism, deconstructionism, and feminism. Numerous publications about his works

exist. Most of them introduce and interpret Hwang and his plays along with other American Chinese writers or other modern American playwrights such as Frank Chin, Amy Tan, Eugene O'Neill, Tennessee Williams, and Sam Shepard. These books include Bella Adams's *Asian American Literature* (2008), C. W. E. Bigsby's *Modern American Drama, 1945-2000* (2004) and Esther Mikyung Ghymn's *Asian American Studies: Identity, Images, Issues Past and Present* (2000). Devoting one section or chapter to discussing Hwang, these publications affirm his influence on (Asian) American theater. However, Hwang is mostly referred to as a representative ethnic minorities writer and is talked about in terms of migration, race, and Orientalism. For example, in *Modern American Drama*, Hwang is classified in a chapter entitled "Redefining the Centre: Politics, Race, Gender." Some books also focus exclusively on Hwang and his plays specifically, including William C. Boles' *Understanding David Henry Hwang* (2013) and Esther Kim Lee's *The Theatre of David Henry Hwang* (2015). These books provided solid introductions, interpretations, and informative literature reviews of Hwang's main plays, tracing the playwright's outputs in various stages.

In terms of academic journal articles, the overwhelming majority of studies focus on Hwang's most well-known work, *M. Butterfly*, followed by his first three works devoted to Chinese American immigrants. In comparison, many more exciting plays by Hwang, such as *Bondage* and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof*, received little scholarly

attention. Discussions around them are more commonly found in newspaper reviews.

Many studies on David Henry Hwang tend to underscore the playwright's cultural background. Meanwhile, the rich texture and stylistic aesthetic expressions inherent in Hwang's works tend to be overlooked. In addition, critics' concern about his plays centers on rigid identities of race, gender, and sexuality, be it of the playwright or of his characters.

From scholars' reception of *M. Butterfly*, which has attracted far more discussions than other works, we can perceive a dominance of a binary framework that opposes the West and the East, female and male, hetero- and heterosexuality. This is first reflected in the central academic debate surrounding the play, which discusses the confrontation between the Asian ethnic community and broader American society. Upon the widespread fame of the 1988 Broadway production, many critics such as Dorinne Kondo and Robert Skloot claim it as a parody of the postcolonial narratives of Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* that fetishize and generalize the East. (Skloot, 1990; Kondo, 1990). However, its portrayal of Asian characters caused many controversies, particularly among Asian American reviewers. As Moy and Hsiu-Chen Lin argue, presenting Song Liling as an effeminate figure who manipulates the West's imagination of the East, *M. Butterfly* provides yet "another disfigured stereotype" of "the Dragon Lady" (Lin, 1997, p.31; Moy, 1990, p.54). Additionally, to Moy's disappointment, other stage Asian

figures such as Comrade Chin do not meet an expectation that they “speak on behalf of the Chinese or Asians” for being too “laughable,” “desexed,” and “cartoonish” (Moy, 1990, p.55). Thus, the play is thought to fail to show “a new, hoped-for vision of Chinese or Asian identity” (Moy, 1990, p.54). In the early 1990s in the U.S., the Asian minority had long been denied the opportunity of self-representation. Considering the context, there was an understandable expectation for *M. Butterfly*, a production that brought Chinese minorities to the Broadway stage, to present positive Asian identities. However, it is also evident that this criticism is still focused on the anxiety surrounding authentic and representative racial identity. In these critics’ arguments, race is assumed to be an essential concept. Therefore, the characters’ ambiguities, expressions and desires that defy oppressive definitions of identity and the hierarchy of “highness” and “lowness” are largely dismissed.

Similar binary logic can be found in gay and feminist studies of *M. Butterfly*.

David Eng, Quentin Lee, and Ilka Saal (1993; 1998; 1994) are among the first scholars to read homosexual themes in the play. Capturing and recognizing the gay relationship between Gallimard and Song Liling, these readings brought to light its queer undertones, which in Eng’s words, tended to be “sacrificed” by major scholarship that privileges “the exclusive regime of a compulsive and compulsory heterosexuality” (Eng, 1994, p.94). While some of these readings affirm the play’s queer subversion of the

heterosexual regime by exposing the performative performance of gender, these studies find flaws in its closeted characterization.

To explain in more detail, David Eng posits that under the surface of the play's heterosexual narrative, which features a white man's tragedy for his fantasizing of an idealized Asian woman, an intersection of racism and homosexuality can also be found. As he claims, Song's drag as Butterfly is "the fulfillment of the Rice Queen's ultimate fantasy in which the gay Asian male literalizes the desired qualities of the effeminized oriental sissy" (Eng, 1994, p.97). That is to say, aside from Asian women, the play is also about how Asian men are an object of Western erotic fetishism. The unequal relationship between the disguised Chinese diva and his lover (a potential "rice queen," which frequently denotes white gay men who exclusively prefer and fetishize East-Asian men) is also mentioned in Lee and Saal's readings. Though the reading provides a valuable lens to penetrate the white colonizer's fantasy in *M. Butterfly* from another dimension, it frames the queer protagonists' desires in postcolonial relations, therefore downplaying their queer agency and growing course of disidentification. That is, the ways these characters gradually move away from the cultural roles (Pinkerton and Butterfly) they once identify with, motivated by their personal desires. For instance, in Eng's analysis that situates Song as the object of the French diplomat's closeted colonial desire, the figure's queer desires, subjectivity, and defiant distance from any

poles of identities are left unexplored.

For these critics, the play becomes more problematic for its arguably repressive treatment of homosexuality in favor of a heterosexual narrative. Agreeing with Eng, Saal suggests that the death of Gallimard in Butterfly drag is an attempt to “straighten” his same-sex relationship with Song (Saal, 1998, p.640; Eng, 1994, p.106). In this way, despite the play’s “reversals of binaries,” it “represses the issue of homosexuality, closets it for the audience” (Saal, 1998, p.641). Similarly, Quentin Lee directly condemns the work for its ambivalence regarding the issue of “outing,” or coming out as homosexuals (Lee, 1993, no pagination). He argues that the oppression of closeted homo bodies expressed in other characters’ lines, the play’s plot, as well as its academic reception, reflect the homophobic position of the “dominant interpretative community, the text, and the playwright himself” (Lee, 1993, no pagination). The play, therefore, is criticized as “too closeted and “not excessive enough” for commercial success in the white-dominating U.S. market (Lee, 1993, no pagination). This viewpoint is also shared by Saal, who claims that “the playwright forsakes the potential to ‘queer’ the binary structure” of heteronormativity, as his two protagonists’ possible gayness is eclipsed by their dramatic switch of binary gender and cultural roles (Saal, 1998, p.641).

Differing from the critics who approached queer space in *M. Butterfly*, my study shows that Hwang’s work restores queerness in its refusal of fixed binary stances,

playful camp aesthetics, and the nuances of characters' desires and growth. I notice that written in a cultural moment three decades ago, Eng, Saal, and Lee's studies demonstrate a yearning for a definite articulation of "unhindered" homosexual visibility (Eng, 1994, p.132). By doing so, they risk conflating queerness with the action of outing, conflating characters with the playwright, or conflating major plots with the whole theatrical production. In their readings, therefore, the play tends to be reduced to a lineal story about how two males initiate the reversal of "Butterfly" and "Pinkerton," "the Orient" and the "Occident" at the expense of their homo Eros. However, just as Song claims, "I am not 'just a man,'" I would point out that this play is not just a *story* that reverses power relations within the heterosexual logic (Hwang, 1989a, p.88). Situated in a distinct cultural context and refreshed by the latest queer studies and insights, I attempt to proliferate queer readings on Hwang's plays with different observations and new dimensions.

Like many other plays examined in the study, such as *Bondage* and *Yellow Face*, *M. Butterfly* unfolds in a metatheatrical arrangement, which renders the show as a theatrical presentation, parody, and representation of what happens on stage, including normative orders and hegemony. The theatricality throws the presented "stories" into question. More precisely, it deliberately plays with the "stories" and undermines the authenticity of the represented cultural identities. As addressed by Janet Haedicke, in



the play, “the theatre emerges as a cell of perception and culture” that “constitutes the play’s tragic focus,” not only for characters but also for spectators (Haedicke, 1992, p.31). She writes, “In a flood of gender, racial, cultural, and theatrical shifts, the spectator seeks vainly for grounding in a unitary eye/I,” or a fixed perspective that allows them to identify with a stable subjecthood in the play (Haedicke, 1992, p.41). And with “gaze dismantled, subjectivity decentered, the spectator of *M Butterfly* can perceive beyond the cultural representation of subjectivity” (Haedicke, 1992, p.41). Thus, an interpretation of the play with “an unequivocal gaze” and “a standard of unitary subjectivity” would “produce the very terms which *M. Butterfly* deconstructs” (Haedicke, 1992, p.29).

In addition, with the prevailing academic attention on the ‘stories’ or plots of *M. Butterfly* (and Hwang’s other plays), the disruptive queer potential inherent in the playwright’s aesthetic expressions is not fully discovered. The supposedly absent “excessive” queerness in the play’s content, as argued in previous scholarship, is in fact celebrated in its camp theatrical sensations, which feature an exaggerated, playful, humorous reiteration and subversion of rigid gender and sexual identities.

Furthermore, the interpretation of Gallimard’s death in drag as a defense of heterosexual gender roles may limit our understanding of the figure’s ongoing queer subjectivity (his gradual disidentification with the role of “Pinkerton”) and potential

defiance of heterosexual norms with death. The portrayal of disidentificatory and fluid selves and their possible transcendence of normative reality is of great significance in perceiving the play's queer aesthetics of transformation and utopian imagination.

As I illustrated, most studies on David Henry Hwang's works center on *M. Butterfly*—his representative work and assume essential divisions, confrontations, and antagonisms based on race, gender, and national and sexual identities. The binary way of reading contradicts Hwang's intention in his playwriting. In the afterword of *M. Butterfly*'s published script, the playwright encouraged “all sides to cut through our respective layers of cultural and sexual misperception... from the common and equal ground we share as human beings” (Hwang, 1989a, p.100). These words highlight the extent to which Hwang believes that the assumed differences and barriers between people are shaped by knowledge and social construction. Echoing Judith Butler, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Judith Halberstam, and other queer theorists, Hwang talks about the possibility of transcending these social boundaries. That is, to urge readers from diverse communities to stand in an elevated position from which lines of conflict become clear and break discursively constructed self/other boundaries. Hwang's insight here aligns with the perspectives of my research. I fill a gap in the scholarship on queer space in Hwang's works and attempt to enrich Hwangian studies by shedding light on his queer aesthetic sensibility. Examining the playwright's outputs from the 1980s to the

2010s, I suggest that queerness and queer aesthetics manifest not only in the deconstruction of gender identity but also in the disruption of race identity, masculinity and femininity, and human identity, not only in “stories,” but also in how they are staged. Exploring the multifaceted non-normative representations in Hwang’s playwriting and theatrical productions, I seek to reveal and outline the playwright’s queer aesthetic expressions that comprehensively transcend discursively produced boundaries of bodies and entities.

## **Overview**

My thesis encompasses three chapters that investigate different dimensions of identities put into question in Hwang’s theatrical works: gender and sexuality (female/male, gay/straight), race (white/black/yellow), and species identities (human/ghost/alien). This arrangement does not mean that the three lenses are isolated from each other; instead, it is employed to create a multifaceted analysis of Hwangian queer aesthetics with different priorities in each chapter. To fully capture the nuances of texts and the corresponding performances under my research, I applied a method of “close reading” proposed by Jane Gallop, that is, “pay[ing] attention to elements in the text which, although marginal, are nonetheless emphatic, prominent—elements in the text which ought to be quietly subordinate to the main idea, but which textually call

attention to themselves” (Gallop, 2000, p.8). The reading method calls for avoiding automatic correction of texts, the presumptions and expectations of what ought to be read, which also echoes a queer way of engaging with others. It underscores the surprises embedded in details, with which we can “encounter something new” and “bring reading to passion” (Gallop, 2000, pp.11,17).

Through reading closely, I can pay attention to aspects and aesthetic sensitivities in Hwang’s works that tend to be neglected. Given the lack of first-hand experiences of watching Hwang’s live theater performances from the 1980s to the 2010s, I endeavor to approach his works based on a wide range of materials, including the plays’ scripts, photographs, audio recordings, newspaper reviews, interviews, and academic criticism. These resources allow me to obtain detailed insights into Hwang’s live productions and the audience’s reception, providing valuable references for my readings.

The first section (Chapter Two) examines the queer aesthetic regarding gender and sexual expressions embodied in David Henry Hwang’s works. As a play that brings into light fluid gender expressions and rich eroticism between two male protagonists, *M. Butterfly* is imbued with queer undercurrents and sensations. In the sections, I argue that Hwang’s stylized employment of theatricality, parody, humor, and witty pun infuses the production with rich camp sensations. These aesthetic techniques allow the playwright to playfully manipulate and push the boundaries of heterosexual and racial identity

norms. Departing from existing interpretations that read the play's characters as static, I attempt to reveal their ongoing and unfixed subject positions as a source of transgender aesthetics.

When reading the play's ending, I perceive Gallimard's suicide while portraying the "Madama Butterfly" persona as a silent defiance of heterosexual oppression, which differs from those readings that critique it as not queer enough. In the 1993 film adaptation of the work (directed by David Cronenberg) and the new Broadway revival version (2017), the two protagonists' homosexual love and erotic touch are portrayed in more detail. Also, their endings contain stronger allusions that Gallimard's death scene is a queer transformation and resurrection, which allows him to abandon his past identity and transcend patriarchal norms. Hence, the chapter also investigates and compares queer aesthetics reflected in each version of the play across different mediums and changing contexts from the 1980s to 2017.

In the section devoted to the film *M. Butterfly* (1993), I read how David Cronenberg's directorship and Hwang's screenwriting delve deeper into the theme of self-transformation and express transgender aesthetics. As I examine, the work foregrounds the characters' self-invention journey driven by conflicting tensions of resistance and desire. This journey leads them, especially the arguably closeted French diplomat, to deviate from heterosexual gender and sexual expectations and pursue a

transformative self. In addition, I find that the “slave-master” relationship between Gallimard and Song and their role transition resemble a performance of sadomasochistic role transformation. The sadomasochistic framework constitutes a particular expression of Hwangian queer aesthetics, where gender, sexuality, age, social positions, and other identities are elevated to an erotic game. I examine queerness and aesthetic sensibility in Gallimard and Song’s relations of interdependence, possessing and being possessed, surrender, and conquest in the sadomasochistic matrix.

The revival edition of *M. Butterfly* (2017) made remarkable changes regarding the content and structure of the original story. I illustrate that this play evokes queer sensations foremost by bringing visible the characters’ erotic homosexual bodily contact. Moreover, the revival version interweaves premodern Chinese operas and love discourse in the characters’ story, expressing their love beyond gender identity and sexualities. The ending, in particular, pays homage to the Chinese opera *Butterfly Lovers* and stages Gallimard’s Song’s rebirth as a pair of butterflies. I argue that, through appropriating the past sentiment, the play imagines an elsewhere in a heteronormative present, offering queer utopian aesthetic sensations.

The second section of the thesis centers around Hwang’s aesthetic fantasies of queered race. In Chapter Three, I demonstrate how Hwang’s selected plays embody the pursuit of a queer hope to denaturalize, disrupt, and undo the identities and the

intersubjective barriers related to race. I start by examining “the 1990s” as a key moment that witnessed many American theatrical artists’ expressions of a wish for a queer utopia, where oppressive identity-based oppositions and hierarchies among people are transcended. Echoing his contemporaries, Hwang’s plays also show an awareness of the approaching millennium and cast a future of queered race. In dialogue with Jose Esteban Muñoz’s work, I argue that these theatrical works embody the anticipated emergence of queerness in the aesthetic dimension. Before offering a close reading of the playwright’s *Bondage* (1992) and *Yellow Face* (2007), I explore the discursive and performative construction of the concept of race and present academic researchers’ and Hwang’s queer understanding of it.

The rest of the chapter then focuses on how (sodomasochistic) camp and utopian aesthetics in the selected two plays envision a queer hope for the subversion of racial categorization. Boldly playing with the boundaries of Asian, African, and Caucasian identities, *Bondage* and *Yellow Face* disclose the performativity of these labels. Set in an S/M parlor in California in the 1990s, *Bondage* is organized with speeches and acts of a couple, Terri and Mark. To enact various racial roles and obtain pleasure from their power disparities, the two are wrapped from head to toe in hoods, gloves, costumes, and masks. For Hwang, these special costumes “allow us to begin playing with this notion of the interchangeability of skin colors and how they do or do not relate to particular

behavior” (Bryer, 1995, p.145). I argue that Terri and Mark’s manipulation of racial stereotypes (“Chinese gangster,” “Vietcong,” and “nerd,” for example) in their sadomasochistic race play evokes theatricality, exaggeration, humor, wordplay, and more facets of camp aesthetics. To some extent, the bondage setting also opens a utopian realm for the invalidation of racial norms and subjects’ interdependence.

In his auto-graphic comedy *Yellow Face*, Hwang pays tribute to his father, a Chinese immigrant who dreamed of being Jimmy Stewart (an actor well-known for his American roles in Hollywood films in the mid-twentieth century). He highlights the potentiality of racial fluidity through the characterization of a white man, Marcus, who accidentally disguises himself as Asian to achieve career success and eventually finds his home in the Far East. Through staging a masqueraded “yellow face” that is ironically received as authenticity, Hwang challenges essentialist racial ideologies with camp humor. The end of the play shows a fictional scene where Marcus joins “Dong Song,” a folk chorus inherited and performed by Dong ethnic minority groups in Southern China, with local Chinese villagers. I argue that the moment epitomizes how a utopian fantasy where acceptance and harmony replace collision is presented aesthetically.

The final section of my reading, namely Chapter Four, is devoted to the subject of human identity. As well as exploring identity crises of race, gender, and sexuality,



Hwang questions the definition of “human” per se, expressing a strong interest in inhuman transformation in folktales and mysteries. In productions of *The Sound of a Voice* (1983) and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988), he displays queer imagination of inhuman, hybrid, and unnatural bodies that align with posthumanist ideas. What I find fascinating is that sound in these works serves as an effective vehicle for expressing disintegrated human identity. Accordingly, I further develop the queer reading approach employed in the research with Deleuzian and Guattarian’s bodily aesthetics and Drew Daniel’s account of the queer capability of the sonic. Expanding my investigation on queerness, which manifested in unrepresented in/human and abjected entities accessible in the aural realm, I explore queer subjectivity and aesthetics through a joint lens of posthumanism and sounding.

From a glimpse of the thesis overview, it is not hard to find that I did not read Hwang’s plays in chronological order. Instead of tracing Hwang’s journey of exploring queer selves and examining the consistency of his work in different writing stages, the thesis unfolds in a way that reflects my exploration of the potential depths of queer aesthetics in Hwang’s plays. How far can queer selves and aesthetic expressions be achieved and manifested in his works? What is the possible embodiment of queerness beyond gender and sexuality? Following the path of these inquiries, I structured chapters based on various themes of queerness in Hwang’s plays, from its embodied

representation as homosexuality to its abstract capacity to trouble racial and non/human categories. The thesis extends from the scope of sex to broader territories where other (and more basic) transgression of human identities can happen. Therefore, deviating from chronological order, the final chapter focuses on reading Hwang's earlier works—*The Sound of a Voice* (1983) and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988). These plays display rich experimentation and the radical imagination of queer subjectivity as non/human becoming.

To some extent, this reading trajectory reflects my interest in disrupting linear, chronological logic when approaching a writer's corpus. Queer theorists attempt to challenge the heteronormative, reproductive, linear ordering of time. As Carolyn Dinshaw articulates in a round table discussion titled "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," a queer desire of the past "requires reworking linear temporality," "not regulated by 'clock' time," or "narrowed by the idea that time moves steadily forward" (Dinshaw, 2007, p.185). My research shows that Hwang's experiment of the human self does not necessarily reveal structured progression over time (though gay eroticism represented in different versions of *M. Butterfly* from 1988 to 2017 indeed reflects a progressive trend). Therefore, instead of assuming a linear temporal logic behind the playwright's queer thoughts and writings, I view his works as intricate underwater currents, eddies or turbulence in the same body of water. Together, they constitute the dynamics of queer

aesthetics in Hwang's writing. In this sense, to read Hwang's plays chronologically and neglect the heterogeneity of time would diverge from the queer theme in the study.

Overall, my study explores a queer aesthetic dimension in David Henry Hwang's plays that navigate beyond ontological ways of understanding the selves and others in US society after the 1980s. To that end, I look into three aspects of identity—gender and sexuality, race, and human—that are reflected on and subverted in Hwang's corpus. As entry points of each chapter, the three themes manifest Hwang's exploration of self-identification as a site of power relations and social construction in various facets of human existence. The sequential order from gender to human also reflects a vertical investigation of queerness and queer aesthetics. It showcases how the concept of queer disturbs "every norm it traverses," from sexuality to broader scope encroached by binary oppositions and boundaries (Välimäki, 2007, p.179). Following Hwang's exploration of de-essentialized identities, the thesis traces aesthetic expressions in his plays that ignite reflections on what we are made of and what we can become.

## Chapter Two

### ***M. Butterfly* and Its Adaptations: Beyond Gender and Sexuality**

#### **Chapter Introduction**

Near the end of the opening night of *M. Butterfly* held on February 10, 1988, in Washington, D. C., the revelation of lead actor B. D. Wong's male full-frontal nudity was a sensational moment. In almost the entire performance, Wong successfully led the audience to believe in his portrayal of a Chinese opera diva Song Liling, the mistress of a former French Diplomat. When he "dropped his drawers" on stage, as the play's writer David Henry Hwang recalled, "the audience literally screamed. It was really cool. It was like when Glenn Close came out of the water in *Fatal Attraction*" (Bryer, 1995, p.143).

Hwang's comment juxtaposes two important artistic works in the 1980s in the US, one being his play that would be a Broadway hit and the other *Fatal Attraction*, a 1987 screen blockbuster directed by Adrian Lyne. The screams from the audience, which link

the two pieces across media genres, reflect the shock, confusion, fear, and anxiety felt by the public confronting moments of sexual transgression at that time. In the case of *M. Butterfly*, these moments are represented by Song's cross-dressing and gender confusion, which impacted stable gender binaries and sexualities. In the Tony award-winning play, Song's gender deception enables him to maintain a romantic relationship with Rene Gallimard, another male character, for twenty years. In this way, the character's transformation of gender identity constitutes a dramatic shock moment for the audience, who, like the French officer in the play, regards him as their desired object. As noticed by William C. Boles, one critic of David Henry Hwang, for the male audience present in the play's 1990 touring production, the exposure of Song's biological sex brought huge confusion to their heterosexual preference. For they "suddenly discover they were attracted to a man" who had been assuming a feminine persona for espionage missions (Boles, 2013, p.59).

As for *Fatal Attraction*, its "scream" moments correspond to Glenn Close's unsettling screen role—Alex Forrest. In the film, Alex enters an extra-marital affair with Dan Gallagher, a man who has a happy and stable family. After a passionate weekend, Dan attempts to end their relationship, which is responded to by Alex's persistent pursuit of his love. For the man who wants to protect his family, the female protagonist's bold behavior becomes a great disturbance to his life. The scene Hwang

mentioned in “It was like when Glenn Close came out of the water” happens when Dan grapples with Alex, following her shocking intrusion into his house (Bryer, 1995, p.143). At that moment, they fight with each other in a bathroom, and Alex gradually ceases struggling after being choked by Dan in a bathtub. After a few seconds, however, she comes back out of the water and unleashes sudden attacks on Dan Gallagher, who assumes she has been killed. Driven by her aggressive sexual desire and attempt to assert dominance, this murderous female character violates “conventional archetypes of women” and the stability of a nuclear family.<sup>9</sup>

In Hwang's description of the audience's reaction to the critical moment in *M. Butterfly*, immoral, deviant, and unconventional sex is interwoven with screams. These words provide a glimpse of the spectatorship in the 1980s that saw an intimacy between unstable gender norms and a mixture of horror and excitement. What complicated the cultural and historical context of Hwang's observation was the spread of the AIDS pandemic during that era, which invoked the pathological fear and associations with

---

<sup>9</sup>For the quoted comment, see: Elaine Berland and Marilyn Wechter, “Fatal/fetal attraction: Psychological aspects of imagining female identity in contemporary film”, *Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 3 (1992): 35. It is worth noting that although *Fatal Attraction* portrayed an image of a woman beyond the social expectations of a good woman, mother and lover - who are passive receivers of male desire and gaze - this film is widely criticized for affirming patriarchal ideology by manipulating viewers' identification with the male protagonist and punishing the monstrous female character. For more about the passive role of women in dualistic sexual differences, please see Angela Carter, *The Sadeian Woman: An Exercise in Cultural History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2001), 4.; For feminist criticism on *Fatal Attraction*, please refer to Liahna Babener, “Introduction: Fatal Attraction, Feminist Readings,” *The Journal of Popular Culture* 26, no. 3 (1992): 1-3, [https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1992.2603\\_1.x](https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.0022-3840.1992.2603_1.x).

death in relation to casual sex, homosexuality, and marginalized sexual behavior (MacKinnon, 2005, p.37). It is, therefore, not a coincidence that some reviewers of *Fatal Attraction* captured the movie's oblique allusions to AIDS panic. Brian De Palma, for example, referred to it as a "Postfeminist AIDS thriller" (Corliss, 1987). The audience's reaction to *M. Butterfly* and *Fatal Attraction* in the 1980s illustrated, in another sense, what was regarded as more pervasive, safe, normal, and less screaming concerning sex: traditional family values and ontological gender expressions.

Interestingly, both works linked by Hwang's comment refer to and rewrite the storyline of *Madama Butterfly*, a cultural text that epitomizes public fantasy of gender and colonialist stereotypes of Oriental "lotus blossom[s]" and "cruel Caucasian [men],"<sup>10</sup> as commented by the playwright. Premiered at La Scala in 1904, this opera by Giacomo Puccini portrays a submissive Japanese heroine, Cio-Cio-san, who sacrifices everything for her brutal Western lover, Pinkerton. In *M. Butterfly*, the idealized image of women—beautiful, submissive, and selfless—is utilized by Song Liling to attract a French Diplomat; in *Fatal Attraction*, getting pregnant as a result of a weekend affair with a married man, Alex is positioned in a situation similar to the heroine in *Madama Butterfly*. For in Puccini's opera, Cio-Cio San is also entangled in an ill-fated romance,

---

<sup>10</sup> In the "afterword" of *M. Butterfly* (1989), Hwang talked about the "sexist and racist cliché" in the portrayal of a submissive Asian "lotus blossom spinning away for a cruel Caucasian man, and dying for her love" in Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* (Hwang, 1989, P.95).

having a baby with her ruthless lover, who leaves her and finds an American wife. *Fatal Attraction* directly alludes to the opera. When Dan grows an intimate relationship with Alex, he introduces *Madama Butterfly* to her as a drama he enjoys. Later in the film, they listen together to a recording of the opera, something in which Alex shows great interest. Her paranoid fixation on Dan allows her to develop an identification with the role of Butterfly. In the film, as she frets over her increasingly cold lover, the libretto of *Madame Butterfly* is shown on her desk, indicating the extent to which she has immersed herself in its story. However, as the plots of *M. Butterfly* and *Fatal Attraction* develop, Song and Alex are proved to be anything but their counterpart in *Madama Butterfly*. They subvert the stereotype of femininity and motherhood with gender deception and violence.

Let us come back to Hwang's commentary on the moment when Song Liling reveals his/her male nudity in *M. Butterfly*'s tryout performance. This is the starting point for me to delve into the complex political landscape of gender and sexual norms of the 1980s in the U. S. in the introduction above. In Hwang's words, what led him to associate that moment with Glenn Close's performance in *Fatal Attraction* was not only the audience's screams but also something "cool" located and affirmed by his instinctive comment— "It was really cool" (Bryer, 1995, p.143). The coolness captured by Hwang corresponded to my reading of the term queer. As I have explained in my



introduction, the Chinese translation of “queer” arouses associations for me of something cool. As a new and strange word, “queer” entered my mind like a sharp-shaped crack, strange but refreshing. It also triggered an old personal memory. At the age of twelve or so, when I anticipated spending only another tedious and depressing school day, a giant beverage corporate mascot named Qoo showed up in the hall outside my classroom like a miracle. The Chinese name of Qoo is exactly 酷儿 [Kuer/cool-er], which coincidentally overlaps with “queer” in my first language. Influenced by this strange confluence of “queer” and “cool,” I attempt to state that what Hwang called “cool” in that dramatic moment is also queer in nature. The coolness contained in Song’s female-to-male transition indicates an affirmation of queerness—the disruption of stable identities, an accepted sexual relationship, or the contiguity of a normal day.

As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the queer moments are imbued in Hwang’s 1988 production of *M. Butterfly* and its adapted and rewritten versions. These moments, be they camp parodies of dominant gender and sexuality, portrayals of same-sex desire and queer transformation, or visions of alternative lives against heterosexual norms, together respond to and interfere with sexual norms of the 1980s and beyond. They constitute a Hwangian queer aesthetic—a nonconforming beauty that troubles people’s fixed knowledge of group identity. Drawing on theories of camp and queer studies represented by Judith Butler, Judith Halberstam and Jose Esteban Muñoz, I examine the

play's queer aesthetics as a reverberation of camp sensations, transgender expressions, and queer futurity.

### ***M. Butterfly* (1988)**

Premiered on Broadway in 1988, *M. Butterfly* has proved to be an enormous success. Aside from being nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, it won The Tony Award for Best Play, the Drama Desk Award, the Outer Critics Circle Award, and the John Gassner Award for Best Play. *M. Butterfly* is based on an unlikely news report about the espionage case of a French diplomat, Mr. Bouriscot. The Frenchman fell in love with a Chinese female impersonator<sup>11</sup> whom he believed to be a female over a twenty-year period. As a Chinese spy, Mr. Shi easily gathered information from Mr. Bouriscot and passed it on to China. After reading this story in the *New York Times*, David Henry Hwang contemplated the Orientalism embedded in the news report and rewrote this story to *M. Butterfly*. In the play, he borrowed rich elements from Puccini's opera *Madama Butterfly*, which articulates a tragic love story between a Japanese woman Cio-Cio San and a U.S. naval officer, Pinkerton. In sharp contrast to the irresponsible Pinkerton, who abandons his Japanese wife and remarries in America, Cio-Cio San, the submissive East beauty, keeps waiting for her lover in Japan. After giving birth to a

---

<sup>11</sup> In Chinese tradition, "Dan", or female roles in Beijing Opera are usually played by female impersonators.

child that is requested to be returned to her husband, she ends her own life in desperation.

Despite its international and long-standing fame, *Madama Butterfly* has been criticized for its imperialist and Orientalist standpoint. As remarked by Hwang, “such a story has become too much of a cliché” for portraying “the image of the Oriental woman as demure and submissive” (Hwang, 1989a, p.95). Hwang, therefore, worked on the storyline of *Madama Butterfly* and portrayed in detail the French officer Gallimard’s affair with Song Liling, subverting the stereotypes in *Madama Butterfly*. The protagonists in *M. Butterfly* experience a shift in gender and the position of power. In the end, the Western colonizer falls victim to his own Orientalism and commits suicide as *Madama Butterfly*. By contrast, Song transforms from a “woman” to a man with tie and suit, playing the role of betrayer in their love relationship.

Marjorie Garber, one of Hwang’s reviewers, suggests that gender in this script “exists only in representation -- or performance” (Garber, 1992b, p.250). With the support of set design, props, and costumes, the unconventional fluid gender expression and its relationship with the hybrid identities of nation and race attracted, astonished, and bewildered audiences. In this next section, I demonstrate that the gender fluidity and gender ambiguity embodied in *M. Butterfly* not only intensify the story’s suspense

but also display rich queer aesthetics via camp techniques represented by irony, parody, repetition, exaggeration, and theatricality and transgender expressions.

### **“Life as Theater”: Camp Role-playing of Identities**

In this section, I demonstrate how *M. Butterfly*'s meta-dramatic structure, music, and cross-roleplaying constitute a deliberate theatricality. This approach renders prevailing gender and racial expressions embodied in the cultural text of *Madama Butterfly* as artificial and questionable, forming part of Hwangian camp aesthetics.

As Jack Babuscio posits in “Camp and the Gay Sensibility,” camp largely lies in the sense of theatricality, which questions the authority and seriousness of norms that appear to be natural. Babuscio writes, “To appreciate camp in things or persons is to perceive the notion of life-as-theater, being versus role-playing, reality and appearance. . . . . Camp, by focusing on the outward appearances of roles, implies that roles, and, in particular, sex roles, are superficial—a matter of style. Indeed, life itself is role and theater, appearance, and impersonation” (Babuscio, 1993, p.24). Camp theatricality can firstly be found in the structure of *M. Butterfly*.

The show is framed as a play within a play, appropriating the storyline of Puccini's opera that I discussed in the introduction. In the first scene, Gallimard's lines call attention to the audience's position as the watchers/listeners of his narration. The sixty-five-year-old French man is imprisoned for alleged spy activities with his Chinese

partner Song Liling, who passes as an Eastern beauty and steals political intelligence from him for over two decades. In a melancholic mood, Gallimard talks to the audience about what happens between them:

GALLIMARD: Alone in this cell, I sit night after night, watching our story play through my head, always searching for a new ending, one which redeems my honor, where she returns at last to my arms. And I imagine you—my ideal audience—who come to understand and even—perhaps just a little, to envy me (Hwang, 1989a, p.4).

The character interweaves his tragic love story into the tapestry of *Madama Butterfly*, which is introduced and performed by him, Song, and other key figures in his memory. In “[his] version of *Madama Butterfly*,” Gallimard attempts to role play and identify with the figure of Pinkerton, while other people in his story are allocated roles of the heroine, her maid Suzuki and Pinkerton’s friend Sharpless (Hwang, 1989a, p.9). In the play, these characters’ performances of Puccini's opera from Cio-Cio-San’s marriage to suicide are fused with the French man’s narration, recollections, and fantasy. The theatre conjured by Gallimard and his narration, however, is interrupted from time to time by himself and Song, who leave their roles and talk as if they were actors in the off-stage state. For instance, in Act Two, Scene Five, after Comrade Chin—Song’s Communist coordinator—steps down, Gallimard “sticks his head out from the wings,” asking, “Is she gone?” (Hwang, 1989a, p.49). Song replies, “Yes,

Rene. Please continue in your own fashion” before they resume the play’s plotline

(Hwang, 1989a, p.49).

The “play in a play” structure endows the *M. Butterfly* with a sense of theatricality, that is to say, a performance that represents itself as artificial. The structure of *M. Butterfly*, as argued by Haris Abdulwahab and Fayez Noureldin, portrays evident features of “metadrama”, or “a drama about drama” (Noureldin, 2017). A metadrama always refers to other cultural texts or events in reality. In *Drama, Metadrama, and Perception* (1986), Richard Hornby summarized three major forms of metadramas: “the play within the play,” “role-playing within the role” and “self-referencing within the play,” which means actors’ distance from their roles and direct engagement or dialogues with events in their play (Hornby, 1986, p.32). The characters’ role-playing of *Madama Butterfly* in *M. Butterfly* and their awareness of playing a role epitomize these features. In “Metadrama and the Deconstruction of Stereotypes: David Henry Hwang’s *Butterfly* and *Bondage*” (2017), Haris and Fayez investigate the metadrama devices used by Hwang to destabilize racial and gender stereotypes. They state that “The theatrical nature of role playing participates remarkably in the deconstruction of boundaries” (Noureldin, 2017, p.67). It also creates “a type of aesthetics by which the audience is stimulated, through the relevant ‘estrangement effect,’ to reconsider the ideological significance of the on-stage experience” (Noureldin, 2017, p.82). “Estrangement effect”

refers to a way to prevent the audience from being absorbed in performed content. As a result, it allows them to reflect on and question presented social orders and values.

While Haris and Favez's reading illuminates the deconstructive force of the metadramatic structure and theatrical sensibility in *M, Butterfly*, its focus falls outside of the realm of camp. The play's dramatic framework, in my observation, constitutes Hwang's camp aesthetic style, which lays bare and celebrates the artificiality of enacted cultural images.

The camp effect is visibly displayed in the deliberate exposure of the play's characters' role-playing states and the signal indicating the presence of the dramatic stage. In Act One, Scene Four, Gallimard reenacts a segment from Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* with his best friend Marc. In this segment, Pinkerton and his friend Sharpless talk about the playboy's intention to exploit Cio-Cio-San's love and marriage. Switching from the role of Pinkerton to Gallimard, this character speaks to the audience: "They then proceed to sing the famous duet, 'The Whole World Over'" (Hwang, 1989a, p.7). The stage direction in this scene writes, "*The duet plays on the speakers. Gallimard, as Pinkerton, lipsyncs his lines from the opera*" (Hwang, 1989a, p.7). Here, the overplay of Gallimard's lipsyncing act calls attention to his enactment of Puccini's opera. In another case, during the next scene, Song Liling performs the entrance of Butterfly: "*She appears there again, now dressed as Madame Butterfly,*

*moving to the 'love duet.' Gallimard turns upstage slightly to watch, transfixed"*

(Hwang, 1989a, p.10). The shift of Gallimard's position to upstage and the beholder accentuates the theatrical realm where the role of Butterfly and her idealized feminine passivity are performed. The citation and more details in *M. Butterfly* underscore the characters' engagement in the play's inner theater, rendering the staged identities as objects for performance.

It is also worth noting that the camp theatricality of the play is manifested in role-crossing elements. As addressed earlier, the actors in *M. Butterfly* play characters across different dramatical contexts, such as the players of Song Liling/Butterfly, Marc/Consul Sharpless, and Comrade Chin/Suzuki. The productions of *M. Butterfly* also cast one actor for various roles within its story. In its 1988 Broadway premiere, for example, the Woman in a Pornographic magazine, Renee (the Danish girl Gallimard has an extra affair with) and Isabelle (Gallimard's first sex partner) were played by the same actor, Lindsay Frost. The design of role-crossing enhanced the production's playful representation of identities as superficial acting.

In *M. Butterfly*, music plays a significant role in conveying the artificiality of gender and race identities. Hwang started to play the violin at a young age and was obsessed with jazz. For him, "music really helps in terms of developing structure and dramatic growth, and jazz, in particular, helps with theatrical improvisation" (Lyons,



1999, p.237). In the script of *M. Butterfly*, music not only serves as a backdrop of the play but also accompanies actors' lines. The sonic effects employed in both the Eastern and Western operas— “orchestral accompaniment,” “the sound of gongs<sup>12</sup> clanging,” “piano,” and “drums”—fade in and out throughout the show (Hwang, 1989a, pp.15, 20).

The music denotes that the characters are “acting” their parts, adding a theatrical atmosphere. In particular, in Act Two, Scene Seven, when Song announces her “pregnancy” to her lover, she claims, “I’m pregnant. *(Beat)* I’m pregnant. *(Beat)* I’m pregnant! *(Beat)*” (Hwang, 1989a, p.61). The beats and the repetitive lines denote together a theatrical excess and exaggeration, underscoring the absurdity that Song assures Gallimard of “her” pregnancy via citation and performance of heterosexual codes. The scene shows traces of performance in characters’ reenactment of *Madama Butterfly*; beyond that, it also exhibits the failure of this role-playing, namely the ironic and hilarious distance between scripted roles and performers. This aspect is examined in depth in the following section.

### **Playing with Established Scripts: Camp Parody of Gender and Race**

In *M. Butterfly*, Hwang deploys the quality of theatricality to enhance camp

---

<sup>12</sup> “Gong” is a typical Chinese percussion instrument often used in Beijing Opera.

aesthetics. Additionally, the playwright defies and unsettles dominant and orthodox narratives, especially that of gender and race through camp parody. In the show, characters reenact and make fun of the cultural paradigms represented by Madama Butterfly in stylized manners that deviate from the original script.

This is firstly manifested in the humorous incongruity between characters and their enactments in the work. Comrade Chin, a harsh, rude, and assertive revolutionary woman coordinating Song's spy mission, for instance, plays Suzuki, the maid of Cio-Cio San. In Puccini's opera, Suzuki is characterized as submissive and meek like other stereotypical Oriental women. She accompanies Butterfly in waiting for the return of Pinkerton, praying faithfully for the happiness of her mistress: "And you, Ten-Sjoo-daj! Grant me that Butterfly shall weep no more, no more, no more" (Puccini, 2001, p.65). Suzuki played by Comrade Chin, nevertheless, scolds her mistress' blindness in love in a comical harsh and crude manner: "Girl, he's a loser. What'd he ever give you? Nineteen cents and those ugly Day-Glo stockings? Look, it's finished! Kaput! Done!" (Hwang, 1989a, p.12). The exaggerated speeches and gestures of Chin/Suzuki, as addressed by Hwang, show a "T.V. sitcom style" (Hwang and DiGaetani, 1989, p.148). On the one hand, it indicates Hwang's interest in blending "low" and "high" aesthetic tastes and creating a "theatrical" atmosphere. The playwright said in a 1989 interview: "You can take the crassest type of sitcom and butt it up against high culture like opera,

and find a relationship between the two,” “That creates variety for the audience, it keeps them (the audience) on their toes, it is inherently theatrical” (Hwang and DiGaetani, 1989, p.148). On the other, it serves as a deliberate challenge to the distant “wise” and “inscrutable” images of the Easterners portrayed in the U.S. observed by the playwright. “In fact Asians can be just as crass as people are here (in America)” (Hwang and DiGaetani, 1989, p.148). Chin’s performance of a Japanese maid with evident failure undermines the authenticity of stereotypical Eastern femininity. The incongruous scene constitutes a playful theater that disturbs order and structure regarding gender and racial representation.

Besides, through the parody of Puccini’s work, the play dramatizes and subverts the working of patriarchal gender ideology. In Act Two, Scene Eight, Song and Gallimard present a moment of naming a boy. Citing libretto from *Madama Butterfly* while at the same time deviating from it, these characters reenact and play with the interpellation process of gendered subjects.

SONG: “Chi vide mai/ a bimbo del Giappon.”

GALLIMARD: “What baby, I wonder, was ever born in Japan”—or China, for that matter—

SONG: “ ... occhi azzurrini?”

GALLIMARD: “With azure eyes” – they’re actually sort of brown, wouldn’t you say?

SONG: “E il labbro.”

GALLIMARD: “And such lips!” (He kisses Song) And such lips.

SONG: “E i ricciolini d’oro schietto?”

GALLIMARD: “And such a head of golden”-if slightly patchy - “curls?”

SONG: “I’m going to call him Peepee.”

GALLIMARD: Darling, could you repeat that because I’m sure a rickshaw just flew by overhead.

SONG: “You heard me.”

GALLIMARD: “Song Peepee”? May I suggest Michael, or Stephan, or Adolph?

SONG: “You may, but I won't listen.” (Hwang, 1989a, p.66)

When Song presents her French lover with a “baby,” whom she pretends is their son, the two perform a line from *Madama Butterfly*: “Chi vide mai a bimbo del Giappone occhi azzurrini? E il labbro? E i ricciolini d’oro schietto? ( Who ever saw a Japanese child with blue eyes? And his lips? And his fair golden hair?)” (Puccini, 2001, p.65) In Puccini’s opera, Cio-Cio San sings the line when she introduces her child, a symbol of the bond between her and her American husband. In *M. Butterfly*, Hwang borrows the conventional episode of heterosexual reproduction and replants it in Song and Gallimard’s queer relationship. The working of this trope in a new context sets out a parody of gender and sexual essentialism. Because in this scene, the reproductive pattern is enacted by two male characters’ theatrical performances. Moreover, Song’s conflicted roles —male and female (mother), heterosexual and homosexual- create a humorous, absurd, and ironic effect.

In this scene, what also draws my attention is the way the child obtains his gendered (and scripted) identity. Citing, echoing, and translating heterosexual lines

from *Madama Butterfly*, Song and Gallimard's co-performance epitomizes and parodies the interpellation ritual for a gendered subject (also a scripted role, namely Cio-Cio-San's son) comes into being.

From eyes and lips to hair, the couple looks for, checks, and secures the baby's conformity with Butterfly's son and his likeness with Gallimard, though the audience knows the baby is not theirs. Via the two characters' citation of *Madame Butterfly*, the baby's body is hailed and crafted into the pre-existent expectation of it. In the previous scene, Song tells Chin she needs a baby and adds, "Make sure it's a boy" (Hwang, 1989a, p.62). This plot dramatizes the structure of interpellation entailed in a gendering process. Judith Butler elaborates that when an infant is born, the parents' announcement ("It's a girl") imposes a performative force on the infant's subject formation (Butler, 1993, p.232). As an interpellation, this utterance "initiates the process whereby a certain "girling" is compelled," conferring a subject's position in a heteronormative society (Butler, 1993, p.232). Reenacting the process in which a gendered subject is produced—a process, as it goes in the play, full of hilarious flaws and deliberate incongruity, Hwang makes fun of heterosexual discourses with a camp sensibility.

Song and Gallimard's parody of a heterosexual cultural text has exposed the fragility of gender ideology; their naming of the baby, furthermore, strengthens the parodic effect. Based on the story of Puccini's *Butterfly*, Song's child is presumed to

have a conventional Western boy's name— "Michael, or Stephan, or Adolph" (Hwang, 1989a, p.67), as suggested by Gallimard. Foregrounding the cultural legacy and masculinity anxiety of the baby's alleged father, these suggestions reflect a reproductive continuity of patriarchal property and Westcentric discourses. However, this expectation is disrupted by Song, who proposes naming the boy "Peepee." Referring to urine ejected from a subject's body, "pee" reminds me of the concept of "abject" substance in Julia Kristeva's theory. For her, sickening body waste (as well as things like unclean food, blood, and corpses) trespasses the border of human existence (Kristeva, 1982, pp.2-4). It, therefore, causes the reaction of abjection, that is, the expelling of entities crossing boundaries. Situated outside an established system (such as a subject's sense of self and the integrity of the human body), the abject draws us "towards where meaning collapses" and "disturbs identity, system, order" (Kristeva, 1982, pp.2, 4). As a manifestation of the abject, the name "Peepee" brings trouble to a reiterated conventional naming process, threatening the patriarchal order that legalizes a proper boy name. At the same time, this name accentuates the phallus' function of urinating as an anatomical organ, depriving it of its cultural meaning in human society that is associated with male power and privilege. In L.A. Theatre Works' recording of the play's 1996 production at the DoubleTree Suites, Santa Monica, the audience bursts into laughter when Song proposes the name "PeePee." Hwang's joke on naming here

produces camp humor that subverts established conventions and rewrites the processes of gender interpellation.

### **Our Bitter-wit: Queer Desires and Camp Sensibilities**

*M. Butterfly*'s text further displays camp aesthetics by staging characters with non-straight eroticism and their disturbance of heterosexual authority with such techniques as self-mock, humor, and ironic incongruity. The characters' camp strategies call attention to queer desire and expressions. Moreover, they allow for a defiant intervention into the anti-homo discourse they obey and repeat.

Song and Gallimard's growth journey unfolds with a subtle gay sensibility, "a creative energy reflecting a consciousness that is different from the mainstream," shaped by an experience of social oppression in straight culture (Babuscio, 1993, p.19). In portraying these characters' reactions to oppressive homophobic norms, the play displays camp aesthetics interwoven with queer desires and self-expression.

The play's opening part in prison intensively displays Gallimard's shame and bitterness for his erotic relationship with another male character. Discussing the question of Gallimard's sexual orientation, Hwang states that "he [Gallimard] knows he's having an affair with a man. Therefore, on some level he is gay" (Hwang and

DiGaetani, 1989, p.145). However, in the play, the character keeps his same-sex desire secret. Since his adolescence, the French man's homosexual urges conflict with heterosexual imperatives. This makes him vulnerable to confusion, frustration, and shame. As Jack Babuscio indicates, modern society forms a general understanding of sexuality that associates heterosexuality with "normal, natural, healthy behavior" and homosexuality with "abnormal, unnatural, sick behavior" (Babuscio, 1993, p.20). Homophobic discourse forces Gallimard to stay in the closet, unable to express his queer desire publicly or to himself. Through camp and bitter wit, the character negotiates his queerness within a straight world.

In his cell, Gallimard observes other people talking about his scandal printed in headlines, which says that he loves a woman played by a man for twenty years. At that moment, his shame is covered up by exaggerated narcissism, self-mockery, and bitter humor, a camp response to the laughter from the straight world. He claims: "I'm not treated like an ordinary prisoner. Why? Because I'm a celebrity. You see, I make people laugh," "I was voted 'least likely to be invited to a party.' It's a title I managed to hold onto for many years. Despite some stiff competition," "My fame has spread to Amsterdam, London, New York. Listen to them! In the world's smartest parlors. I'm the one who lifts their spirits!" (Hwang, 1989a, p.2).

The French protagonist's intentional humor that "makes people laugh" reflects the



“bitter-wit” of queer people examined by Jack Babuscio: “Our response to this split between heterosexual standards and self-demands has been a bitter-wit that is deeply imbued with self-hate and self-derogation” (Babuscio, 1993, p. 27). The wit based on gay sensibility serves as a strategy for queer subjects to produce a “positive identity” in a hostile environment. By doing so, they can express themselves and avoid sanctions from social regulation. The tension interwoven by tears and laughter not only allows the visibility of the marginalized subjects but also conveys the “beauty in the seemingly bizarre and outrageous” (Babuscio, 1993, p. 28). Gallimard’s self-derision tells of his bitterness at deviating from the expectations placed on heterosexual men with laughter, this contradiction arousing a camp aesthetic experience.

In another case, Hwang displays camp humor and irony in a dialogue between Song and Comrade Chin. The former is a male-to-female crossdresser, while the latter is a speaker of homophobic authority in the 1960s in China. It is shown in the play that Gallimard’s growth is encroached upon by anti-homosexual discourses in Western countries. However, the harsh homophobic atmosphere in China in the 1960s faced by Song was bred under a complicated political environment.

During the modernization of China in the early twentieth century, Chinese intellectuals absorbed the dualistic understanding of gender and sexuality in Western science as a more progressive knowledge. Before the influx of Western sexual

discourses, Chinese masculinity varied around oppositional archetypes of “gentleman-scholar” to “martial” macho (Louie, 2002). Also, the conception of homosexuality was not established in traditional China. Same-sex lovers were not assumed to have a generic difference that distinguished them from heterosexuals (Wah-shan, 2000, pp.21-22).

After the founding of New China in 1949, the dominant Communist government enhanced moral and social control, including strict regulation of gender roles. As a result, people whose activities transgressed sexual binarism (masculine versus feminine) became the target of correction. For one thing, these people revoke ambivalent gender expressions in feudal Chinese—for example, cross-dressing performances, homo-erotic relationships, and practices such as “Fen-Tao” and “Duan-Xiu”; for another, homosexuality was (paradoxically) regarded as contamination from Western society, which witnessed growing gay movements at the same period of time (Wah-shan, 2000, p.54). The Chinese government's homophobia during the Cultural Revolution was a product of sexual politics mixed with anti-west and anti-feudal ideologies. Accordingly, the authority celebrated manhood that represented the national image, a collective fantasy of a revolutionary hero devoted to the establishment of a new country (Xing, 2016, p.102). The fantasy of masculinity reached its peak in the 1960s and 1970s when the “Cultural Revolution” took place. As portrayed in the play, during the political

movement, Song's homosexual activities are charged as "the lowest perversions"

(Hwang, 1989a, p.70).

The hostility endured by Song for his transgressive feminine dressing and homosexual relationship circulates throughout her contact with Comrade Chin. In Act Two, Scene Four, when reporting information obtained from Gallimard, Song is scrutinized by Chin for her cross-dressing and potential homosexual practices. Against Chin's homophobic interrogation, Song displays a queer resistance camouflaged by obedience, employing a camp pun that allows her to challenge authority without being recognized.

CHIN: You're not gathering information in any way that violates Communist Party principles, are you?

SONG: Why would I do that?

CHIN: Just checking. Remember: when working for the Great Proletarian State, you represent our Chairman Mao in every position you take.

SONG: I'll try to imagine the Chairman taking my positions. (Hwang, 1989a, p.48)

Again, I heard the audience laugh when Song finished the line above in the play's 1996 recording by L.A. Theatre Work. Song's answer involves a humorous pun that juxtaposes anti-homosexual authority (Mao) with "perverted" erotic practices. Chin's utterance means to encourage Song to keep sexual politics in mind when he disguises himself as a woman. Song's answer, then, leads the connotation of "taking a position"

to an erotic one, associating us with positions he takes during his same-sex acts with Gallimard.

In this conversation, Song's obedience to Comrade Chin's heterosexual imperatives bears a defiant manner. Chin's warning, "You represent our Chairman Mao in every position you take," reclaims the "Communist Party principles" she mentions before, denoting that Song should act according to national ideology regarding sexuality. Song's response yields to the "principles;" however, its deliberate ambiguity with supposed obscene gay undertones resists them.

This scene reminds me of Butler's analysis of how a character named Paul violates authority with a polite "bow" in Willa Cather's 1905 story "Paul's Case." The character's gesture, as she suggests, is "a certain defiant raising of the ass, invitation to sodomy, that takes place precisely through the very 'polite' convention of deferring to the law" (Butler, 1993, p.165). Similarly, Song's gesture of subjugation to heterosexual authority is simultaneously polite and subversive. His camp wordplay—"the Chairman takes my [sexual] positions," resonates with a gesture described by Butler that "covers and defers some allegedly criminal sexuality that takes place against and through the law that produces that criminality" (Butler, 1993, p.165). In a seeming repetition of the law that produces abnormal sexual bodies, Song covertly questions and interferes with its operation.

Moreover, conflating the positions of the “Chairman” and Song, this scene deliberately evokes a camp incongruity of public and private, honorable and corrupt, high and low. The heterosexual hegemony in China in the 1960s regulated what was high— a public, monopoly, and heroic masculinity imbricated with national ideology, and what were low— private, deviant, and immoral sexual desires. As indicated by Jack Babuscio, “gayness” is often seen as “a moral deviation” (Babuscio, 1993, p.21). This fact is the core of camp aesthetics, which revels in the contrasts of “sacred/profane,” “spirit/flesh,” and “high/low status” (Babuscio, 1993, p.21). Here, Hwang's employment of pun in Song's answer deliberately confuses the Chairman and the character's political/homosexual sex positions. It allows the profane body experience to come to surface, disturbing the order of sex politics with its supposed nastiness.

### **Mutation of One Butterfly Pair: Growing Queer Selves and Transgender Aesthetics**

Additional queer aesthetics in the 1998 text of *M. Butterfly* are reflected in its portrayal of the characters' queer transformation, resonating with Halberstam's elaboration of transgender aesthetics. Shifting gender roles (for Song, from female to male; for Gallimard, from male to female), the two protagonists display a growing

self—the formation and deformation of gender and sexual identities. More importantly, they showcase how queer desires and longing, though squeezed by a homophobic atmosphere, support their transcendental transformation beyond the male-female binary.

Portraying the two protagonist's exploration and negotiation of gender and sexual identities in line with roles in *Madama Butterfly*, the play demonstrates these characters' growing queer selves. Gallimard's becoming a woman (from Pinkerton to Cio-Cio San) parallels his queer transformation. The diplomat from a typical Western family is instilled with a set of heteronormative ideas concerning the unity of sex, gender, and sexuality from a young age. Concerning the reasons behind the formation of such a unity in a patriarchal society, Judith Butler explains that "the institution of a compulsory and naturalized heterosexuality requires and regulates gender as a binary relation in which the masculine term is differentiated from a feminine term, and this differentiation is accomplished through the practices of heterosexual desire" (Butler, 1999, p.30). In effect, sexed beings are taught to present either femininity or masculinity and desire the opposite sex. The girlie magazines in his uncle's closet and his father-like friend Marc's heterosexual guidance, for instance, lead Gallimard to live in accord with his biological sex (male). Moreover, the imperialist discourse represented by cultural icon Pinkerton, who wins the "hearts of the fairest maidens" from the Orient, offers a model of heterosexual masculinity (Hwang, 1989a, p.7). Nevertheless, Gallimard's acting as a

man is constantly blocked and frustrated. Aside from unsuccessful heterosexual experiences and the problem of infertility, his underlying same-sex affection suggests the queerness of Gallimard, a feminine White man who tries to comply with the norm by establishing his manhood.

From negation to awareness, the play portrays Gallimard's exploration of his queer sexuality, which accompanies his gradual disidentification with Pinkerton. One case intensively displays his change. In Act Two, Scene Six, Gallimard's frustration with work intensifies his wish to prove his manhood. He commands Song to take off her clothes that prevent him from totally conquering an East woman. The deadlock between Song and Gallimard ends up with the latter's concession:

Gallimard: Did I not undress her because I knew, somewhere deep down, what I would find? ..... By the time I reached her, Pinkerton... had vanished from my heart. To be replaced by something new, something unnatural, that flew in the face of all I'd learned in the world—something very close to love. (Hwang, 1989a, p.60)

Gallimard's withdrawal of command indicates a surrender that protects Song's hidden identity and his secret queer desire—something “unnatural,” “very close to love.” Moreover, the character's bodily gesture of concession implies a wordless homosexual reconciliation between him and his lover, “*He [Gallimard] grabs her around the waist; she [Song] strokes his hair*” (Hwang, 1989a, p.60). The patriarchal

teaching loses efficacy with Song's queer touch finally overwhelming "Pinkerton" in Gallimard's heart.

Similar moments of sexual exploration are observed in another protagonist's characterization. The cultural revolution in China in 1966 separates Song and Gallimard. After reuniting with Gallimard in Paris, Song seeks to make a change in their relationship. S/he urges his/her lover to face the "truth" that his Butterfly is male-bodied, that they are engaging in a long-time secret homosexual relationship. Despite Gallimard's objection, Song says: "No matter what your eyes tell you, you can't ignore the truth. You already have known too much" (Hwang, 1989a, p.78). Then, "*Song goes to a mirror in front of which is a wash basin of water. She starts to remove her makeup as stage lights go to half and houselights come up*" (Hwang, 1989a, pp.78-79). With "a wash basin of water," Song performs a transformation ritual and abandons the heterosexual feminine masquerade that allows him to love and be loved by a man (Hwang, 1989a, p.79).

Unlike Gallimard, Song expresses a bold desire for non-straight togetherness. In Act Three, Scene Two, before stripping in front of his male lover, Song frankly confesses his queer desires-- "Admit it. You still want me. Even in slacks and a button-down collar," "Well maybe, Rene, just maybe--I want you" (Hwang, 1989a, p.85). The moment before revealing his body, Song admits he is "feeling sexy" (Hwang, 1989a,



p.87). The character then commands Gallimard to touch his skin and “covers Gallimard’s eyes with one hand,” leading the latter to explore his face (Hwang, 1989a, p.89). Song’s invitation to Gallimard to join the queer space of “thirdness” is expressed in his words: “I’m your Butterfly. Under the robes, beneath everything, it was always me” (Hwang, 1989a, p.89).

By “thirdness” I mean a space of dynamic, fluid, and possible deviances of identities that exceeds binary discourses, “a blurred version of either male or female” (Halberstam, 1998, p.20). It is a term with a rich queer connotation.<sup>13</sup> In her research on *M. Butterfly*, Marjorie Garber (1992a, p.125) elucidates the “third space of possibility,” or the space of “thirdness” opened by Song’s acting, spying and transvestite: “the play’s preoccupation with the transvestite as a figure not only for the conundrum of gender and erotic style but also for other kinds of border crossing, like *acting* and *spying*, both of which are appropriations of alternative and socially constructed subject positions for cultural and political ends.” Thus, Song is shown to be simultaneously a transgressor and explorer of normative rules who wanders between fixed roles. The undecidability of his identity is epitomized in his declaration, “I am not ‘just a man’” (Hwang, 1989a, p.88). His imaginative thoughts that “beneath” the performative codes, he is still

---

<sup>13</sup> In “Performance and Perception: Gender, Sexuality, and Culture in David Henry Hwang’s ‘*M. Butterfly*’”, Ilka Saal uses “the potential to queer the binary structure of discourses” and “site of thirdness” alternatively to address the Hwang’s subversion of dichotomous gender identities (Saal, 1998).

Gallimard's beloved "Butterfly" conveys a willingness to lead a different life elsewhere, "where Song is more like a man, Gallimard more like a woman" (Kondo, 1997, p.43).

Gallimard's drag performance of *Madame Butterfly*'s suicide, then, shows the possibility for him to be more like a woman. After finishing making up, Gallimard dons Butterfly's kimono and utters: "I could look in the mirror and see nothing but ..... a woman" (Hwang, 1989a, p.92). The death of Gallimard as a woman evoked criticism from queer intellectuals represented by David Eng, who read it as a negation of queer love (Eng, 1994). My reading, however, affirms the ending's queer potentiality.

Gallimard's death can be read as an escape from heteronormative enslavement. In this sense, death is not where he perishes but where he defies homophobic reality and celebrates a queer rebirth beyond gender binarism. This view resonates with further adaptations of this play. As I demonstrate in later sections, the film version of *M. Butterfly* underscores the death of Gallimard as a transformation rather than an ending. Also, the 2017 revival of *M. Butterfly* portrays the two protagonists' rebirth as a pair of butterflies after Gallimard's suicide.

From what I have examined, Song's abandonment of female identity and Gallimard's drag show with the price of his life convey a queer aesthetic featuring the transformation and mutation of an unstable or growing self. The ambiguous and transformative expression of the body, stressed by Halberstam, stands for an "unstable

and chaotic self” (Halberstam, 2005, p.104). Examining the visual projects of bodily transformation, Halberstam proposes the term “transgender aesthetic” to describe an aesthetic effect generated from “identity as process, mutation, invention and reconstruction.” (Halberstam, 2005, p.121). In the text of *M. Butterfly*, the characters’ subjectivities are unstable with the fluid gender expressions, though their “transgender” is not in the sense of anatomy but is linked with their incompatibility with gender norms. It epitomizes the socially and culturally constructed selves of Song and Gallimard, the “disruption” in their practices of gender norms and the “reconstruction” of their queer subjectivities.

The 1988 *M. Butterfly*’s concern on “serious issues” of identities (gender, nation, and race), cultural interaction, and Orientalism, among others, often eclipses the play’s unseriousness—its queer aesthetics, ambiguities and nuances that defy and transcend the ontological boundaries of what it explores. Therefore, in my research, I seek to reveal the rich queer undercurrents embedded in the play’s aesthetic sensations, a seeming “frivolous”<sup>14</sup> dimension, and the complexities of the protagonists’ selves. Hwang’s stylized employment of theatricality, parody, humor, and witty puns, as I examined in previous sections, infuse *M. Butterfly* with rich camp sensations. These aesthetic techniques allow the playwright to playfully manipulate and push the

---

<sup>14</sup> By “frivolous,” I accentuate that artistic work’s sensibilities and styles are often relegated in importance compared to their content and meanings.

boundaries of heterosexual and racial identity norms. The play's queer aesthetic is also embodied in queer characters' transformative gender-crossing and a potential queer resurrection. Portraying Gallimard and Song's negotiation and defiance of gender binarism, it offers artistic expressions of ambivalent, unfixed, and growing subjectivity.

### ***M. Butterfly* (1993)**

In 1993, *M. Butterfly* was adapted into a film by David Cronenberg, casting Jeremy Irons and John Lone. The director of the film came as a surprise, considering that his previous works (such as *The Fly*, *Naked Lunch*, and *Crash*) tended to revolve around horror, scientific, and cult themes. In the project, the two "Davids" collaborated to work on the original play to make it more suitable for the medium of film, with Hwang writing the screenplay.

In the film version of *M. Butterfly*, theatrical expressions are replaced with more linear cinematic narration. It begins on the day Gallimard meets Song Liling during the latter's performance of *Madama Butterfly* and recounts what happens afterwards. In this way, the film focuses on the two characters' tragic love story and drops numerous non-chronological fantasies, memories, and illusions embedded in the 1988 play. Though the film adaptation does not fully convey the original script's charm rooted in its playful

theatricality, it allows for a deeper exploration of the leading characters' queer transformation.

### **Metamorphoses into Dragonflies: Queer Transformation and Rebirth**

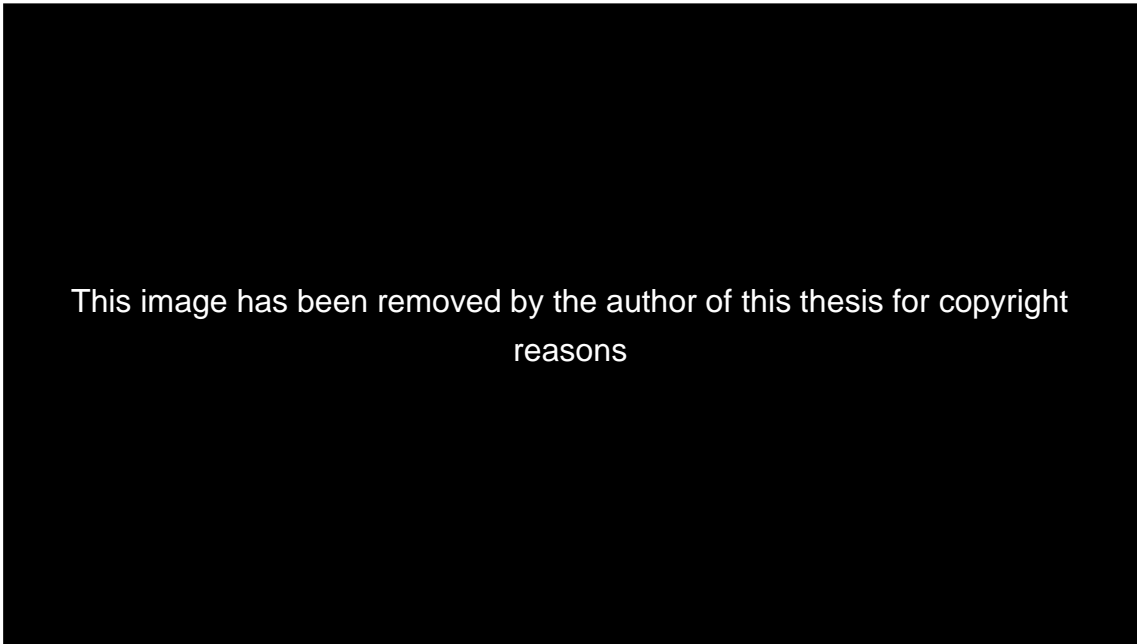
When adapting Hwang's playscript of *M. Butterfly*, David Cronenberg developed what he found fascinating in the story: "The desire and capacity for physical and mental transformation" (Cronenberg, 1996, p.174). Compared with demonstrating the political tensions between the West and East, male and female, the film version is more dedicated to disclosing the nuances of humanity at an individual level. More precisely, it bears on how a subject transforms into something else, sexually and culturally. In the film, Gallimard and Song Liling are shown to be enticed to engage in a new relationship, say goodbye to their past, and transform their life status and identities.

In the case of Gallimard, his transformation is proven to be lethal. After all, it leads to the derailing of the normal life he has before, as well as his death. Jeremy Irons' acting foregrounds the character's obsessive and fanatical tendencies similar to those portrayed in his role as Humbert Humbert in *Lolita* (1997). Gallimard is "obsessive" not only in that he preserves and pursues a colonial and sexist fantasy, *Butterfly*, but also because of his curiosity and desire to experience a risky turmoil of transformation.

The movie begins by portraying Gallimard's daily life routine, including some casual small talk between him and his colleague after work. At the party held in a Swedish embassy, he is enchanted by Song, with a close-up showcasing his absorption in Song's singing and acting. The emergence of the Chinese diva, who fools the French officer about her gender identity, brings a series of changes to Gallimard's life. While it is often interpreted that Gallimard is thoroughly trapped in the fantasy of an ideal woman, I observe that this "trap" is more of an excuse for him to do what he wishes to do. In other words, the seduction from a cross-dressing spy allows him to connect with his innermost desires that deviate from heterosexual norms. And he satisfies these desires passively, as Cronenberg comments, "He's not fooled. He wants to be fooled" (Cronenberg, 1996, p.186). Song's trick enables him to conduct homosexuality while at the same time appearing forced to do so.

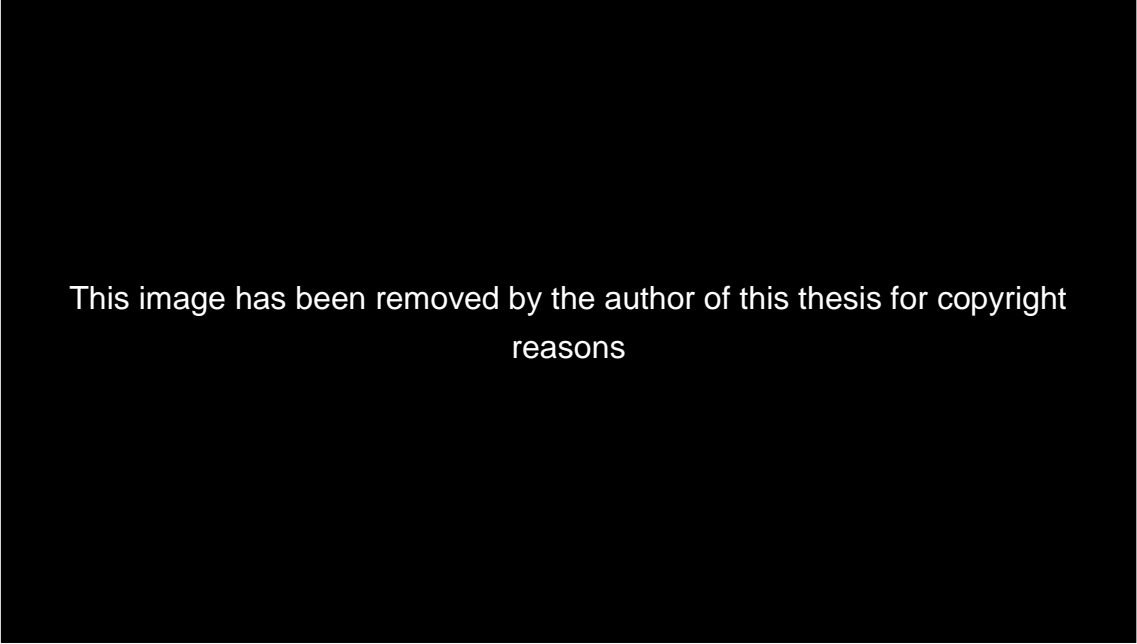
This interesting paradox is what Cronenberg intends to present in the film—"being forced to do things that you really want to do anyway" (Cronenberg, 1996, p.176). The same applies to Song Liling, too. While justifying his sexual acts with a male diplomat as a part of his espionage mission, he is willing to indulge in a same-sex relationship. As he and Gallimard are about to have their first sexual contact, he breathes short, uttering: "Know now, that we embark on the most forbidden of loves, I'm afraid of my destiny." The line suggests the character's awareness, longings, and

fear related to his homosexuality. There are scenes that depict their sexual interaction, often in voyeuristic shots, which presumably allude to the watchful gaze of Song's old housekeeper or the homophobic public. In these scenarios, Song is in a position to offer Gallimard oral pleasure or sit on his lover's lap, his back turned (which provokes associations of anal sex), with an expression of ecstasy on their faces. The shots imitate an interrogative gaze from a long distance, rendering the presented content as private, unrepresentable, and thus deviant.



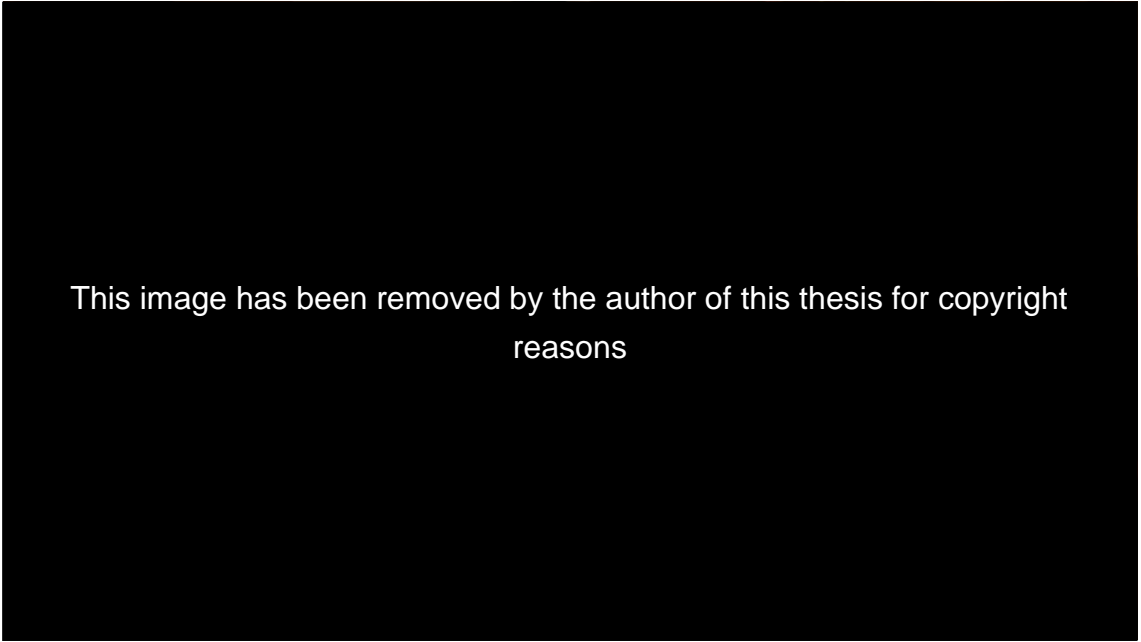
This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons

Figure 1. Frame grab from *M. Butterfly* (1993). The watchful gaze of Song's old housekeeper.



This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons

Figure 2. Frame grab from *M. Butterfly* (1993). One of the voyeuristic shots of Song Liling and Gallimard's private intimacy



This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons

Figure 3. Frame grab from *M. Butterfly* (1993). One of the voyeuristic shots of Song Liling and Gallimard's private intimacy

As a participant in this covert activity, Gallimard frequents the Beijing alley where



his lover lives like a nocturnal animal. His obsession with exploring the “dark” side of his life breaks up the normalcy he once has. He starts to make up lies to deceive his wife, indifferent to her growing suspicion of his cheating. There is a metaphor in the film that illustrates Gallimard’s entering into a transformative status, where he embraces the uncertainties in his life. As he wanders on a Chinese street at night after visiting Song’s house, he spots an old man catching dragonflies on a river bank. The man tells him in Chinese that these are newly hatched dragonflies—they can not fly yet; however, when the dawn breaks, they will fly away. He then gifts one of these insects to Gallimard. When taking a carriage home, Gallimard thoughtfully watches the dragonfly on the back of his hand until it suddenly flies away. The scene draws a connection between the Frenchman and this dragonfly, suggesting a similar transformation that he will experience.

This scenario was added by Cronenberg impulsively when he shot the film in Beijing. In Chinese and Japanese culture, the delicate insect symbolizes the transient summertime, instability, and adorable fragility (Liu, 2001, p.170). From another perspective, the dragonfly connotes transformation and mutation for its distinct morphological and functional change after eclosion<sup>15</sup>, by which it enters adulthood.

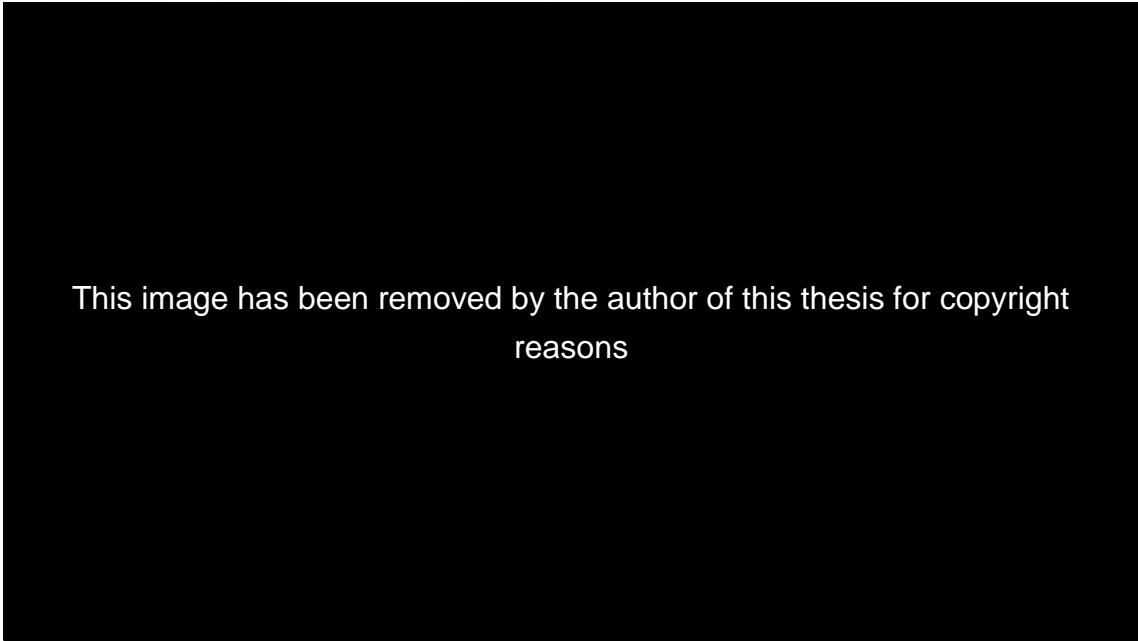
---

<sup>15</sup> The term refers to the final stage of the adult metamorphosis of a dragonfly. Within a few minutes, as the soft cuticle becomes fully sclerotized (hardened), the newly emerged adult is typically able to fly.

These properties make the dragonfly a subtle symbol of queerness, for it will go through a change in form and function in its life. It also resonates with Gallimard and Song's fragile queer romance, the perilous consequences of Gallimard's desire to convert a fixed self.

The movie, however, does not adequately establish Gallimard's background, which motivates his transformation of sexual and gender identities. In the adapted work, the French diplomat's anxiety about establishing his manhood and his resistance to heterosexual intercourse since his adolescence is hardly addressed. For example, it reduces details about Gallimard's inability to get sexually aroused by objectified female bodies in girlie magazines when he was a teenager, his unpleasant heterosexual courtship, and his infertility. These personal stories indicate the character's nonconformity to straight norms and his anxiety about it. In the movie version, this background is compressed as Gallimard's passionless marriage and his refusal of the naked body of a desirable woman, Frau Baden. The revision downplays the figure's experiences of being repressed in a patriarchal society. This may be a flaw of the film. However, the movie effectively delves into Gallimard's desire for an alternative life, relationships, and transformation from an imposed white male identity. When not expected to act and love in a way different from a straight man, Gallimard gets involved in a political trick, which in turn leads him to what he denies and wants.

In this way, while Gallimard appears to be homophobic, he enters into a same-sex relationship anyway. A detail of the movie indicates the extent to which Gallimard wants to stay on in Song's trick. In the movie, John Lone's appearance as a woman is not convincing enough, and this is the director's deliberate design. David Cronenberg states that he attempts to make visible that Song is not a perfect woman—"When Gallimard and Song are kissing I wanted it to be two men," which is only ignored by Gallimard (Cronenberg, 1996, p.180). An interpretation of this detail can be that it reflects Gallimard's obsession with the idealized woman invented by Song. But it is also possible that he is willing to sustain the fantasy, without which he can not be fooled to love a man. As noticed by Aren Bergstrom, "Like Bill Lee in *Naked Lunch* [a cult film directed by David Cronenberg two years before *M. Butterfly*], where Lee concocts a scenario of espionage to excuse his own homosexual acts, René Gallimard creates a fantasy about Chinese women that will allow him to live out his own homosexuality" (Bergstrom, 2018). The movie *M. Butterfly* provokes thoughts about the contradictions and nuances of human sexual desires, a motif explored in its predecessor.



This image has been removed by the author of this thesis for copyright reasons

Figure 4. Frame grab from *M. Butterfly* (1993). Song Liling and Gallimard's kissing.

Similarly, Gallimard needs to set a boundary between himself and female others to prove that he is a man, but he steps into this role of women and dies in the most “feminine” way. The B side of all these “be forced,” “be deceived,” and “be pushed” situations lies in the subject’s active desire to seek self-invention and bodily mutation.

Death is the climax of his transformation. In the scenario, we can see how this character “sweeps out the past; viciously, violently, cruelly, completely,” according to the director’s words (Cronenberg, 1996, p.184). In the 1988 version of *M. Butterfly*, Song Liling’s transition of gender is foregrounded. In the last scene of Act Two, before she reveals his maleness, she invites the audience to witness her change. With a basin of water on stage, she is shown removing her make-up and female appearance.

In the film version, however, it is Gallimard's transformation that is closely presented. Before the night of his performance of *Madama Butterfly* in a Paris prison, there is a scene that shows his preparation work. That is, a prison officer calls Gallimard and delivers a package to him through a narrow hole in his cell door. Then, a pair of hands with red nails receive it. The hands no doubt belong to Gallimard, who then responds to the officer's question and admits that he will have a show tonight. The scene prepares the audience for his following transformation into Madama Butterfly. On that night, Gallimard stages with little make-up. As he proceeds to recite the lines of Butterfly in her last scene, he puts on a geisha wig, applies rouge on his face, and dresses up in a kimono. In his last posture, he bows and kills himself with a tiny mirror.

Gallimard's death as a woman tends to be interpreted as a way to sustain his fantasy. For instance, Teresa De Laureti reads it as an action out of fetishism and narcissism, arguing that Gallimard's purpose is to become the "object" he admires, therefore keeping his fantasy unbroken (Laureti, 1999). Nonetheless, it is also likely that Gallimard's suicide drag is the result or process of this character's self-revolution, regardless of how passive he seems in the journey. Risking losing his life (since the loss of subjectivity and life is an extreme expression of women's otherness), he experiments with a man's transformation into a woman. By doing this, he abandons the anxiety-inducing standard of masculinity and embraces a more "feminine" self, expressing

passivity, failure, and self-devotion—qualities supposedly linked with femininity. Here, gender is detached from anatomical differences; it is rendered as an abstract social construction that can be embodied in different bodies. As Cronenberg states when talking about *M. Butterfly*, “a story about two men” can still “play out all the maleness and femaleness” (Cronenberg, 1996, p.184). Rather than something natural, female sexuality is a situation or an invention that applies to every subject in changing power relations.

In this sense, Gallimard’s death is not an end but a transformation or rebirth (which is more clearly seen in the 2017 revival of *M. Butterfly*). This is reminiscent of the theme of transformation in the Roman poet Ovid’s (43BC-17AD) poem *The Metamorphoses*. This classic work narrates many myths about how entities transform into other beings— from humans to animals, gods, plants, and constellations; from one sex to the other, or a hermaphrodite; from one appearance to another, and many others. In a word, everything “dies” from a previous shape and “rebirths” as a new one. As Ovid writes in the poem, “In this universe so vast, nothing perishes; but it varies and changes its appearance, and to begin to be something different from what it was before, is called being born; and to cease to be the same thing, is to be said to die” (Ovid, 1851, p.525). Aside from *The Metamorphoses*, numerous mythological stories and artistic works contribute to the aesthetics of transformation. An interesting example is an Indian

Folklore collected in *Angela Carter's Book Of Fairy Tales* (2005). It tells how a crab transforms into a handsome man and has to stay in this form after his wife burns his crab shape. The film *M. Butterfly* serves as another vivid manifestation. Gallimard's death can be viewed as a transformative transition leading up to his "rebirth." It opens up a possibility of transcending the order of reality, a rejection of heterosexual oppression. The transformation with blood and pain represents a bold presentation and protest against homophobic violence. And Gallimard's make-up in his death scene also calls attention to a color style of queerness, with the large, excessive red color around his eyes decorating the ritual of mutation.<sup>16</sup>

In an interview, Cronenberg expresses his surprise at the extent to which the audience can not understand how Gallimard fails to see through Song's disguise during their sexual intercourse since "naturally he would have wanted to stick his cock up her cunt. Only that satisfies a real guy" (Cronenberg, 1996, p.186). After lamenting these people's lack of imagination regarding sex, he went on to say, "I think people have got to accept how weird people really are...Human sexuality is an incredibly potent force" (Cronenberg, 1996, p.186). I believe his film adaptation of Hwang's play exhibits not only the weirdness of sexuality but also that of human subjectivity—the tensions

---

<sup>16</sup>According to Halberstam, compared with straight minimalism, the light and intense color stand for queer, feminine and monstrous (Halberstam, 2005, p.119).

between resistance and desire can transform people into something they have never been before.

In this way, the film version's exploration of the characters' nuanced queer transformation embodies the "transgender aesthetics" in Halberstam's account. As a "postmodern aesthetic," this concept celebrates the detachability and transitive capacity of human bodies and subjectivity—moving beyond any binary adherence (Halberstam, 2005, p.124). In addition to navigating its audience to the transformation experienced by Gallimard, the film also juxtaposes it to that of Song Liling. Its ending foregrounds a queer hope that is interwoven with living and death, failure and growth, identification and disidentification.

When Gallimard conducts his performance of suicide in jail, surrounded by an audience of prisoners, the film presents alternating shots between this scene and the scene of Song's being released and transported to China. Death and "resurrection" are alternately narrated in prison and on the plane. This cinematic language implies the transformation of both characters. For Song, his female-to-male transformation refers to his abandonment of feminine masquerade as well as the persistence to "be another person." Instead of performing the Butterfly—the unattainable "real" model—and the stereotypical Oriental beauty Anna May Wong on the cover of a magazine, he is at ease as a "queer dragonfly" and beautifully flies away from the palm of compulsory



heterosexuality.

### **Sadomasochistic Desires and Patriarchal Power Play**

Through presenting the metaphor of transformation and resurrection of the queer subjects, the film version of *M. Butterfly* possesses a queer aesthetic embodied in an insightful portrayal of gender transgression. Although the film version dropped much camp aesthetic sensibilities that are fully displayed in theatricality, parody, humor, exaggeration, and other elements of the original script, its focus on queer eroticism and gay sensibility, to some extent, compensates for the loss. In terms of the expression of queer aesthetics, another major difference between the film version and the original text is the exploration of sadomasochism (S/M).

SONG: Do I sound silly, a slave, if I say I'm not worthy?

GALLIMARD: Yes. In fact you do. No one has loved me like you. (Hwang, 1989a, p.65)

In Hwang's 1998 script, sadomasochistic relationship is not a prominent theme. Still, the quotation above provides a direct reference to it—when acting as a woman, Song expresses her feeling of inferiority akin to slavery. A latent sadomasochistic sense is shown to penetrate the two protagonists' relationship, with Gallimard's enslavement of Song and the change of their roles.

Puccini's *Madama Butterfly* itself encompasses a frame of S/M: Cio-Cio-San gives up everything for her lover without demand and ends her life with a dagger, while Pinkerton catches his "Butterfly," then "pierces its heart with a needle, and then leaves it to perish" (Puccini, 2001, p.62). There is no doubt that this frame hinges on the power mechanism in gender identity, feminine passivity, national identity, and racial identity. In the original script and film version of *M. Butterfly*, Song and Gallimard (a pair of queer lovers) also play a sadomasochistic game. And a set of parodies and challenges towards fixed identities is witnessed in the reversed slave-master-relation of Song and Gallimard.

The reinforcement of S/M elements allows another expression of queer aesthetics in the movie of *M. Butterfly*. In "Camp Sadomasochism in Tennessee Williams's Plays," Tison Pugh (2016) proposes a lens of "camp sadomasochism" based on the broad overlapping of camp and sadomasochism. Firstly, the two hinge on "performative modes," involving the assumption of prescribed roles (Pugh, 2016, p.21). Secondly, both feature playing in the matrix of power and order, which facilitates a dismantlement of social hierarchy. To be specific, the S/M game allows a fluidity of roles between the poles of sadist and masochist, where gender, sexuality, age, social positions, and other identities become erotic toys. As Foucault claims: "the S/M game is very interesting because it is a strategic relation, but it is always fluid... It is an acting out of power

structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure” (Foucault, 1984, pp.29-30). The power matrix of sadomasochism is constructed and deconstructed. Similarly, camp aesthetics is highly linked with the ambiguity and transgression of identity borders as well as the subvention of the mechanism of knowledge and power. As described by Fabio Cleto, camp performance is “of a mobile knowledge – on the critical, political and epistemic stage” (Cleto, 1999, p.36). In the film, the protagonists’ particular roles of Sadist and Masochist are reflected in their lines and power dynamics. The shifting of the two protagonists’ situations resembles a performance of sadomasochistic role transformation.

The film adds a new episode that presents Gallimard and Song’s days together in Beijing after Song becomes Gallimard’s mistress. As they eat a picnic on the Great Wall, Song, wearing a Mao suit, asks Gallimard why he chooses a Chinese girl whose chest is like a boy’s instead of a Western woman. Gallimard explains that her chest is not like a boy’s, but is like “a young innocent schoolgirl, waiting for her lesson.” Their topic, then, extends to the education of the West and the East.

Song: “I know you are not frightened by your slave’s education.”

Gallimard: “Certainly not, especially when my slave has so much to teach me.”

In another example, Gallimard enters their flat after suffering from frustration at

work. Drunk and angry, he mocks Song's emphasis that she is his "slave" and orders

Song to strip in order to test her "submissiveness":

Gallimard: "I am a man. I want to see you naked."

Song: "I thought you understood my modesty, I thought you respected my shame."

Gallimard: "I believe you gave me your shame some time ago."

Song: "And it is just like a White Devil to use it against me."

Gallimard: "White Devil so. I am no longer your lord master. So your obedience has limits I see."

The pattern of interdependence, possessing and being possessed, surrender and conquest in the sadomasochistic matrix is reflected in the relationship between the two. And the death of Gallimard pushes the erotic S/M game to a climax, where Gallimard becomes the sacrificial "victim" or "sovereign" being who is liberated from the bondage of reproductive and utilitarian production. The two quoted terms are borrowed from French philosopher Georges Bataille's accounts: "The victim [of the sacrifice] is a surplus taken from the mass of useful wealth," "we may call sovereign the enjoyment of ties that utility doesn't justify (utility being that whose end is productive activity)" (Bataille, 1988, p.59; Bataille, 1991, p.198). According to Bataille, reproductivity is closely related to working. By contrast, excessive, erotic, and other non-reproductive and non-productive activities or conditions, including death and sacrifice, are regarded as evil. Because they are useless and purposeless, standing in opposition to utilitarian principles. In his opinion, there is too much energy in society, and this "accursed share"

must be consumed luxuriously without any profit, for example, in the form of eroticism and sacrifice, lest it would lead to ruinous consequences. He posits that the sacrificial “victim” and “sovereign” existence who consume rather than produce are able to escape the enslavement of society (Bataille, 1988, p.59; Bataille, 1991, p.198, 199, 221).

From another perspective, the “slave-master” relationship strengthens the tension of the erotic entanglement of the two protagonists in the film. As the marginal “abjects” in a heterosexual society (which is reflected in Comrade Chin’s words: “There is no homosexuality in China”), the female impersonator and the French diplomat experience humiliation from the homophobic society, suffering from violence, loss, loneliness, and the torment of desire. To some extent, sadomasochism offers a strong bond between the two queer subjects and alleviates the feelings of separation, injury, destruction, guilt, and anxiety (Li, 2009, p.210). The intimate and cohesive relationship makes them feel the ecstasy of losing themselves and merging with each other, with the universe (Li, 2009, p.320). This property of sadomasochism creates a subtle and complex relationship between the two lovers and enriches the homosexual eroticism less addressed in the original script of *M. Butterfly*. Gay desire “challenges the separation of mind and body by intertwining desire with one’s thoughts and embodied emotion, returning bodily sensation and lived experience to aesthetic appreciation” (Isherwood, 2020, p.232). In the gay sensibility, the queer aesthetic is aroused.

## **The Revival version of *M. Butterfly* (2017)**

On October 26, 2017, directed by Julie Taymor, the Broadway revival of *M. Butterfly* was performed at the Cort Theatre. In “The Further Metamorphosis of a Butterfly,” the introduction of the Broadway revival edition of *M. Butterfly*, David Henry Hwang outlined two reasons for rewriting the play. According to him, the pre-internet days in the eighties impeded him from a deep understanding of the factual models of the characters in *M. Butterfly*. A “greater knowledge of the true story,” then motivated him to consider an updated version of his play (Hwang, 2017, p.vi).

In addition to this factor, Hwang also attempted to incorporate a more elastic gender understanding in the story, as he observes: “Our world had thankfully moved forward towards a more complicated understanding of gender identity and fluidity” (Hwang, 2017, p.vi). With changes to the storyline and more homosexual hints, the new version of the love story between the characters Song Liling and Gallimard is expected to be “more nuanced” and “less gender-binary” by the playwright (Hwang, 2017, p.vi). Refreshed with an evolving societal landscape regarding LGBTQ issues and more exposure to the factual affair behind the play, the 2017 work delves into the characterization of Song Liling as a Nan dan (female impersonator) and his ambiguous gay relationship with Gallimard. In this way, the play foregrounds the characters’

homosexual love across gender identity, which, as will be analyzed, is directly affirmed in the ending scene. As I demonstrate in the section, the play evokes rich queer aesthetic sensibilities through foregrounding these character's gay desires and bodily sensations. Moreover, it calls on ancient Chinese elements—Classical operas and “qing” (love) discourses—to envision an alternative life of non-straight togetherness, embodying a queer utopian aesthetic.

Before I discuss the queer space and aesthetic expressions in the production, it is necessary to provide an overview of it and address where it differs from the 1988 version. Despite significant theatrical structure and content changes, the rewritten play still tells the romance between Song Liling and Gallimard in flashbacks. It starts from a similar but more concise narration from Gallimard in a prison cell in 1986 after he is arrested for supporting his Chinese spy lover. Different from the 1998 production of the play, the revival version deleted some scenes involving actors' parodic performances of *Madama Butterfly*. Though the change reduces the camp pleasure it once contained, it allows for a clearer unfolding of the play that is complicated by the addition of two traditional Chinese dramatic works (*Butterfly Lovers* and the *White Snake*). As part of the change, Song is shown to assume not only the persona of Butterfly in Puccini's text but also that of Zhu Yingtai in *Butterfly Lovers*, a girl passing as a male scholar and falling in love with whom she engages in brotherhood. This design adds another layer of

this character's deception in terms of gender issues. When Gallimard, a married French diplomatic officer, first sees Song in her performance of *Madama Butterfly* in China, the audience is informed that Song is a male opera singer impersonating the female character of Butterfly. However, to attract the Western diplomat, Song borrows the plot in *Butterfly Lovers* and confesses that he is actually a woman—like Zhu Yingtai, the role he plays, “she” needs to keep her female identity secret. It is only after Song's confession that “she” becomes Gallimard's mistress. Incorporating Zhu Yingtai's story, the original mystery and ambiguity around the figure of Song is further deepened. Because at the end of the script, when her espionage is discovered, “she” is still shown to be a “he,” just as in previous versions of the play. The new production also ends with Gallimard's desperate suicide in Butterfly's Drag; however, after the scene, the couple transforms into “two butterflies” fluttering on stage, suggesting a rebirth of these characters.

From an overview of the play, it is evident that the subtle same-sex relationship between Song and Gallimard is given more importance and more room for interpretation. In Hwang's rewriting, he provides further commentary on the same-sex erotic relationship between the two male characters. It makes it easier to notice something beyond the drama's superficial tension featuring characters' reversal of the East-West, male-female power order and witness their individual emotional



connections. To some extent, the play leans toward how the two subjects negotiate with the heteronormative reality, identify and disidentify with gender and cultural roles, and react to their non-normative partnership. The artistic visibility of gay bodies and affections, as in Matthew Isherwood's account, constitutes "a queer aesthetic sensibility" that "frees one to make their desires real through a radical reimagining of what is possible in the present moment" (Isherwood, 2020, p.237). Accordingly, I will explore the aesthetic expressions of the production that allow queer desires and imagination.

### **Dance in the Dark: "Space-Off" Same-Sex Eroticism**

On the surface, Song Liling and Gallimard's story may be viewed as a heterosexual tragedy. In this perspective, a Chinese spy avenges a sexist Western Colonizer by catering to the latter's fantasy of submissive Asian women. However, *M. Butterfly* does not hold itself from displaying the private erotic moments between the two male characters, and this is more clearly seen in its 2017 version. Inconspicuous it may look, the same-sex eroticism in the play constitutes a corner that threatens to become visible in a supposed heterosexual story framework between Pinkerton and Butterfly.

From gossiped conversations about the scandalous love between Gallimard and Song at the beginning of the play, we can glimpse a sense of anxiety and curiosity toward the two characters' potential homosexual acts:

MAN 1: He says...  
 MAN 1 AND WOMAN 3: . . . it was dark. . .  
 MAN 1 AND WOMAN 1: . . . and she was very modest!  
 .....  
 MAN 2: That's impossible!  
 ALL: How could he not know?  
 MAN 1: Simple ignorance.  
 MAN 2: For twenty years? (Hwang, 2017, p.3)

How could Gallimard not know Song's male identity across twenty years of sex life? What are the details that enable sex between two men? These discussions are overly obsessed with the two male characters' private and non-normative sexual encounters. At the same time, the gossipers avoid obscene associations of same-sex intercourse under discussion. "It was dark..." they borrow Gallimard's words as an explanation of the scandalous case of gender misperception. But would this excuse ease people's doubts? The fact that this "darkness" is reiterated and discussed obsessively still indicates the public's curiosity and concern about the dark nature of the homosexual intimacy between the French officer and his lover. Simultaneously, for both Gallimard (an arguably closeted gay) and people who talk about him, it is *okay* to leave this sensitive topic in a dark space. For in there, the presumed deviant sexuality is not representable, visible, and (therefore) disturbing. In the 2017 production of *M. Butterfly*,

however, the supposed blocked and repressed dark space is staged, which blurs the boundaries between the visible and the invisible, representable and unrepresentable.

At the end of Act One, Scene 13, after Song becomes Gallimard's mistress, they spend their first night in the former's apartment. Like the play's 1988 script, the stage direction in the new version writes, "Gallimard turns out the lights, They move to the bed," immersing us in imaginative darkness (Hwang, 2017, p.43). More than this, the new production expands on the bodily contact and erotic exploration between the two characters in their "first night" and the days after. As Gallimard says, "That first night we spent together was fumbling, groping, finished almost before it started" (Hwang, 2017, p.43). In the related scenes, Hwang uses ambiguous words to indicate not only these characters' underground extramarital affair but also their secret homosexual eroticism. For instance, Gallimard describes: "Within her tiny flat, we began to make a world of our own," to which Song replies, "With you, I feel I can be myself at last" (Hwang, 2017, p.44). Gallimard agrees with the statement: "I feel free" (Hwang, 2017, p.44). In the "tiny flat" where they enjoy the freedom to be themselves, Song attempts to teach Gallimard "[d]ancing, in the dark" (Hwang, 2017, p.44). Well aware of their same-sex relationship, Song guides the closeted diplomat to grope for their forbidden desires as he leads him to dance in the darkness. The text reads:

SONG: First, you put one hand here. And the other, here.

(They dance)

Now, you lead me. And if I am very good, if my body follows exactly the way you want me to, then you might pull me very close. And your hand might even slip . . . all the way down here. And I will not move it. Then everyone in the club will see—how much I love you. (Hwang, 2017, p.45)

These instructions encourage Gallimard to explore his lover's body and delve further into their bodily pleasure. Meanwhile, the script also shows the fragility of the secret space that allows these characters' erotic exploration, for it could come to an end at any moment due to the detection from the outside. When "a shadow appears," which may allude to the presence of comrade Chin, who keeps warning Song of his transgressive homosexual orientation in the play, Song ceases their dance (Hwang, 2017, p.45). "Enough!" he exclaims, then "breaks away from him [Gallimard], turns off the music" (Hwang, 2017, p.45). In the new version of *M. Butterfly*, Song and Gallimard's hidden space for homosexual eroticism and bodily contact echoes the concept of "space-off" in Teresa de Lauretis' work. For Lauretis, if there is an "elsewhere" that allows for resistance or rearrangement of patriarchal "hegemonic discourses" and "power-knowledge apparatus," it is not situated outside of those discourses but lies within them—those "off," unseen and unrepresentable parts (Lauretis, 1987, p.25). Borrowing a cinematic term, she describes the site as "space-off," "the space not visible in the frame but inferable from what the frame makes visible" (Lauretis, 1987, p.26). Though Lauretis here is using the notion for theorizing

the construction of female sexuality and subjectivity, this concept can also apply to homosexual desires, which likewise inhabit a space not representable in normative discourses. Calling attention to the “space-off” in Gallimard and Song’s relationship, the revival of *M. Butterfly* sheds light on the dark corners that harbor same-sex bodily groping, intimate touch, and erotic passions.

### **Becoming Butterflies: Queer Rebirth**

In previous discussions, I read how Hwang presents private and invisible desires in the revival of *M. Butterfly* and creates a space for queer reverie. More than this, the play also draws upon erotic discourse in classical Chinese drama, allowing the two male characters the possibility to transcend their existing identities and heterosexual constraints on an imaginative level.

As I mentioned earlier, an important change in the 2017 production of *M. Butterfly* is the addition of the Chinese classic operas *Butterfly Lovers*<sup>17</sup> and *Madame White*

---

<sup>17</sup> *Butterfly Lovers*, or *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, is a widespread Chinese tale dating back to the Eastern Jin dynasty (AD 317-420). The story gained popularity through textual and oral forms in the Tang (AD 618-907) and Song (690-1279) periods. Hundred versions of it in various genres exist, including operas, novels, folk ballads, and TV series and Films. In *M. Butterfly* (2017), *Butterfly Lovers* is described as a Yunnan opera, which is presumably one of the versions of the tale, with the date unknown. For the evolvement course and documented accounts of the story, see Cho’s study and Duanrong Xu’s *Liang Zhu gushi yanjiu* 梁祝故事研究, vol. I (Cho, 2018, p.2; Xu, 2007, p.6).

*Snake*<sup>18</sup>. The two pieces, especially the former, have endowed the element of “butterfly” in the play with a more profound meaning. While the original script portrays “butterfly” as the fantasy of Madama Butterfly— an ideal image of a woman—the element in this version also corresponds to the transformation and rebirth of the couple in *Butterfly Lovers*. Before I talk about the queer imagination and aesthetics evoked in the ending of the production that pays a direct homage to the Chinese classic romance, I will first introduce the story of *Butterfly Lovers* and trace how it is integrated into the homosexual love between Song and Gallimard.

When Song Liling passes as a woman before Gallimard, she relates herself to the female protagonist in *Butterfly Lovers*, claiming, “It is my story” (Hwang, 2017, p.33). Previously, after a brief encounter with Gallimard at the German Embassy, she invites the new friend to “see the true butterfly story” at the Peking Opera (Hwang, 2017, p.18). Backstage, she explains to him the love story that might seem unfamiliar to Westerners:

SONG: My character is a girl. Who, in order to be educated, disguises herself as a boy. I fall in love with another classmate – also male, of course. He finds he has feelings for me – which he cannot understand. Finally, I can hold the truth insider me no longer. It bursts forth – too late. I’ve already been betrothed to a wealthy merchant, and my true love – dies of heartbreak. But heaven takes mercy on us. We two are reborn – as butterflies, to be together forever. (Hwang, 2017, p.22).

---

<sup>18</sup> *Madame White Snake* is a well-known Chinese folktale. One of the earliest textual narrations about it is “The White Maiden Locked for Eternity in the Leifeng Pagoda” (白娘子永鎮雷峰塔), a story collected in Feng Menglong’s *Yushi Mingyan* (喻世明言, or *Stories Old and New*) that was written in Ming dynasty (1368–1644) (Chen, 1997).

As a well-known folktale for the contemporary Chinese audience, *Butterfly Lovers*, or *Liang Shanbo and Zhu Yingtai*, is quite influential in Chinese culture and performed in various local operas. It is, for example, one of the four most outstanding works in Yueju (Yue opera, a branch of major Chinese operas).<sup>19</sup> Specifically, in Hwang's play, Song is shown playing Yunnan<sup>20</sup> opera rendition of the tale. Connecting Song with the role she performs on stage, Hwang rationalizes Song's identity as a female impersonator. It is commonly known in China that female impersonators play Beijing Opera heroines. In the 1960s, females had long been ostracized from the stage of Chinese opera. The traditional Chinese culture values the "myth of female inferiority" and strictly divides the social functions of females and males. Thereafter, women were restricted to domestic areas, and their presence on stage as actresses was regarded as destructive to morals (Xu, 2007, pp.18-20). The roles of "dan" – women characters in Chinese opera, from girls to old ladies – were often played by actors who were trained to be "nan dan" (female impersonators) since their boyhoods (Xu, 2007, p.58).

In Hwang's 1988 play, this fact, indeed, reduces the credibility of Song's consistent construction of female identity before not only Gallimard but also the public.

---

<sup>19</sup> Yueju refers to a form of Chinese operas that originates in Zhe Jiang province of China.

<sup>20</sup> Yunnan is a province located in southern China.

In the new version of the play, Gallimard addresses Song as “Mademoiselle” at first sight. This title then changes to “Monsieur Song,” as Gallimard knows that “men play women’s roles” in Chinese opera. Reenacting the role of Zhu Yingtai in her life, however, Song successfully convinces Gallimard that his “true” identity is female:

There is no doubt that Song attempts to appropriate a storyline from *Butterfly Lovers* to “reveal” himself as a woman. The role he plays, Zhu Yingtai, dressing as a man to receive an education, has to disclose her female identity to form a romantic relationship with her male schoolmate Liang Shanbo. Thus, the plot helps Song to explain “her” story, that “she” is raised as a boy to satisfy “her” father's demand for a son. However, the incorporation of the opera *Butterfly Lovers* in the new version of *M. Butterfly* carries a more profound layer of meaning. That is, Song is portrayed as a homosexual, male version of Zhu Yingtai, who adopts a female disguise for political reasons. Much like the female protagonist in *Butterfly Lovers*, who expects her lover to see through her cross-dressing, Song hopes Gallimard to uncover that he is male-bodied. When forced to take off her clothes, she shows some anticipation— “In fact, it’s all I ever wanted. For you to see me. As I am,” “Go ahead... Ignore...everything that has made it possible for me to love you. Yes, you will see me. And you will also show us both—who you really are” (Hwang, 2017, p.66). This line expresses the character’s attempt to unearth the hidden part between him and Gallimard. He encourages



Gallimard to admit their same-sex relationship and closet status, embracing their queerness.

The unutterable and deliberately sustained identity misunderstanding lasts until the end of the play. In Act Two, Scene 8, before exhibiting his naked body in front of Gallimard, Song states that what he does next is “the ending *I’ve* been searching for. I believe it can lead—to a new beginning,” namely a queer relationship beyond gender and sexual boundaries (Hwang, 2017, p.99).

In *Butterfly Lovers*, the couple who cannot be together in reality become butterflies after death and achieve a romantic ending. In a widely circulated version of the folktale collected in Feng Menglong’s *Yushi Mingyan* (喻世明言, or *Words to Enlighten the World*, which is also known as *Stories Old and New*, published circa 1621), the ending is described as:

...the ground split open with a loud bang, leaving a ten-foot wide gap, into which she threw herself. Her clothes, which followers in the procession tried to grab, flew o in pieces, like skin sloughed o by a cicada...and the sedanchair was seen resting right by Liang Shanbo’s tomb. Now the realization came that the two sworn brothers in life were now husband and wife in death. Eyes then turned to the floating pieces of Yingtai’s clothing, which changed into a pair of colorful butterflies. As legend has it, it was the spirits of the couple that had changed into the butterflies, the red one being Liang Shanbo, the black one Zhu Yingtai. (Feng, 2000, pp.491-492)

Mirroring the classical folktale’s ending scene, *M. Butterfly* allows a possibility for

Gallimard and Song Liling that is forbidden in their real life:

*Song collapses as the shadows of two butterflies flutter upwards from their bodies. Lights FADE TO BLACK.* (Hwang, 2017, p.105)

This scene epitomizes how the aesthetic realm rejects existing limitations and allows us to envision a better and futuristic queer world, a proposition in Jose Esteban Muñoz's *Cruising Utopia* (2009). The portrayal of the two male protagonists' transforming into butterflies transcends the limits of reality, allowing free expressions of homosexual eros and togetherness across identity barriers. It draws from the romantic butterfly fantasy beyond social restrictions and the associated conflict, distress, and despair in *Butterfly Lovers*, which is well-expressed in Sookja Cho's observation:

Liang and Zhu's relationship epitomizes the fundamental problem of finding oneself trapped by the tensions between social norms and personal desires. The butterfly images aptly capture this problematic human relation, in which desires, interests, and confused emotions intermingle and confront each other across unresolved categorical barriers. The problematic expectations of gender and emotion, and the trauma of trying to reconcile these, are carried away as the butterflies soar up into the sky. (Cho, 2018, p.182)

Coincidentally, despite depicting a heterosexual couple, the story has been interpreted by modern readers as more of a queer metaphor (Chao, 2013, p.333). People continue to explore this text of the past, from which they are empowered and inspired to

criticize the present and move towards a better future. In the same way, *M. Butterfly* (2017) restages a modern, gay, male-bodied Zhu Yingta. It rewrites the tragic ending of Song and Gallimard by fusing it with the butterfly transformation motif in Liang-Zhu's story, embodying the world-making capacity of queer aesthetic imagination.

When reviewing the revival of *M. Butterfly*, Claudia Orenstein stated that the homage to the Chinese opera is a counterpart of Puccini's opera, providing "a view into Song's love fantasy, in which gender disguise is eventually overcome, leading to a final, true love union after death" (Orenstein, 2018, p.492). I believe that the use of this romantic tale throughout the revival version of *M. Butterfly* reinforces the love beyond gender identity and sexualities.

When discussing sexuality in a Chinese context, it is necessary to address the country's special cultural legacy regarding sexual orientation and the constitution of homophobic discourse in modern China. In *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-Sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*, Chou Wah-shan (2000) surveys homosexual elements in Chinese culture and literature. Quite similar to Western society before the mid-19th century, where the categorization of homosexuals was not yet constituted<sup>21</sup>, ancient Chinese society also did not build a strict connection between same-sex contact or desire and one's social identity. The binary conception of homosexual and heterosexual was not

---

<sup>21</sup> For the genealogical research on the homosexuality, please see Foucault's *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction* (Foucault, 1978).

formed. A person who has same-sex desires or activities would hardly be judged, criticized, and abjected by the reproductive patriarchal society, especially males from the ruling classes. It was commonly seen these male elites have both female and male concubines without being labeled as homosexual (Wah-shan, 2000, p.27). In the Qing dynasty (1644–1911), there were even male brothels that catered to the same-sex tastes of the officials (Wah-shan, 2000, p.35). In addition, female impersonators (Nan Dan) who got special training for same-sex service from a young age were popular among males in the upper class (Wah-shan, 2000, p.36). Regarded as “brief, recreational, and casual,” homosexual intercourse would not bother people fulfilling marriage obligations and supporting a patriarchal society in premodern China (Wah-shan, 2000, pp.42, 33). Thus, it was not considered sinful, perverted, or threatening.

Homosexual eroticism was also justified by a naturalistic idea of “eating and sex are human nature” for both the ruling class and the ruled people (Wah-shan, 2000, p.31). As it existed widely in society, the same-sex impulse was a natural expression of “qing” (love or Eros). In premodern Chinese literature that depicts love union beyond sex and gender (*Bian er chai*)<sup>22</sup>, class (*Butterfly Lovers*), and species (*Lady White Snake*), the concept of qing tends to be foregrounded as a power that “exceeds the

---

<sup>22</sup> *Bian er chai*, or *Caps and Hairpins*, is a novel in the last Ming dynasty (1368- 1644). It involves four stories that revolve around the theme of “Qing” between same-sex protagonists: “Qing Fidelity,” “Qing Chivalry,” “Qing Sacrifice,” and “Qing Marvel.”

solidity of gold,”<sup>23</sup> a miracle against social obstacles. From a male protagonist’s

monologue in *Bian er Chai*, we can perceive the value of “qing”:

We are the people who really appreciate *qing*. Although our [same-sex] relationship has deviated from the norm [*li*], it flows with *qing* ... a discourse that confines itself to the life and death of female-male relationships is not really *qing*. (Samshasha, 1997, p.390).

In the new version of *M. Butterfly*, the addition of *Lady White Snake* and a “love union” fantasy at the ending scene resembling *Butterfly Lovers* call on utopian drives restored in the past. They open a space for the disruption of fixed social identities driven by “qing.” The final togetherness of a queer couple is a reverberation of the aesthetical tradition of Chinese literature that values “qing” beyond social norms. The dramatization and romanticization of a cross-dressing performer’s same-sex erotic relationship, to some degree, echoes a nonbinary appreciation of queer desire in traditional China. Though this trend did not pose a threat to the premodern Chinese patriarchal family system, class oppression, or sexology, it illuminates an alternative way of desiring and living in the heteronormative present. The disruption of boundaries of sexuality and gender identity, with the freedom to accommodate alternative sexual desires, implants fantasy in the rift of identity discourses.

---

<sup>23</sup> “Qing as solid as gold” is a traditional Chinese idiom.

More importantly, the homage to the story at the end of the play leaves a (positive) ending for queer potentiality and futurity. Repressed by the upper class, the faithful couple in *The Butterfly Lovers* dies for love like Romeo and Juliet, and so are Song and Gallimard, who may “continue” their forbidden homosexual love as “butterflies after death.” Referring to the Chinese transgender story, the revival of *M. Butterfly* inquires the potentiality of a queer connotation in the classic opera that implies the two queer subjects’ “previous existence” and traces the “past” of the two. In this way, the transformation into butterflies lays stress on the protagonists’ refusal of the reproductive rule, their resurrection, and potential “successful” homosexual love in a utopian queer space.

Moreover, the addition of the opera “Madame White Snake” to Song’s stage performance in the opera house implies Song’s identity fluidity. This widespread Chinese folktale portrays a love that transcends the boundaries of species, narrating Lady White’s passing<sup>24</sup> from snake to human and falling in love with a human being, Xu Xian. Taiwan’s researchers like Li You-xin dig out queer trope reflected in the story, regarding it as “an allegory of gay men falling for straights” (Chao, 2013, p.233).

Similarly, *M. Butterfly* (2017) also involves Song’s strategic passing from a male to a

---

<sup>24</sup> Passing, according to Jack Babuscio, means being “on stage” and a “real” (i.e., straight) man or woman in order to avoid the violence from the dominant discourse (Babuscio, 1993, p.25). Here, Lady White’s “passing” refers to the snake’s acting as a human being.

female to attract his male partner. When discussing the aesthetic elements of camp, Jack Babuscio cited Oscar Wilde's words: "It is through Art, and through Art only, that we can shield ourselves from the sordid perils of actual existence" (Bergman, 1993, p.21). I find what Wilde conveys quite pertinent for elucidating the utopian drive in the revival version of *M. Butterfly*. Through appropriating two premodern Chinese operas and their qing discourses, the play envisions a more elastic imagination of the protagonists' gender identities and sexualities. Moreover, it provides an aesthetic space for "equal love" across nationalities, genders, and races, resonating with how Song differentiates

*Butterfly Lovers and Madama Butterfly:*

SONG: ..... Now, isn't that more beautiful than your Cio-Cio-San?

GALLIMARD: They're both tragic love stories –

SONG: But in mine, the girl and the boy love as equals. (Hwang, 2017, p.22)

In addition, the interweaving of Western and Eastern theatres in narration enhances the theatrical sensibility in the play. Song's disguise as "Zhu Yingtai" and his transformation into butterflies with Gallimard blur the distinction between role-playing and being, displaying the campy notion of "life-as-theater," which stresses that "roles, and, in particular, sex roles, are superficial -- a matter of style. Indeed, life itself is role and theater, appearance and impersonation" (Babuscio, 1993, p.24). As Song claims, "most of my life is a performance" (Hwang, 2017, p.31). The robe, Qipao, long-cross,

wigs, tie, and suit worn by Song generate the same performance effect as the costumes of female characters in operas through teasing with the gender norms. As a gender non-conforming subject, Song's successful construction of female and male reflects the superficiality of "sex roles."

In this version of *M. Butterfly*, Song's fluid gender expressions and androgynous beauty are foregrounded more plainly compared with the previous version. Take Hwang's description of Song's appearance, for instance:

*Now they are backstage, and the show is over, Gallimard watches as Song changes out of her costume, emerging from behind a screen in an androgynous Mao suit. Gender ambiguous, Song now looks like a beautiful man. (Hwang, 2017, p.21)*

Also, the homosexual affection between the two protagonists becomes the focus of the story. On the one hand, the play's change from vague to explicit renders the homosexual elements visible; on the other hand, to some extent, the revision sacrifices the old play's stylistic camp expression, which is discussed as campy, parodic, and absurd. Many of the protagonists' parodic episodes of *Madama Butterfly* intersecting in the script, for example, are cut out. The increasing direct expression of homosexuality in Hwang's rewriting of the play in the 2010s may be attributed to the change in homophobia conditions in the U.S.



## The Evolution of Hwang's Butterfly

By the 1980s, America had already seen a series of successes of gay and lesbian movements in medical and political fields. LGBT organizations' influences were in the ascendant, such as the Gay Activists Alliance (GAA), which was founded in 1969. In 1973, the American Psychiatric Association stopped pathologizing "homosexuality" as a pathological term. With more research and support on homosexual identity,<sup>25</sup> gays and lesbians were getting more recognition, despite that, though not universally, these groups tended to cling to a binary perspective.

Nevertheless, homophobia was still rooted in the US society with the traditional patriarchal and religious concepts of gender and sexuality. Homosexuality's celebration of sexual freedom threatened family stability and thus was regarded to be destructive to society (Jouet, 2017, p.134). The religious discourse against homosexuals was represented by American evangelicals, who hold that according to Leviticus 20:13 in the Bible, homosexuality is an "abomination."<sup>26</sup> In 1980, Ronald Reagan won the

---

<sup>25</sup> These publications include: *Homosexual: Oppression and Liberation* (1972) and *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*, which was first published in 1972

<sup>26</sup> The citation of Bible is from New Revised Standard Version.

presidential election, and his conservative administration, which was also supported by American evangelicals, contributed to a more unfriendly and hostile environment for gay people. The report of the first AIDS case in the US in 1981 added insult to injury: Construing AIDS as God's retribution for the "sin" of homosexuality, he [Reagan] and his neocon cronies set the tone for the country" (Rich, 2013, p.17). With AIDS was considered as "gay cancer," American society in the 1980s saw a strong homophobic atmosphere, regardless of the protests of gay activists.

When *M. Butterfly* premiered on February 10, 1988, at the National Theatre in Washington D.C., it became one of the few plays that deal with same-sex eroticism in mainstream public theatrical space. Explicitly queer-themed performances and plays, though starting to gain more recognition, tended to be restricted in small theatre venues, particularly in New York City and San Francisco.

The indifference to queer connotations in *M. Butterfly* was reflected in the reception and comments of the play. The dominant comments revolved around Orientalism and cultural conflicts in the script. As David Eng pointed out, there is a "lack of criticism considering what I see as the drama's rather obvious homosexual subtext" (Eng, 1994, p.147). The audience also showed unconscious adherence to a heterosexual love model in their question about Song and Gallimard's relationship. "As audiences leave the theatre..... most spectators are simply incredulous at how for

twenty years Gallimard could have confused Song's rectum for a woman's vagina" (Moy, 1993, p.124). The viewer's reflection reflects a fixed understanding of sexuality, gender, and desires, which assumes a certain bodily part to be the only source of sexual pleasure. The potentiality of homosexual eroticism between the two protagonists tended to be neglected as the play was released. And it was in the 1990s that scholars such as Quentin Lee and David Eng started to discuss the "rather obvious" queer theme in *M. Butterfly*.

Although not categorized as a "gay drama" at first, *M. Butterfly* attracted more attention to its queer space with its growing popularity over time. As I have argued in the previous section, the film adaptation of *M. Butterfly* by David Cronenberg displays a more obvious same-sex eroticism between Song and Gallimard. And it is arguably related to the American public's more open attitude toward gender and sexuality in the 1990s. In this period, the US witnessed the founding of many queer organizations, exemplified by Queer Nation (1990) and the increasing positive usage of the term "queer."

In the twentieth century, antagonism towards LGBTQ people in the US judicial system and public discourse decreased to some extent. In 2015, the Supreme Court stated in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that it is unconstitutional to forbid homosexual marriage. Several decades before that, however, queer groups enjoyed almost no legal protection.

The American public's support of gay marriage increased significantly from 35 percent in 2001 to 55 percent in 2016 (Jouet, 2017, p.136). For another example, to gain more votes, Obama changed his position concerning gay civil rights from conservative in 2004 to supportive in his 2008 electoral speech, claiming that his views were "evolving" (Jouet, 2017, p.138). Overall, from 1988 to 2017, the expressions of queerness in *M. Butterfly* became bolder and more explicit with society's growing tolerance and interest in homosexual topics. However, it does not mean a lack of queer space in the first *M. Butterfly* (1988). The queerness embodied in the original script, as I examined in the first section, is aligned with stylized camp techniques (excess, exaggeration, theatricality, humor and irony) and shrewd metadramatic narrations.

In conclusion, in this chapter, I argue that David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly* displays a rich queer aesthetic via gay desire, transgender expressions, camp techniques represented by irony, parody, repetition, exaggeration, performativity, and similar techniques. This chapter is also devoted to investigating and comparing queer aesthetics reflected in each version of the play and its changing context (from the 1980s to 2017).

I argue that a queer aesthetic embedded in *M. Butterfly* (1988) is manifested in its camp style. In this play, deliberate theatricality juxtaposes plots by past, present, performance, fantasy, memory, and parody. In a fusion of performance and reality,

identities become theatrical. I interpret the camp aesthetic of Hwang's design of "metadrama" or the "play in a play" in the characters' redirection and parody of *Madama Butterfly*. In addition, Hwang also utilizes abundant music, props, and costumes to denote the artificiality of gender and race identities and a campy incongruity. A queer aesthetic is also reflected in the growing queer identity in the play. In it, characters are shown to disidentify from their prescript roles (Pinkerton and Butterfly), displaying an unfixed and growing self.

A major difference between the on-screen adaptation of this play in 1993 and the original script is the film's exploration of the characters' nuanced identity transformation. I argue that this course shows their desire to change from their previous identity and embrace a newly invented self. The film version's expression of their metamorphosis into "queer dragonflies" display transgender aesthetics. Moreover, I examine queerness and aesthetic sensibility in Gallimard and Song's sadomasochistic relationship. The shift in roles between the couple resembles a bondage game, rendering the cultural identities assumed by them as artificial dynamics.

The revival of *M. Butterfly* (2017) incorporates storylines in classic Asian operas, which endows the play with queer energies of the past. The revision offers more details of Gallimard's and Soong Liling's erotic exploration, rendering visible their gay sensibilities. Furthermore, the end of the play calls on traditional Chinese opera

*Butterfly Lovers* and premodern “qing” (love) discourses, opening an alternative possibility for their love union. It envisions an aesthetic dimension for fantasy, dreams, fluid gender expressions, and more world-making possibilities.

## Chapter Three

### *Bondage and Yellow Face: Camp, Utopia and Aesthetic Fantasies of Queer Race*

#### Chapter Introduction

PRIOR. The fountain's not flowing now, they turn it off in the winter. Ice in the pipes. But in the summer...it's a sight to see, and I want to be around to see it. I plan to be, I hope to be.

This disease will be the end of many of us, but not nearly all. And the dead will be commemorated, and will struggle on with the living and we are not going away. We won't die secret deaths anymore. The world only spins forward, we will be citizens. The time has come.

Bye now.

You are fabulous creatures, each and every one.

And I bless you: *More Life*.

The Great Work Begins.

Tony Kushner, *Angels in America Part Two: Perestroika* (1994, p.99)

The quotation is from Tony Kushner's epic play *Angels in America: A Gay*

*Fantasia on National Themes*, which premiered in the early 1990s.<sup>27</sup> In this scene, Prior

---

<sup>27</sup>. *Millennium Approaches*, part one of the project, was premiered at the Eureka Theater, California in May of 1991 and part two, *Perestroika*, in 1992.

Walter, a gay man living with AIDS for many years, is found near the Bethesda Angel Fountain in Central Park, New York. Around Prior are important persons in his life—his partner Louis, who abandons him after he is diagnosed with AIDS; Hannah, the mother of Louis' new lover; Belize, his carer and ex-boyfriend. With political, religious, gender, ethnic, and sexual differences as well as intricately relationships, these characters form a queer companionship. On that “sunny winter’s day” in January 1990, they jointly tell a legendary story of the fountain blessed by Bethesda in Jerusalem (Kushner, 1994, p.97). It is said that the fountain’s water had healing powers before it ran dry. However, as Hannah narrates, “When the Millennium comes, the fountain of Bethesda will flow again” (Kushner, 1994, p.98). Prior, as the chosen prophet in the play, delivers the inspiring speech quoted above to the audience. In it, he calls for the approaching of a utopian world, where “we will be citizens” and “More life” will be blessed.

Against the disappointing realities of the mid-1980s in New York portrayed in the play—the neoconservative hegemony of Reagan’s administration, AIDS, political polarization, and identity-based divisions—the vision that comes with “Millennium” promises “the possibility of life freed from the shackles of hatred, oppression, and disease” (Savran, 1995, p.211). The “Fountain of Bethesda” heals not only the suffering of disease and death but also the rage, disappointment, and insult caused by the



supposed division between Black and White people, gay and straight, men and women, various religions, HIV-positive and HIV-negative individuals, and more.

Prior's words remind me of a 1971 manifesto mentioned by Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*. Written by a group named Third World Gay Revolution, it is entitled "What We Want, What We Believe." The manifesto states: "We want a new society—a revolutionary socialist society. We want liberation of humanity....., regardless of race, sex, age or sexual preferences" (Jay and Young, 1992, p.367). Radical and naïve as it may seem, the manifesto reflects a queer wish, a collectivity without identitarian purposes, for the "we" mentioned here are open to differences and possibilities (Muñoz, 2009, p.20). To some extent, Prior and his companions on the stage of Mark Taper Forum, Los Angeles, in 1992 serve as real "angels in America," differing from the angels in the play who demand immobility and stasis. Their multiple voices constitute the "we" in the manifesto who describe, image, and announce the great work of the future world, evoking a demand two decades ago and joining its rehearsal of "liberation of humanity."

*Angels in America* foregrounds the 1990s as a pivotal moment in the United States: it approaches the millennium of possibility, but it is still shadowed by the persistent past—religious conflicts, racial and gender confrontations, the dilemma faced by LGBT people in social exclusion, and AIDs. The particular historical moment on the

brink of the millennium witnessed many artists' cultural expressions of worries and hopes about the limits of identities. Aside from Tony Kushner's theatrical work, the camp rock musical *Hedwig and the Angry Inch* (1998), written by John Cameron Mitchell and composed by Stephen Trask, also serves as a notable example. In the lyrics of "Tear Me Down," one of the musical's songs, Trask conveys a dream to breakdown binary identity divisions:

Hedwig is like that wall,  
 standing before you in the divide  
 between East and West,  
 Slavery and Freedom,  
 Man and Woman,  
 Top and Bottom.  
 And you can try to tear her down,  
 but before you do,  
 remember one thing.

Listen  
 There ain't much of a difference  
 between a bridge and a wall  
 (Trask, 1999)

In this song, the Berlin Wall stands for the division among cultures and communities. The leading character, Hedwig, as a similar being between/across men and women, East and West, attempts to turn the wall into a bridge of communication and understanding. S/he calls for tearing down the symbolic wall that cuts through humans to move beyond discrimination, confrontation, and pain it creates.

Likewise, in *Bondage* (1992) and *Yellow Face* (2007)— plays set at the end of the

twentieth century, David Henry Hwang demonstrates a yearning for a future world that transcends racial hierarchy and identification. For instance, in *Bondage*, a play that explores the possibility of “flying off over the combat zone” of racial conflicts, the heroine claims, “Anything’s possible. This is the 1990s,” denoting a utopian prospect for disrupting normative racialized bodies and relationships (Hwang, 2000, p.279). As I delve into the play, the recurrent motif of the 1990s drew my attention to the unique historical context in the United States: its inadequate social realities and other contemporary American theater works’ utopian wishes towards the end of the millennium. For this reason, I started this chapter by looking back at queer visions in arts at the historic moment. In this chapter, I explore how Hwang’s these two plays enrich and complicate the anti-normative utopian drive in American artistic productions at the turn of the twenty-first century. I argue that envisioning dissolved, fluid, and unmoored racial identities, Hwang’s *Bondage* and *Yellow Face* bring forth an ideal image of an alternative world—as what has been celebrated by his peer artists—that I want to address as queer utopia.

The concept of utopia was manifested as early as the ancient Greek period in Plato’s *Republic* (approx. 380 BC). The book discusses what an ideal state is supposed to be, conjuring social values, orders, and structures that can achieve justice and goodness. In the 16th century, the term was conceptualized with Thomas More’s

influential piece *Utopia* (1516), which established utopian writing as a literary genre (Dhuill, 2010, pp.6-7). In More and more subsequent writers' works, utopia stands for a revised sketch of a society that is not accessible at present and a critique of existing reality. Settled in an imaginary dimension in which time and space are disconnected from here and now, a utopian world can transcend real limitations and difficulties and project personal or collective wishes. Accordingly, this inspiring and encouraging notion is often employed by scholars, critics, and artists to explore solutions to an inadequate present.

In Frankfurt School philosopher Ernst Bloch's elaboration, a spectacular future, hope, and an improved world are interwoven in aesthetic experience and practice. For him, art offers a "Vor-Schein'," or "visibility of this pre-appearance": the anticipatory, yet-to-become, and ideal vision of the world (Plaice, 1995, p.xxix). Bloch writes: "*Art is a laboratory and also a feast of implemented possibilities,*" "and wherever art does not play itself out into illusion, beauty, and even sublimity is that which mediates a premonition of future freedom" (Bloch et al., 1995, pp.216-217). The beauty of art exceeds what can only be perceived in the established order and orients toward an inaccessible utopian space. Accordingly, based on Bloch's aesthetics of hope, artists' imagination and creation display a world-changing force by painting a forward-drawing picture.

The future-oriented power of beauty is exemplified by the theatrical productions of the 1990s in the U.S. that I discussed earlier. Reflecting on unsatisfied and desperate reality, these works of art bring forth hope for a queer future, where identity-based differences that contribute to oppression and isolation among groups are disturbed and dissolved. In contrast to a static utopia—a fixed blueprint where truth, identity, hierarchy, and order tend to be totalized and idealized, the queer hope orients towards a dynamic one. In her book *Sex in Imagined Spaces* (2010), Caitríona Ní Dhúill points out that mainstream modern utopian narratives at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries feature a definitive and knowable world. This form of utopia “coincides with the desire to establish constant truths that could be realized and lived” (Dhuill, 2010, p.168). She indicates that Blochian thoughts anticipate a transition from a modern to a postmodern conception of utopia by emphasizing an always open-ended dream that inspires people to explore possibilities beyond existing social restraints. The postmodern utopia is open to change, offering “the truly utopian vision of a forward-looking human subject” (Dhuill, 2010, p.169). In a sense, the longing for alternative expressions of desires, sex, and race embodied in dramatic works at the end of the twentieth century sees identity as a building site and departs from traditional utopianism that may be risky for its closed boundaries.

Jose Esteban Muñoz is the pioneer scholar who captured the affinity between

queerness and hope. He brought queer aesthetics within a utopian framework. Drawing on Ernst Bloch and Herbert Marcuse, Muñoz investigates the “anticipatory illumination of queerness” of art, space, and moments that offer a great refusal of heterosexual and reproductive mandates and a glimpse of the “not yet there” (Muñoz, 2009, pp.22, 136-146). In other words, a queer future—though unformed, can be visualized in the past and present aesthetic practices. The utopian impulse of queer art allows us to imagine and move toward futurity, where dominant norms and conventions lose their authority.

In *Cruising Utopia: the Then and There of Queer Futurity* (2009), the queer horizon considered by Muñoz mainly concerns homosexuality, public sex, and other sexual practices against normative reproductive ideologies. The queer utopianism mentioned in this research, however, is expanded to consider a refusal of any established and fixed identifications. The queerness I emphasize centers around what Shane Phelan calls the “indeterminacy of identities”:

Queer theory [has] pointed to the fundamental indeterminacy of identities – of inside/outside communities, of masculine/feminine, of homo/hetero/bi, of male/female, and of racial and ethnic categories. Ultimately queer theory’s target is identity itself – the assumption of unity or harmony or transparency within persons or groups. (Phelan, 1997, p.2)

In this way, a queer hope celebrates the possibility of breaking from identity and labels and dissolving the barriers that separate one subject or community from another. This vision disturbs conventions with a twisting posture and a doubtful attitude toward

nature. The queer utopia, as I introduced earlier, is manifested in David Henry Hwang's *Bondage* and *Yellow Face*, which both experiment with the potential of denaturalized race. In the Hwangian utopian prospect, people's racial identities are rendered flexible, interchangeable, and mutable. His ideal, moreover, voids ethnic categories as well as the hatred, confrontation, and regulations produced by them. Drawing on Muñoz's elaboration on a utopian drive and queer aesthetics, I will explore Hwang's aesthetic expressions of a yearning for queered race and interpersonal relationships stripped of assumed self-other boundaries.

In the following sections, I first account for the concept of race as a discursive and constructed being. I examine how the notion was invented and performatively enlisted human beings into distinct categories, shaping their sense of self, and introduced Hwang's thoughts that queer it. Then, I approach the playwright's productions of *Bondage* and *Yellow Face*, exploring how camp and utopian aesthetics work together to convey racial fluidity and queer hope in these plays. In my discussion of *Bondage*, I focus on camp aesthetics demonstrated in the play—it complicates Hwang's utopian imagination that navigates beyond binaries and race essentialism. This artistic taste subverts racial ideologies by highlighting their artificiality and theatricality and brings more nuance to Hwang's aesthetic expressions of queer hope. Moreover, camp sensibility in *Bondage* works as an overlapping of a utopian aesthetic approach. Aligned

with a sadomasochistic framework, camp racial role-playings in the play adopt a fantastical capability that allows characters to enact multiple racial personae. With performative speeches and acts, they exhibit racial fluidity, make fun of, and suspend the force of racial norms in a utopian BDSM-inspired setting.

In the second part of the chapter, I read how *Yellow Face* queers the notion of race with camp humor. By doing this, it opens an aesthetic dimension for imagining a transcendence of racial expectations. In Hwang's words, "to take words like 'Asian' and 'American.' Like 'race' and 'nation,' mess them up so bad no one has any idea what they even mean anymore" (Hwang, 2009, p.69). By fictionalizing a Caucasian character who finds a home in a Chinese tribe, Hwang casts a picture of a world where dialogue and harmony replace racial and national collisions. Through the use of camp and an exploration of racial indeterminacy, the two plays evoke a queer aesthetic reveling in utopian fantasies that refuse stable, single, and constant identification based on skin color.

## **How Race Is Queered**

Before discussing the tension between sadomasochism, queer aesthetics, and utopian queer visions of race, it is necessary to introduce race as a social construct heavily shaped by dominant performative languages and enactments. This section



explains what I mean by “queered race” in the chapter. It presents how a queer lens is applied in the context of racial ideology by challenging the stability and authority of race identity. Moreover, it brings to light how David Henry Hwang reveals the Black/White/Asian division as discursive production in this playwriting and celebrates a queer perspective.

From a normative definition, race refers to “a sub-group of peoples possessing a definite combination of physical characters, of genetic origin,” the combination of which divides “the sub-groups from other sub-groups of mankind” (Krogman, 1945, p.49). The quotation reflects a perception of race as innate, definitive, and natural. However, the concept is not a transhistorical fact as it seems. As articulated by Audrey Smedley, it emerged as a modern invention around the eighteenth century (Smedley, 1998, p.694). And the way that humans are classified, separated, and ranked for their skin colors was hardly found in ancient times (Smedley, 1998, p.693). Audrey writes, “The creation of ‘race’ and racial ideology imposed on the conquered and enslaved peoples an identity as the lowest status groups in society” (Smedley, 1998, p.694). In existing racial ideology, human bodily differences are endowed with important social meanings infused with colonial values, stereotypes, and power hierarchy.

After understanding the notion of race as a result of cultural imagination, we can go further to inquire how it shapes individuals’ self-awareness and social positioning.

To explain the process, I need to return briefly to the notion of performativity and discuss how racialized beings are enacted through performative languages and imperatives.

In the first chapter of the thesis, I introduced J. L. Austin's conception of performativity. To recapitulate, it suggests that what people say can work as a doing, bringing changes to the world. Referring to this theory and Althusserian interpellation, Butler suggests that gendered and sexualized bodies are performatively "hailed" into being; they are the result of repetitive speeches and acts that reiterate heterosexual norms. In Butler's words, "identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1999, p. 33). She also reminds us that in the repetition of reciting identity norms, some "disruption" and "refusal" may appear in unexpected ways, and it is where the "agency" of the subject lies. In this way, unsanctioned forms of identity/body would come into being (Butler, 1993, p. 23).

To what extent is race—whose artificiality is mentioned briefly at the beginning of the section—shaped by performative forces, like gender, sexuality, and shamed queer selves? Deepening our understanding of this inquiry requires a revisit to the historical moment when the notion of race came into being. In 1741, the French Bordeaux's Royal Academy of Sciences held a writing contest exploring the factors that contribute to the physical differences of black-skinned people. The competition showcased the

Europeans' interest in knowing and accounting for people of another continent they contacted and colonized. At that time, over 4,500,000 enslaved Africans had been traded and transported to labor in plantations across the Atlantic, suffering from death, homelessness, and deprivation of freedom (Gates et al., 2022, p.x). The event's contestants provided multifaced explanations of Africans' alleged human differences from perspectives such as climate, religion, and medicine. For instance, some attributed the blackness of humans to representing the "sinfulness" or "curse" denoted by God (Gates et al., 2022, pp.26, 29). This view was inseparable from the belief that black men were degenerated and corrupted human species— "general stupidity and the almost bestial barbarity of some of them" (Gates et al., 2022, p.174). Some essays used climatological and environmental varieties to explain Africans' dark skin and physical traits, claiming that these people's "noses and mouths have been swollen and flattened by the heat" (Gates et al., 2022, p.26). More assumptions on blackness included that black bodies had a particular "black bile" passing through generations and that they had thicker blood than other racialized people. Outdated, absurd, and pseudo-scientific as these texts might seem, they served as an epitome of Western intellectual efforts in shaping and pinning down knowledge about a type of people with distinct skin color in the Enlightenment era.

Resonating with my discussion above, Henry Louis Gates and Andrew Curran,

who wrote about the writing competition, made some insightful comments. According to them, this contest may inspire us to see “how Enlightenment-era naturalists progressively transformed the alleged cognitive and physical differences existing among the world’s peoples into normalized categories—taxonomical schemes that positioned white Europeans at the pinnacle of a fixed racial hierarchy” (Gates et al., 2022, pp. xi, xiii). To put it in another way, the Bordeaux documents record how discourses in various academic fields performatively assigned a name (with an inferior position) for the nonwhite living beings when the notion of race was invented.

Race emerged and solidified as a scientific fact. However, the classification of human groups under colonial order, in Ayanna Thompson’s incisive words, is “a social process that one might call race-making” (Thompson, 2021, p.7). In the introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race* (2021), Thompson calls attention to the unstable, inconsistent, and often contradictory traces of racial constructions embodied in early modern English theatrical works. She accurately points out, “Race does not exist, but racism does” (Thompson, 2021, p.7). Accordingly, race is not so much a natural physiological imprint as it is a series of social imperatives. These imperatives are born out of oppressive historical discourses, structured with unequal hierarchy, and solidified by individuals’ reiterations.

Inspired by gender and queer studies, scholars of race have also integrated

performativity theory in their work (Elam, 2002). This theory allows them to investigate racial identities as the result of making or doing. Joining Judith Butler's work on gender performativity, Dorinne Kondo sheds light on the discursive construction of race and its interconnection with gender, nation, class, and other identificatory dimensions in *About Face: Performing Race in Fashion and Theater* (1997). His de-essentialist perspective highlights that race, gender, and other identities may be differently constructed "within the discursive possibilities present at a given historical moment" (Kondo, 1997, p.7).

I argue that David Henry Hwang dramatizes what we might call "racial performativity" in his plays. Hwang is not alone in staging the enactment or "doing" of racialized bodies in American theater. In Jeremy O. Harris' 2018 play *Slave Play*, the central storyline revolves around three interracial couples' journey through "Antebellum Sexual Performance Therapy" (Harris, 2018, p.52). This is "A RADICAL therapy designed to help black partners reengage intimately with white partners from whom they no longer receive sexual pleasure" (Harris, 2018, p.52). As part of the treatment, the characters are shown to participate in sexual fantasy performances set in a "MacGregor Plantation" during the slavery era, performing the dynamics of the historical slave-master relationship (Harris, 2018, p.42). *Slave Play* explores how, in the present time, when Slavery has been abolished, the social hierarchy that privileges white people in history can still work on racial minorities. The past enslaved social position

may constitute trauma and associated complex masochist desires for some people of color, as the play portrays.

Interestingly, staged in a highly dramatic setting, the racist ideology and power relations in the Old South are performed with blunt honesty, erotized, and rewritten in a modernized and subversive way. In it, the black woman character Kaneisha takes a complex pleasure from her slave identity recalled from the past as well as racialized violence. When undergoing the sexual slave play, she acts as a “slave” while her white partner Jim performs as her white manager. Uttering “Massa Jim...Are you gonna whip me? For being a nasty negress,” she “*is nearing her climax*” (Harris, 2018, p.50). The same embrace, utilization, and rewriting of racial discourses take place in Hwang’s *Bondage*, but in a more radical form. For the play not only reenacts racialized bodies but also explores its fluid, volatile possibilities.

In *Bondage*, Hwang covers the characters’ faces, bodies, hair, and other identifying features with costumes. In an interview with Robert Cooperman in 1993, Hwang explained that such design intends to denote that the characters’ racial identities are changeable, plastic, and artificial, shaped by normative imperatives:

The extent to which this whole racial thing is so mutable; It’s so arbitrary that we ended up in these particular skins. I don’t know if it is an attempt to downplay racial difference as much as it is an attempt to show the mutability of the mythology. The way in which these differences are arbitrary and how one person seems to be able to transform from one thing to another across these boundaries

that we find so inviolate in the culture as it stands right now. (Cooperman, 1995, p.373)

As we read from the quotation of Hwang's words above, the characters' facemasks and hoods are primarily meant to outline the "mutability of the mythology" of race.

Without revealing skin colors and faces, the actors can enact and perform various racial roles with speeches and acts. Hwang's description of race as "mutable" indicates an anti-essentialist attitude, in which race is a mythology that never really exists. Instead of being stable, the actors' race identities are shaped by performative and constructive languages, "transforming" from one to another across the boundaries produced and consolidated by social discourses. In this way, *Bondage*'s leather costumes "downplay racial difference" through the blurring of racial lines, revealing that race categorization is vulnerable to cultural and social manufactures.

Hwang's interpretation of race as performative offers a starting point for discussing the queerness of his plays that deal with racial issues. His theatrical writings possess critical perspectives in many ways parallel with the development of Orientalism studies and queer theories in the historical period around the 1990s. There is no clear evidence that Hwang engaged in a direct dialogue with queer intellectual thought at that time, as he did with decolonial theories. In some interviews, forewords of his work, and social

critique essays, the playwright referred to Edward Said's formulation of Orientalism.<sup>28</sup> He wrote, for example, an essay titled "People Like Us" for *The Guardian* in 1989 about how the West's "seeing facts through the distorting veil of Orientalism" with "vanity" leads to its poor judgments and defeats (Hwang, 1989b). Though Hwang hardly engaged with queer theories in political comments like the cited one, his artistic works represented by *M. Butterfly* and *Bondage* arguably embody (gender/race) performativity and reflect queer criticism's disidentifactory position. In the next sections, I will demonstrate how Hwang's *Bondage* and *Yellow Face* boldly play with the boundaries of Asian, African, and Caucasian identities, disclosing the performative nature of these concepts.

### ***Bondage: Sadomasochistic Race Play and Camp Aesthetics***

Premiered on March 1, 1992, in Louisville, Kentucky, *Bondage* is an elaborate one-act play written for the 16th Annual Humana Festival of New American Plays. Its plot centers on the interaction between a dominatrix Terri and her client Mark in an S&M parlor in 1990s California. To satisfy Mark's masochistic desire, the couple

---

<sup>28</sup> Please see David Henry Hwang, "Introduction," in *FOB and Other Plays* (New York: Plume, 1990), p. x; Hwang, D.H. and DiGaetani, J.L. 1989. "M. Butterfly": An Interview with David Henry Hwang. *TDR (1988-)*. 33(3), pp.141-153.



performs different racial identities, wrapped from head to toe with hoods, gloves, costumes, and masks. The changes in the two characters' power positions in the S&M game also deepen their understanding of each other—their weariness with the prevalent hatred and opposition among social identity groups. And in the end, the two expose their hidden identities and engage in a romantic relationship beyond racial division and prejudice.

The play's discussion on ethnicity and gender is complicated and profound. It is interwoven with the playwright's personal life, experience, observation, and reflection on dominant racial discourses. *Bondage* is a “private work” that encapsulates the playwright's “genuine fears and vulnerabilities” as a Chinese American (Johnson, 2017, p.178). The two characters in the work are inspired by Hwang and his Caucasian wife, Kathryn Layng, who cast Terri in the play's 1992 production. As Layng says, the storyline of the play renders the process whereby she and Hwang struggle to overcome presumptions about the Other and establish interpersonal intimacy (Smith, 1993, p.45). Hwang's inclusion of these experiences brings more texture to the power dynamics between sexual encounters, social status, and racial placements portrayed in the play.

In this section, I will look into how the camp enactments of racial images within an S&M ritual in *Bondage* expose the performativity and constructedness of race.

Moreover, I will argue that the play offers a utopian prospect where race is queered,

disrupted, and unmoored, which allows individuals to strip away the related prejudices, assumptions, and regulations. Before I continue to analyze how exactly the S&M setting in *Bondage* offers a favorable site for queer aesthetics and the formation of queer subjectivity, it is necessary to address a concern regarding how queerness works with the play's seemingly heterosexual plot. From the sketch of *Bondage*'s storyline I provided earlier, it is obvious that the play stages a love relationship between a man and woman (though it is not revealed until the end). And heterosexuality, as a dominant pattern of sexuality, can be incompatible with queer relations, selves, and aesthetics that I intend to explore in the play. How can we locate queerness in the text that seems to fall into a conventional patriarchal system? I will respond to the issue from two aspects.

First, if we read the play closely, we will find that both the gender and sexuality of the characters covered from head to toe are also the targets of subversion. Before the actors take off the hoods and reveal their past, these characters' gender and sexualities remain uncertain for the audience. For example, the dialogues between Terri and Mark arouse speculation about the former's possible non-fixed gender identity. After making a lengthy speech about what Mark may feel as a man, the female protagonist adds, "I know. I've been in your place" (Hwang, 2000, p.274). This sentence is followed by doubts shared by Mark and the audience/readers: "You ... you've been a man? What are you saying? (Hwang, 2000, p.274)"

In another case, Mark's exaggerated love confession also reveals a possible non-heterosexual orientation.

MARK: But I *do* love you! More than any woman—

TERRI: Or man?

MARK: Or anything—any creature—any impulse . . . in my own body—more than any part of my body . . . that's how much I love you. (Hwang, 2000, p.269)

Terri's abrupt question, "Or man?" breaks the default expectation of Mark's heterosexual identity. And it leads to Mark's listing of things that can be the objects of love, from nonhuman creatures to his body parts. These lines express the character's desires unrestricted from a presumed straight orientation. As a small part of the text, they do not influence the overall tone of heterosexuality in the play. However, they do demonstrate an attitude that does not *privilege* a certain form of sexuality.

In *Straight with a Twist* (2000), an essay collection centering around heterosexual queerness, Calvin Thomas posits that the critical problem with heterosexuality lies less in heterosexual practices per se than their privilege. He writes: "The problem, the obstacle" against a queerer world "may be less straight sexual practices per se than the privileging of those practices. What queerly aspiring straights need to interrogate, challenge, and work toward changing is less their own sexual practices than their condition of possibility" (Thomas et al., 2000, p.18). In other words, what makes

straight orientation problematic in queer politics is primarily the way that it establishes its privilege as the natural, recognizable, and normal form of sexuality rather than its existence per se. In *Bondage*, the characters' dialogues celebrate unmoored aspects of gender and eroticism repressed and eclipsed by such a privilege. Aside from heterosexual love, *Bondage* offers alternative possibilities—female masculinity, same-sex, or even object sexuality, making an intervention into normative knowledge.

When talking about the possibility of queer heterosexuality, a concern, as admitted by Calvin Thomas, could be claiming a “straight subjectivity’s normative centrality” in queer theory in an appropriative manner (Thomas et al., 2000, p.22). That means affirming queer inspiration of straight and straight texts may risk developing or even converting the term queer for the hegemonic life mode’ use. And this risk is anything but what I intend to see or induce, though I can fully understand and embrace any criticism and suspicion based on this contested issue (which I have been cautious about and reflected on during my writing). Nonetheless, I believe it is rewarding to engage heterosexuality with queer agenda, to theorize the tension between the two seeming contradictory notions, or, in Thomas’ words, to “reiterate heterosexuality differently, to be straight otherwise” (Thomas et al., 2000, p.22). In *Straight with a Twist*, the books’ contributors state that they intend not to appropriate queer theory into a hegemonic framework, which “steals and harms,” but to “proliferate its insights” as a coparticipant

in troubling heteronormativity (Thomas et al., 2000, p.3). I find this appeal similar to my standpoint of interpreting the queer space and aesthetics in a heterosexual but anti-homophobic play written by a heterosexual playwright. Though portraying straight practices, *Bondage* works less on asserting the authority of heterosexuality (as I argued before) than interrogating the (failed) construction of masculinity in relation to heterosexual values, especially for people of color.

Second, though I talked about the queer expressions of gender and sexuality in *Bondage*, my interest in the queerness of this play lies in its racial dimension. As will be analyzed, the play experiments with “mutable” racial identities, showing what Butler addresses as a “disloyalty against identity” (Butler, 1993, p.220). Therefore, the sexuality of the character does not restrain the play from displaying queer racial subjectivity and aesthetics. Now, I will look at how queer sensibilities are triggered in *Bondage*, which camps and disrupts racial performativity in a sadomasochistic framework.

Sadomasochism, also known as D&B (discipline and Bondage) or DBSM, is a sexual practice featuring “eroticized exchange principally of power and often also of pain” (Byrne, 2013, p.6). Psychologist Richard von Krafft-Ebing coined the term as a combination of Marquis de Sade (1740 - 1814) and Leopold von Sacher-Masoch (1836 – 1895), who were famous for erotizing dominance and submission power relations in

their literary works. Whilst Sade's novels such as *The 120 Days of Sodom* (written in 1785, and made public in 1899) exploit the pleasure of oppressing the dominated with power and sexual cruelty, Masoch's novels explore the satisfaction brought by obedience. Therefore, "sadist" and "masochist" respectively refer to those who find pleasure in imposing and receiving pain in an SM practice.

A sadomasochistic matrix surfaces in Hwang's *Bondage*. The play focuses exclusively on the interactions of a client and a dominatrix in a Bondage parlor. At the beginning of the play, Hwang indicates the roles of the masochist and the sadist in an SM activity and their special costumes.

*A room in a Bondage parlor. Terri, a dominatrix, paces with her whip in hand in front of Mark, who is chained to the wall. They both wear full face masks and hoods to disguise their identities. (Hwang, 2000, p.253)*

Objects such as whips and ropes are classic sadomasochistic props, with which the sadist controls and inflicts pain, punishment, and humiliation on the masochist. However, the costumes worn by Mark and Terri suggest that their SM practice involves fetishizing race. Both sides of this game are covered from head to toe to "disguise their identities." The ensuing plot suggests that this arrangement is in service of the client Mark, who requests to get humiliated by the dominatrix in their racial role-playing.

In order to perform an analysis of queer aesthetics manifested in the disruption of

race in *Bondage*'s BDSM setting, I investigate a camp sensibility in *Bondage* and how it interplays with SM elements. I will first investigate the play's theatricality celebrated by both sadomasochism and camp, examining how it unveils the performativity of racial identities. Then, I will work on Hwang's camp aesthetic expressions of exaggeration, humor and irony as the characters play with stigmas attached to Asian American men in *Bondage*. Finally, I will examine how the verbal swordfight of the two characters, which is driven by their dominative and submissive roles, evokes wordplay as a facet of camp aesthetics. It is argued that, in the play, sadomasochism and camp aesthetics jointly display fluidity and performative enactments of normative social identities. They reveal, play with, and subvert the racial hierarchy and discourses in the 1990s in the United States.

To start with, *Bondage*'s sadomasochistic framework offers a theatrical stage (embedded in Hwang's stage of the play) for the enactment of race's performative effect. In the play, the two protagonists display multiple suffering possibilities of the masochist client Mark via racial role-playing. Their race play foregrounds theatricality as a key element in BDSM games. In *Masochism in Modern Man* (1941), Theodore Reik identifies some basic features of masochism, which include:

1. "Demonstrative" element (the masochist's exhibition of his "suffering, discomfort, humiliation and disgrace");

2. “The special significance of fantasy” (where the scenes are dramatized and experienced by the participant) (Theodor, 1941, p.72)

Upon Reik’s elaboration, Deleuze noted “contract” as another indispensable feature of masochism, namely an equal and reciprocal “contract” between the sadist and masochist (Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 1989). These features outline a theatrical sense of SM practice: it is a collaboration of two participants who perform a fantastical project protected by a contract.

The theatrical space opened by sadomasochism in *Bondage* is complicated by racial power structures. It allows for the dramatization of the performativity of race — the pre-established bodies, relations, and logic under dominant racial ideology in the nineties. From the characters’ dialogues at the beginning of the script, for example, we can notice how the identities of “a Chinese man” and “a blond woman” in the US society are cited and enacted.

MARK: What am I today?

TERRI: Today—you're a man. A Chinese man. But don't bother with that accent crap. I find it demeaning.

MARK: A Chinese man. All right. And who are you?

TERRI: Me? I'm—I'm a blond woman. Can you remember that?

MARK: I feel . . . very vulnerable. (Hwang, 2000, p.253)

This scene visualizes the operation of racialization, suggesting that racial identities are the consequence of people’s daily reiteration and performance. To some



extent, the two characters' conversation here reenacts the situation where the notion of race circulates in social scenes, labeling and regulating living bodies that repeat its disciplines. I want to develop the argument by appropriating a formula frequently used by J. L. Austin when indicating what a performative utterance is like: "By saying or in saying something we are doing something" (Austin, 1962, p.12). In the scene, Terri and Mark's words show similar performative force. In claiming that Mark is a "man," "a Chinese man," Terri assigns Chineseness to Mark; likewise, with "I'm a blond woman," the dominatrix becomes the role she describes. Before the process, these characters' identities are unknown to the audience, voided by costumes that hide their bodies and faces. As I observe, the power of doing race with words and acts in the quoted lines (and throughout the play) arises from the interaction of the play's SM context and the prescribed expectations of racial roles to be performed.

SM's unique context endows Terri and Mark's seeming descriptive utterance with performative force. In an SM game, language tends to be more powerful than chains and whips. Deleuze denotes that "the masochist appears to be held by real chains, but in fact he is bound by his word alone" (Deleuze and Sacher-Masoch, 1989, p.75). Words are often employed to serve the contract between the Sadist and Masochist, who set rules exclusively for themselves. In the case of *Bondage*, a fundamental rule is that participants should play racial identities until the masochist gets humiliated and

punished. As Terri reminds us: “I am paid to humiliate you” (Hwang, 2000, p.261).

These rules empower Terri and Mark to do what they say.

We should also not ignore that these characters’ doing of race is, first and foremost, guaranteed by pre-established racial discourses. In *Bondage*’s sadomasochistic theatre, what is displayed is not just the actors’ play of race but also how they are played by race. As explained by Ariane Cruz, a pioneer researcher in the intersectional field of race and sadomasochism, race play unveils “the performativity of race as a social identity and a category of power, and speaks to the ways race plays us” (Cruz, 2016, p.60). When summoning various racialized roles (like the Caucasian girl and Asian American quoted above), Terri and Mark dramatize the performative force that constitutes racial categories and the corresponding power hierarchies. They stage the effect imposed by the notion of race on people in the 1990s in the US, especially the power imbalance involved in inter-racial sexual encounters. For instance, in the conversation I discussed before, the Chinese man enacted by Mark confesses a feeling of “vulnerability” in front of a blond girl. In a much later scene, Mark begs to be Chinese again, whose position is “the lowest of the low” (Hwang, 2000, p.265). Through reiterating racial pairings in performative sadomasochistic words, characters in *Bondage* demystify the normative categorization of race as constitutive enactments.

It should also be noted that the sadomasochistic race play portrayed in *Bondage*

exploits the performative energy evoked by shame-based practices. As I read and reread the script of *Bondage* and repetitively immersed myself in Terri and Mark's SM fantasy, I was enchanted by the tensions between pride and shame, display and humiliation, and theatricality and performativity embodied by it. These tensions are knowingly discussed in Sedgwick's 1993 essay "Queer Performativity: Henry James's *The Art of the Novel*," which triggered my associations with *Bondage* as well as my personal experiences. In the essay, Sedgwick articulated how the experience of shame, as I briefly introduced before in this chapter, can forge one's strong awareness of being queer—unfitted, unauthorized, inferior, excluded, debased, and many others. As she concludes, "'queer performativity' is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect shame and to the later and related fact of stigma" (Sedgwick, 1993, p.11). That is to say, the affect of shame and the normative values that enable its functioning in a certain social occasion tell a person what s/he is (or, more precisely, is not). She also describes shame as an overlapping site of theatricality and performativity:

Shame turns itself skin side outside; shame and pride, shame and self-display, shame and exhibitionism are different interlinings of the same glove: shame, it might finally be said, transformational shame, is performance. I mean theatrical performance. (Sedgwick, 1993, p.5)

As a sensitive and easy-to-shy person who always dreams about shameful

scenarios, I have much to say about the described experience in the quotation. I am familiar with the contradicted avoidance and yearning for the eyesight of any potential spectators in a shameful situation, and a strong sense of exposure followed by the satisfaction of being looked at. These self-display aspects of shame, which are inherently theatrical in Sedgwick's formulation, alongside their link to the "experimental, creative, performative" structuring of queer identity, inspired me to notice what shame brings and does to me (Sedgwick, 1993, p.4). When turning my inside out and feeling exposed and judged, I was kind of enjoying penetrating a normal world with my abnormal vulnerability (though the sense is always complicated by the feeling of humiliation). The constitution of queer identification in a shameful scene is well expressed in *Bondage*.

Aside from dramatizing the performativity of racial discourses, the play's characters also exhibit the theatricality of shame—when it occurs with insult and debasement of racialized minorities. Half displaying and half shaming, the masochist Mark reactivates the discrimination experienced by a male Chinese American in the US. In his performance of "Mark Wong"'s courtship with Terri's role "Tiffany Walker," Mark is rejected for not being "man enough," an assumption based on his Chineseness (Hwang, 2000, p.253). Their conversation runs as follows:

TERRI: I'm sure you're a very nice person . . . Mark. And I really appreciate your

helping me study for the . . . physics midterm. But I'm just not—what can I say? I'm just not attracted to you.

MARK: Because I'm Chinese.

TERRI: Oh no, oh heavens, no. I would never be prejudiced against an Oriental. They have such . . . strong family structures . . . hardworking . . . they hit the books with real gusto . . . makes my mother green with envy. But, I guess . . . how excited can I get about a boy who fulfills my mother's fantasies? (Hwang, 2000, p.254)

In the scene of shame that happens to a racialized entity, Terri's insult plunges Mark into the judgmental framework of dominant racial and sexual values. It distinguishes him from bodies or identities that are recognized and affirmative. By "recognized and affirmative" identities, I mean those that correspond to the standard masculinity in white society: physically attractive, outgoing, social, and other traits (Chua & Fujino, 1999). Labeled as a bookish Chinese man, a stereotype commonly imposed on Chinese Americans, Mark is rejected and humiliated for failing to meet this standard. Terri's descriptions of her partner reflect how Chinese subjects are normally perceived in the US. This group is more likely to be labeled as "nerds" for their supposedly assiduous performance in study by the dominant American knowledge (Wong et al., 2012). "Nerd," or bookishness, is one of many typical subjugated masculine stereotypes, including 'wimp, milksop, nerd, turkey, sissy'(Connell, 2005, p.79). The effemination of Chinese American males, according to Lisa Lowe, is reflected in the Chinese Americans' long history of being deprived of citizenship (Lowe, 1996, p.5). The stigmatization of Mark based on his racial background brings about a shameful scenario, marking him as inferior, undesired, different, or excluded.

In the scene, Hwang dramatizes what Sedgwick writes as “the flood of shame” brought by the rejection of or disruptive communication with others who embody the recognition of authority and dominant values. He leads us to a masochist’s theater wherein the shamed subject (Mark, who in the later plot reveals his Chinese male identity) revels in displaying the shame that shapes his isolated, rejected, queer position— a self-exposure that penetrates reality with unexpected effect.

The play’s performing of shame in a sadomasochistic court, therefore, can be one example of Sedgwick’s claim about “dramatizing and integrating shame,” which “renders this potentially paralyzing affect narratively, emotionally, and performatively productive” (Sedgwick, 1993, p.11). Through staging the humiliation occurring in an interracial courtship, Hwang reactivates the effect of shame in outlining the shame person’s queer position and visualizes its communication of queer performativity and theatricality.

In the previous part, I talked about the sadomasochistic theatricality in *Bondage* that lays bare the construction of racial images and allows for the self-display of shamed selves. As the play unfolds, we can find how the SM theater undermines the staged norms, structures, and power relations regarding race.

To play out various positions of master and slave, Terri and Mark perform another two racial pairings. The second and third rounds display similar lover-seeking scenes

between a “White man” and a “Black woman” and two Chinese Americans. Their transformation of various racial identities in a short one-act play reveals that racial identities are unstable and playable. As a reviewer of *Bondage*, Fayez Nouredin comments that the pair’s racial identities are “as theatrical as the costume that the actor puts on” (Nouredin, 2017, p.77). The couple’s citing and exploiting the dominant racial images denote the constructed-ness of racial identity, undermining the authenticity of race.

In addition to enabling the transgression of fixed racial perception, Mark and Terri’s playing of racial images in an SM parlor challenges social power by eroticizing it. Either as Mark Wong, who is not worthy of being loved, or a White man defeated for being a hypocritical liberal, Mark finds pleasure in a subjugated position. This point is intensively reflected in Mark’s claim: “I desire to be the lowest of men” (Hwang, 2000, p.265). As Michel Foucault points out, “SM” is an acting out of power structures by a strategic game that is able to give sexual pleasure or bodily pleasure” (Gallagher and Wilson, 1984, p.30). The social power structures that regulate Black, Yellow, and White identities in *Bondage* are in service for creating asymmetric power relations between the sadist and masochist.

Nonetheless, the characters’ imitation of racial discourse is not for the sake of obeying them; rather, it is to serve personal pleasure. Pat Califia, a transgender lesbian

sadomasochist, wrote: “In an S/M context, the uniforms and roles and dialogue become a parody of authority, a challenge to it, a recognition of its secret sexual nature” (Califia, 1979, p.21). SM people display established orders but refuse to admit that they are natural. With the power differentials in the social logic utilized as the booster of sexual pleasure, the seriousness of authority is dismantled in the participants’ game-like experience.

The representation of race in the realm of sadomasochistic role-playing evokes a camp sensibility in the play. As I claimed in the previous chapter, theatricality and artifice are significant facets of camp aesthetics. In Susan Sontag’s accounts, “Camp sees everything in quotation marks. It’s not a lamp, but a ‘lamp’; not a woman, but ‘a woman.’ To perceive Camp in objects and persons is to understand Being-as-Playing” (Sontag, 1966, p.280). Similarly, *Bondage*’s SM race play draws a clear line between the characters’ role-playing and their own lives. The major content of the script focuses on the characters’ effort to indulge in their “roles” as an indication of their “top” and “bottom” positions, which, as underlined by Laura Antoniou, is crucial in sadomasochism (Antoniou, 1996, p.256). The notion of “role” in SM implies that what the sadist and masochist do is a performance. Here is a scene that calls us attention to when Terri and Mark’s role-playing stops and continues.

MARK: Terri, look at us! Everything we do is pretend! That’s exactly the



point! We play out these roles until one of us gets the upper hand!

TERRI: You mean, until I get the upper hand.

MARK: Well, in practice, that's how it's always—

TERRI: I like power.

MARK: So do I.

TERRI: You'll never win.

MARK: There's a first time for everything.

TERRI: You're the exception that proves the rule.

MARK: So prove it. C'mon! And—oh—try not to break down again in the middle of the fantasy.

TERRI: Fuck you!

MARK: It sort of—you know—breaks the mood?

TERRI: I'm sorry! I had a very bad morning. I've been working long hours—  
(Hwang, 2000, p.257)

The quoted lines showcase the characters' negotiation with the roles they play. As the irritated dominatrix abruptly apologizes and shifts the conversation away from their struggle for power to her awful morning, it becomes evident they are switching from role-playing to reality. The deliberate demonstration of their "in" and "out" roles renders the performed content to be artificial, therefore questioning the enacted white, yellow, and black images and stereotypes with camp style. Playing fluid racialized bodies with leather outfits, high-high boots, gloves, and hoods, the play's actors render the being of race as playing.

Reading further with a camp perspective, we can capture many witty elements in Hwang's writing that turn prejudices against Asians in America into sources of exaggeration, irony, and humor. In their role-playing of an Asian man and a White girl, Mark and Terri employ exaggerated and dense Orientalist images. The tension between their submission and dominance positions intensifies the characters' overlay of

stereotypes attached to Chinese Americans. Actively embracing racial stigmas, Hwang lays bare their absurdity and produces ironic, hilarious camp effects.

When Terri labels Mark as a nerd who is “not sexy enough,” Mark tries to prove his manhood by enumerating his “dangerous” behaviors— “smoking in spite of the surgeon general’s warning,” riding a motorcycle at midnight, knowing “tricks with a switchblade” (Hwang, 2000, p.258). It leads Terri to identify Mark as a Chinese mafioso for his “pathetic imitations of B-movie delinquents, that cheap Hong Kong swagger” (Hwang, 2000, p.258). She then borrows images from Chinese street gangsters in movies to debase the masochist:

TERRI: You don’t have to—you’re Chinese, aren’t you? What are you going to do now? Rape me? With your friends? ’Cause I’ve seen movies, and you Chinatown pipsqueaks never seem to be able to get a white woman of her own free will. And even when you take her by force, it still requires more than one of you to get the job done. Personally, I think it’s all just an excuse to feel up your buddies.

MARK: Wait! Stop! Cut! I said I was vaguely bad—

TERRI: Yeah, corrupting the moral fiber of this nation with evil foreign influences—

MARK: Vaguely bad does not make me a hitman for the tong!

TERRI: Then what are you? A Vietcong? Mmmm—big improvement. I’m really gonna wanna sleep with you now!

MARK: No—that’s even more evil! (Hwang, 2000, pp.258-259)

In the routine scenario the protagonists perform, a Chinese American encounters the stigmatization of being labeled as “Chinese Mafia” and “Viet Cong.” Given the backdrop of the 1990s context, it is unsurprising that Chinese individuals may be stereotypically associated with these images. Hong Kong gangster films blossomed after

the 1950s and formed a stylized genre in the following decades. With the economic boom of Hong Kong and its ascendance to one of the so-called “Four Asian Tigers” in the 1980s, the film industry of this area impressed international audiences with cultural images such as Bruce Lee and Hong Kong gangsters.

And “Viet Cong,” meaning “Vietnamese communist,” is a pejorative term frequently used in US media during the Vietnam War that lasted from 1955 to 1975. Daniel C. Hallin writes that in American television reports at that time, “The North Vietnamese and Vietcong were ‘fanatical,’ ‘suicidal,’ ‘savage,’ ‘halfcrazed,’” and areas occupied by them were “routinely referred to” as “Vietcong infested” (Hallin, 1986, p. 158). The term invokes direct hostility to North Vietnam as well as its communist allies, of which China plays a significant role. The White American’s resentment against Asians after World War II involves multiple causes, including the economic competition of Asian countries and their military confrontation. The latter is linked with the ideology of “yellow peril” in America, which views Japan as a danger during World War II, Koreans and Chinese during the Korean Conflict, Vietnamese during the Vietnam War, and most Asian countries during the Cold War (Kia, 2007, p.132).

With reference to a historical situation depicted by Philip Kan Gotanda, we can perceive the extent to which Asians are misrepresented by these Orientalist images and their marginal status in America. In *Yankee Dawg You Die* (1991), Philip Kan Gotanda

writes of a Chinese actor's predicament in Hollywood in the 1980s. The actor complains that Asians are only limited to playing "waiters, Viet Cong killers, chimpanzees, drug dealers, hookers, sexless houseboys. . . They fucking cut off our balls and made us all houseboys on the evening soaps" (Gotanda, 1991, p.27). This line encapsulates the biased and oversimplified perceptions of Chinese people prevalent in the white-dominated society where *Bondage* takes place.

Terri's association of Mark with Chinese gangsters and even the Viet Cong is in accord with her sadist role. Once Mark denies his nerd identity by insisting on his touch of evil, she instantly assigns another Chinese image to him from dominant pop culture. By doing so, she sustains a superior position, exoticizing and objectifying Mark as an Eastern other, who is constituted either by stereotypes or visual images on the screen. Her stigmatization of the "Chinatown pipsqueaks" who are too weak to take a White girl by force deepens her humiliation of her masochist. After this, Terri crafts a more illogical assumption that Mark is a Viet Cong, pushing Mark's "evil" image to its limit.

The SM performance of overwhelming stigmatized images of Asians in the 1990s in the U.S. is reminiscent of a camp strategy employed by the marginalized and dominated people. Self-consciously, they attack stereotypes by actively embracing them (Xu, 2010). The gestures of self-mockery and exaggeration display a distance between a racialized subject and the stigmatization he enacts and plays with. A reviewer of

Bondage, Samuel Park, interprets the dominatrix, a white girl, as the spokesperson of colonial power who demands to rehearse the process of racialization in the parlor space. As he writes, in the play, “a white woman takes the place of the colonial power, enacting her own feminization narrative over the body and consciousness of the colonized subject” (Park, 2006, p.28).

My reading differs from this perspective and considers Terri a co-participant of a camp SM game. That is, the SM ritual is not a reconstruction of a white subject’s dominance over a colonized subject, but a subversive theater initiated jointly by the two characters. In the theater, the processes of racialization and stigmatization are initiated actively by a man of color and his partner. They maintain a conscious distance with the discursive signs performed, playing with the operations of power while recirculating them, deconstructing while reproducing, ironizing while demonstrating. When the stigmas become increasingly absurd and exaggerated, Hwang evokes a camp effect with an “exhibitionist aesthetic of extremes,” which “draws attention to its posturing” (McMahon, 2006, p.13). Via camp expression, he revisualizes the scenes when institutional violence occurs and transforms them into an aesthetic sensibility.

Humor and irony join the camp effect. The characters’ ironic comments are interspersed in their subversive racial role-playing. Irritated by Terri’s spoiling of the SM game with reality, Mark shouts, “Now, pick up that whip, start barking orders, and

let's get back to investigating the burning social issues of our day!" (Hwang, 2000, p.257) The equivalence between an erotic sexual practice and two sociologists' investigation of "burning social issues" creates amusing results. The humor reminds readers/audience of Mark and Terri's positions of observers, of investigators, and of experimenters with the issues performed.

Likewise, the wordplay of the two characters in the play rings with humor and irony, satirizing the ambivalence in hegemonic culture. The attack of the sadist Terri and the masochist's defense exploits a camp heritage of "wordplay like swordsmanship" (McMahon, 2006, p.8). Hwang's early interest and prowess in debate contributed to his transfer to Harvard School (now Harvard-Westlake), where he completed high school studies (Boles, 2013, p.5). This interest also shapes a feature of his theatrical works, which celebrate "the opposition of ideas and the interplay of ideas" between two characters (Lyons, 1999, p.237). It is not hard to notice the collisions of discourses on masculinity in Terri and Mark's debate when they enact a courtship between two Asian Americans.

TERRI: I'm not about to date any man who reminds me even slightly of my father.  
 MARK: But a blond rejected me because I didn't remind her of her father.  
 TERRI: Of course you didn't! You're Asian!  
 MARK: And now, you won't date me because I do remind you of yours?  
 TERRI: Of course you do! You're Asian! (Hwang, 2000, p.268)

The conversation offers an intriguing wordplay based on the inconsistency within the stereotypical assumptions of Asian men. In an amusing yet poignant way, it displays the predicament faced by racialized male subjects in the realm of romantic relationships. In the dialogues, Terri's role—an Asian girl, rejects her Chinese peer under the banner of anti-patriarchy: "Asian men have oppressed their women for centuries" (Hwang, 2000, p.268). In this sense, the Chinese male played by Mark loses attraction to the girl for reminding her of her father, who represents traditional patriarchy in an Asian context. However, in another situation, the Chinese man is rejected by a "blond" for the seemingly opposite reason: "I didn't remind her of her father." Here, a gender narrative is further complicated by a colonialist dynamic, reflecting how a standard of masculinity in a white-dominated society is imposed on the colonized minorities. For the "blond", Asian American men hardly meet the standard of the hegemonic masculinity associated closely with whiteness in the US and therefore are not attractive enough (Chan, 2001, p.156). The dilemma of Chinese American men is well expressed by J. Chan: "In effect, Asian American men are given a false choice: either we emulate White American notions of masculinity or accept the fact that we are not men" (Chan, 2001, p.156). Therefore, regulated and judged according to a hegemonic notion of manhood encapsulated in the image of a white father, the Chinese man performed by Mark does not fit the blond girl's expectation.

The complex power dynamics are staged as verbal swordplay that pushes the characters' conversation to an absurd paradox. Because of his Asian identity, the man played by Mark cannot be accepted, either by a Chinese girl or a white girl. On the one hand, he is refused because of his subordinate position within postcolonial discourse—he does not resemble a white father. On the other hand, he is refused for his subject position in sexism—he does resemble a patriarchal father. The paradox of his dis/similarity to a patriarchal father works as a laughable wordplay. It elicits laughter from the audience and ironizes the ambivalent standard of masculinity as a cultural construction.

Mark and Terri continue to perform the double standards faced by Asian men with witty language. Mark's role asks for his Asian peer's opinions about "Italian men" or "Latinos." The Asian girl replies: "If pressed, I would characterize them as macho" (Hwang, 2000, p.268).

MARK: Macho? And Asian men aren't?

TERRI: No—you're just sexist.

MARK: What's the difference?

TERRI: The—I dunno. Macho is . . . sexier, that's all. You've never been known as the most assertive of men.

MARK: How can we be not assertive enough and too oppressive all at the same time?

(Hwang, 2000, pp.268-269)

Terri applies the stereotype that Asian men can be counted as sexists, but for their



alleged lack of manhood, they are not man enough to be “machos,” a more alluring expression of sexism. This logic prompts Mark’s pointed and somewhat hilarious inquiry: “How can we be not assertive enough and too oppressive all at the same time?” The contradiction of being “assertive” and “oppressive” at once constitutes an ironic wordplay, showing an aloof touch of distance that stylizes camp aesthetics (McMahon, 2006, p.13). Keeping a critical distance from the clichés he evokes, Hwang invalidates their power with a playful posture.

In the matrix of sadomasochism, Hwang’s characters in *Bondage* arouse a camp sensibility through actively and deliberately participating in the operation of racial discourses. Their sadomasochistic role-playing dramatizes the performativity of race and lays bare the discursive and artificial construction of racialized bodies. Furthermore, it disturbs essentialized identities by rendering them fluid and unstable. Though *Bondage* is placed on the battlefield of “burning social issues,” the campy exaggeration, humor, irony, and wordplay in Hwang’s writing allow a playful and aloof distance between the characters and the oppressive representations they reproduce and undermine. The joint effect of sadomasochism and camp works as a queer aesthetic. It makes visible the “grids” in our social knowledge that regulate “how we perceive ourselves, others, the world, and the relation between them” (Sullivan, 2007, p.76).

More importantly, the aesthetic domain enables us to reflect on, make fun of, and break free of them.

### ***Yellow Face: Utopian Imagination of Queered Racial Face***

Fifteen years after the staging of *Bondage*, Hwang's Obie-award-winning play *Yellow Face* premiered in Los Angeles in 2007. The play touches upon the theme of "authentic" representation of racial identities in the political context of multiculturalism in the US at the turn of the century. It shows Hwang's reflection and reevaluation of his early isolationist multicultural stand that is prone to reinforcing racial categories. Like *Bondage*, *Yellow Face* questions the authenticity of ethnicity. As a semi-autobiographical work that portrays himself and his father as main characters, it references political conflicts surrounding race experienced by the playwright in the last decade of the twentieth century.

To contextualize *Yellow Face*'s socio-political setting and the evolution of Hwang's stance on identity issues, it is pertinent to unpack the term "multiculturalism". Multicultural thinking, which emerged across Western democratic societies since the 1970s, emphasizes distinctive cultures of diverse ethnic communities (Levrain and Loobuyck, 2018). In this way, it is different from the "melting pot theory" that expects

social minorities' assimilation into a unified mainstream culture (Song, 2020).

Associated closely with identity politics or politics of difference, multiculturalism appeals to promote the interest of underrepresented identity groups.

Multicultural thinking heavily influenced Hwang in his early years. When he studied at Stanford, he upheld an "isolationist nationalist" position, valuing his Asian heritage and Chinese American identity (Smith, 1993, p.43). In this period, he played "Asian-American protest music" with other Asian members and remained active in Asian and Marxist-oriented groups (Leon, 1989). In the 1980s, Hwang wrote an "Asian America Trilogy"—*FOB* (1979), *The Dance and the Railroad* (1981), and *Family Devotions* (1981), which concentrate on Chinese American immigrants' lives and their cultural clashes with Eastern society (Boles, 2013, p.13). After completing these works, however, he became increasingly aware of the limitations of the isolationist perspective of ethnicity. When interviewed by *New York Magazine* in 1993, he talked about his uneasiness with multiculturalism: "I have an intrinsic discomfort with anything that lacks complexity. It becomes a Christian fundamentalism of the right or left. The notion of multiculturalism can easily turn to the idea we only relate to each other because of our particular nationality and gender" (Smith, 1993, p.43). The discourse of multiculturalism, which he was interested in and contributed to, "discouraged" Hwang—it divides individuals into categories based on ethnicity, producing barriers

between “us” and others (Cooperman, 1995, p.373).

This realization pushed Hwang’s transition from multiculturalism toward “interculturalism,” a term he introduced to transcend the limitation of one’s ethnic identity (Fanger, 1993). Accordingly, he showed strong interest in disrupting the categories of race in his plays in the early 1990s, such as *Bondage* and *Face Value* (1993). The latter, a farce about racial misidentification, was partly written in response to the casting controversy of *Miss Saigon* in 1990. As a spokesman for the Asian American community, Hwang protested against Caucasian actor Jonathan Pryce’s playing a Eurasian pimp in *Miss Saigon*’s Broadway production. He attempted to explore the question— “What does it really mean to ‘play’ another race?” in *Face Value* (Maher, 2013). Unfortunately, the previews of this play in Boston were criticized as confusing and pointless, resulting in its cancellation before its Broadway opening (Boles, 2013, pp.75-76). The failure of *Face Value*, however, inspired Hwang’s creation of *Yellow Face*. In the new play, he wrote about the failure of the prior work with a touch of self-parody.

*Yellow Face* allows the playwright to reflect on his previous multicultural standpoint and continue his inquiry into the changeability of racial identities. It narrates how the protagonist DHH (the initials of the playwright’s name) is involved in a whirlwind of identity conflicts in the 1990s in the US. It covers DHH’s protest against

the phenomenon of “yellowface” (assigning white actors in Asian roles) in *Miss Saigon*, the miscasting of a white actor for a Chinese role in his play *Face Value*, and the espionage investigations faced by Chinese Americans for their identity. For Hwang, the play “poke[s] fun at some of the absurdities of the multicultural movement” (Viertel, 2008, p.60). By doing so, he turned himself into a comic figure. He explained, “A wise friend once said that, in order to have a conversation about race with a member of a different race, you have to be willing to make a fool of yourself... DHH is the most foolish character in the show, giving audiences permission to laugh at controversies over race and culture” (Hwang, 2014). Hwang writes with a critical, ironic and self-mocking tone, challenging an essentialist understanding of race.

In what follows, I will show how *Yellow Face* queers race by revealing the notion’s theatricality and fluidity, and how the playwright exhibits unstable race identities with a stylistic sense of camp humor and exaggeration captured in my reading. Moreover, I will outline the queer aesthetic dimension of *Yellow Face* that produces a utopian imagination of race. Central to this imagination is that humans are ideally stripped of the social discipline of racial categories and break the opposition between self and other.

## Queering Racial “Face”

The notion of “face” runs through *Yellow Face*. It connects a person’s being with their outward presentation, reminding us of the theatricality and performativity of racial identity. By staging a questionable “yellow face”, Hwang queers race and unsettles socialized “racial ideology” that classifies humans based on physical variations (Smedley, 1998, p.694). At the beginning of the play, Hwang demonstrates the protagonist DHH’s “face” as an Asian model. As the character confesses near the end, the yellow face he “discovers years ago” enables him to “live better and more fully than anything” he has tried (Hwang, 2009, p.68). For years, it develops into his “mask”: “And I became just another actor —running around in yellow face” (Hwang, 2009, p.68). DHH’s words suggest that “face” is what he shows to the external world, a repetitive performance that constitutes his identity.

Wearing a preestablished Chinese American face, DHH speaks up for the rights of Asian actors and authentic racial casting in the *Miss Saigon* dispute. When criticism in the media mounts amid the looming risk of *Miss Saigon* being canceled, he decides to stop the protest. Nevertheless, this decision disappoints Carla Chang, an Asian activist in the play who insists on DHH’s presence at the rally.

“Why do you need me?” DHH asks Carla Chang, pointing out it is his “face” and

“name” that are needed by his community as “the poster child for political correctness” (Hwang, 2009, p.13). The statement indicates how the “norms and dominant relations of power” that regulate racialized bodies demand DHH to act in his role (Ehlers, 2012, p.5). It mirrors what happened to the playwright in reality. After Hwang’s Broadway success with *M. Butterfly*, he was elevated as the “face” of the Asian-American community. With “multicultural movements” that advocated cultural minorities to embrace their identities gained momentum in the 1990s, he was expected to “perform as a political figurehead” for his community (Johnson, 2017, p.218). The formation of DHH’s “yellow face” allows us to see that his Asian American identity is the product of performative acting, prescribed by specific social values at a particular time.

Interestingly, it is also face—a concept highly related to a person’s self-esteem and social performance in Chinese culture (Huang, 1987)—that leads to DHH’s decision to invent an Asian identity for Marcus. When DHH finds that Marcus, whom he selects as the perfect “Asian leading man” for his new play *Face Value*, is a Caucasian, he decides to help him “pass as an Asian” (Hwang, 2009, p.29). Only by doing so can he dismiss Marcus without violating the Actor Equity rules and, at the same time, save his reputation (face).

Marcus’ performance and assumption of “yellow face” parodies and satirizes ontological perception of racial categories. In a meeting with Asian American students,

DHH makes up rhetoric about Marcus' ethnic background, claiming he belongs to "Russian Siberian Asian Jews" (Hwang, 2009, p.30). In order to reflect the authenticity of Marcus' Asian heritage, DHH gives him the stage name "Marcus Gee." For Zhang Qiu-Mei, the plot showcases a performative process whereby a conventional Asian name as a racial marker redefines Marcus and enhances his identification with the Asian community (Zhang,2018). Aside from naming, the discursive power of racial ideology functions in Marcus' echoing of Chinese American students' languages, stylized in campy humor and exaggeration.

MARCUS: .....When I was seven, my parents moved to this fancy neighborhood because it had good schools. But that made me sort of. . . the poor kid in town.

STUDENT #3: I know what that's like.

MARCUS: You do? Um, thank you.

STUDENT #1: Bastard!

MARCUS: You really wanna hear this?

DHH: Trust me, they do.

MARCUS: See the other kids all knew the truth about me. So on the outside, I was trying to fit with everyone else, but inside, um. . .

STUDENT #2: You knew they were lookin' down on you!

MARCUS: That's right! God, this is so weird, I've never even. . . and in public like this. . .

STUDENT #2: Marcus, we've all been oppressed!

STUDENT #1: By the bastards! Now you say it!

MARCUS: Huh? Me? No, I—

STUDENT #1: No, man, ya gotta say it!

STUDENT #2: It's the only way you're gonna rise up!

MARCUS: See it was subtle—I mean, it wasn't like—

STUDENT #2: Subtle sucks.

STUDENT #1: C'mon, ya gotta say it!

MARCUS: Okay. Bastards.

STUDENT #1: That's right. Those motherfuckers. Who make us feel like shit—they were—

MARCUS: Bastard! You're right, they were mean little bastards!

(Everyone applauds.) (Hwang, 2009, p.32)



The way a comic effect occurs when Marcus gradually adopts the Asian Americans' angry languages sets me thinking. Claiming "subtle sucks," one of the Asian American students invites Marcus to join them in criticizing the white majority as "bastards." When Marcus shows his proficiency in using the word "bastards", "everyone applauds," pleased with the results of their training outcome. So what exactly makes me laugh when I read these exaggerated, repetitive, sometimes abrupt, and slogan-like abusive words?

The same source of humor is found when these students praise and defend DHH's new show without seeing it — "Once those white critics started beating on your show, I knew it must be great" (Hwang, 2009, p.30). I felt guilty when I found my laugh separated me from the indignant students who shared my ethnic background. At the same time, some questions torture me: should Asian Americans be funny, camped, and exaggerated when defending their dignity? Why does Hwang's portrayal here seem to suggest these students embrace and consolidate their "yellow face" actively, though they are actually the victims of racial categories? These questions tempt me to think about the operation of racial ideology within the minorized ethnic groups.

Audrey Smedley posits in her article "'Race' and the Construction of Human Identity" that the creation of "race" in history means "the organization of all peoples into a limited number of unequal or ranked categories theoretically based on differences

in their biophysical traits” (Smedley, 1998, p.693). And the racist logic that distinguishes, excludes, and ranks people through skin color can also be implanted in racial minorities. She finds that some people of “low-status races” tend to assert the superiority of their ethnicity in response to the dilemma that they are defined and othered by the mainstream culture (Smedley, 1998, p.695).

It is understandable for minorities to construct “positive images” and “restore a sense of pride and dignity” in this way (Smedley, 1998, p.695). However, this response is still boxed in the “racial worldview” shared by biological determinists (Smedley, 1998, p.695). In a study on racial identity, Alvarez (2002) found that after experiencing unequal treatment for their ethnicity, some Asian Americans enter a phase where they “adopt a dualistic worldview,” asserting Asian superiority over the White majority (p.38). This description reminds me of Hwang’s assertive and dualistic Asian American characters—their knowledge of yellow face ironically turns a white “bastard” into a role model in their communities.

Therefore, if we get the humor of Hwang’s exaggeration and parody in the lines quoted above, it is primarily the dichotomous logic behind racial categorization and its absurdity that makes us laugh. Marcus successfully performs an Asian identity by sharing his experiences of being looked down and repeating Asian Americans’ anger against white people. And his success lies in enacting what Butler terms the repetitive

“ritual” of racial ideology processed by Asian Americans about what they should experience, hate, and be proud of (Butler, 1997, p.25). For the audience who is informed beforehand that Marcus is white, the scene has the qualities of a camp aesthetic effect. Marcus’ cultural drag performance creates an absurd and funny scene where he, being biologically white, accuses white men of being “bastards.” At the same time, the Asian American students support a supposedly white enemy as their role model. The contrast between Marcus’ biological classification as Caucasian and superficial acting and its absurd consequences evoke incongruity, theatricality, and humor—the “subject matter,” “style,” and “strategy” of camp (Newton, 1993, p.43). The scene powerfully displays how racial norms regulating whiteness and yellowness are disturbed by racial performance imbued with camp exaggeration, theatricality, and humor.

Marcus’ maintenance of his invented ethnic background and his defense of it with the notion of “face” denotes race as performative and unstable. Soon after Marcus cooperates with DHH, he gets an Asian role in *The King and I*. Ironically enough, when answering reporters’ questions, he accentuates the production’s hallmark of “cultural authenticity” (Hwang, 2009, p.41). The show makes him famous and turns him into a role model in the Asian American community. His reputation threatens DHH’s status, provoking the playwright’s attack and exclusion.

Marcus defends his behavior and employs the concept of “face”— “Well, I’ve chosen my face. And now I’m becoming the person I’ve always wanted to be” (Hwang, 2009, p.43). For him, being an Asian is equated with “saying things that need to be said, doing things that need to be done” (Hwang, 2009, p.42). In other words, the face he chooses to show (“saying” and “doing” as Asians), which is as changeable as a mask, constitutes his ethnic identity.

Beyond this, the normative understanding of race as a fixed being is challenged by the play’s deliberate confusion of fiction and reality in a metadramatic structure. Hwang intends to make *Yellow Face* “a mock stage documentary” —a combination of “documentary theatre” and satirical fiction (William, 2017). Brimming with media materials like *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times*, *The Daily News*, and government documents, the play seamlessly integrates real-life events centered around Asian Americans in the 1990s. Moreover, the main characters are created based on himself, his father, and other people around him, bringing the play a sense of truthfulness.

And yet, the play is also imbued with fictionality. Near the end of the script, DHH reveals that Marcus is a character created by himself. This fact blurs the differences between biography and theatre. Therefore, we are uncertain about what is made up and what is not. As the playwright said, “Part of the fun of the play...is not knowing what is

true and what is invented” (Maher, 2013). The blending of truth and fiction enhances a sense of theatricality in the staged stories. In the play, DHH states that his purpose in creating Marcus is to “take words like ‘Asian’ and ‘American,’ like ‘race’ and ‘nation,’ mess them up so bad no one has any idea what they mean anymore” (Hwang, 2009, pp.68-69). And this goal works well. In this half-true and half-false story that discusses issues around racial differences, the audience is led to reflect on the authenticity of race. While queering the notion of race, *Yellow Face* displays camp aesthetics of exaggeration and theatricality. Beyond this, it delves deeper into the utopian aesthetic dimension of queer race, revisiting an exploration touched upon in *Bondage*.

### **Sing a Utopian Big Song**

In parallel with Marcus’ passing from a Caucasian to an Asian celebrity, the second Act of *Yellow Face* engages with another subplot that references the political events associated with “Yellow Peril” in 1997. With the US “gearing up to make China its next enemy,” Asian Americans became a threat to the country (Hwang, 2009, p.52). As portrayed in the play, the political wave was triggered by the accusation of John Huang for violating campaign finance laws. Fundraising \$3.4 million for the Democratic National Committee from the Asian American community, Huang was

investigated for his potential connection with China (Huang, 1997).

In the play, the yellow peril also influences DHH's father, HYH. Like Hwang's father in real life, HYH is a Chinese immigrant who shows love and loyalty to his American citizenship. He wishes to be an American like Jimmy Stewart, the representative image of Americans he sees on screen in his early years in China. HYH stays optimistic but finally loses this hope. As CEO of Far East National Bank, HYH is investigated for his potential involvement in the Presidential election via money laundering. For his Chinese background, he is suspected and accused of "disloyalty to America," which he believes is his "home" (Hwang, 2009, p.62). Soon after this investigation, HYH passes away with a broken dream of becoming an American. In his last words, he says, "You know, Son, I used to believe in America, but now, I don't anymore...when I try to stop those guys who are after me, I can't beat them this time. I'm not Jimmy Stewart after all" (Hwang, 2009, p.64).

The disillusion of HYH contributes to the evolution of DHH's attitudes toward race. In the end, DHH fulfills Marcus' wish to "write me[him] a happy ending" (Hwang, 2009, p.43). He sends this fictional figure to a Chinese village, which accomplishes his father's dream: "a world where he [HYH] could be Jimmy Stewart. And a white guy—can even be an Asian" (Hwang, 2009, p.69). Disrupting the clear-cut racial categorization of humans, this dream explicitly realizes the utopia of queer race.

The utopian conjure of Marcus's journey into China is interspersed throughout the play, which follows a reverse chronological order. In the beginning, the stage direction indicates, "*We hear the Dong people singing Track #2 from the CD Dong Folk Songs: People and Nature in Harmony: 'We Close the Village for Rituals'*" (Hwang, 2009, p.7). Then, DHH presents an email from Marcus on January 30, 2006, a future time of what will happen in the ensuing scenes. In the letter, Marcus details his visit to "a village called Zhencong" in Guizhou province, China (Hwang, 2009, p.7). There, he meets the Dong people—a minority tribe in China and explores the distinct landscape, culture, and music (Dong Song) of the local community. Geographically, the village resembles a utopian setting of an isolated island in Thomas More's book. The Dong tribe is scattered in remote mountainous areas in southern China. According to Marcus, he gets there through "ten hours by bus over roads barely paved" after he arrives at the provincial capital, which showcases the village's high degree of seclusion (Hwang, 2009, p.7). The idyllic village sharply contrasts with the chaotic political tumult Marcus experiences in the States in the 90s, which also endows it with a utopian sense. As the play unfolds, the narration of Marcus' journey in Dong village continues in the form of emails, which portrays how he gradually discovers hope to transcend racial discourses and divides in a Chinese village.

The second email inserted in the play is accompanied by "Cicadas Are Crying, I

Sigh as My Youth Passes By,” Dong Song track #15 from Joanna Lee and Ken Smith’s CD “Dong Folk Songs: People and Nature in Harmony.” In the message, Marcus shares his interest in Dong music and his investigation and thoughts about it. He states,

...what’s kept me here in Dong country—is the music. (*Pause*) I’ve done some research. Turns out, the “big song” came to China over the Silk Road, a thousand years ago. Now I sit, in the center of the village at twilight, and listen, with my eyes shut. And sometimes, when I’m very lucky, I can hear the whole journey—from the Carpathian Mountains, through the Middle East, all the way into Asia, covering half the world. The Dong learn this music from birth—it’s so much a part of who they are—of who I’m not. And yet all these songs once came from somewhere else—sorta like me. (Hwang, 2009, p.35)

In this text, Hwang allows his fictional character Marcuse to express their wish in common—to go beyond the reductive racial and cultural categories that separate people from each other. Marcuse finds solace in his findings about Dong people’s music, which is assumed to formulate “who they are”—and “who I’m not.” Now, he learns that the division between “they” and “I” is not that seamless since the music form may engage different regions and cultures across its long and complex history of evolvement.<sup>29</sup> The Dong song represents a potential for linking him to what he is not, which is ideally achieved in the play’s last scene.

---

<sup>29</sup> Though the character claims that big song may be originated from other regions across Silk Road a thousand years ago. It should be noted that there are different opinions regarding the formation of this music. Some Chinese research on Dong Song, for example, posits that it is invented by the local Dong people in ancient time (Huang, 2007).



In the scene, the Dong track “We Close the Village for Rituals” is played again.

This time, Marcus’ email suggests that he has stayed in the tribe for nine months. And he joins the villagers’ ritual of singing the “big song” as part of the public chorus. From his description, we can glimpse a dreamy fantasy where acceptance and harmony replace racial and national collisions:

Marcus: ... Tonight, as they gathered together for the “big song,” I saw a couple of villagers gesturing for me to come closer. I got up, and ascended the steps under the eaves to the pagoda. And no one stopped me. They saw who I am, and gave me “face.” As I opened my mouth, the music began to speak to me, in words only I could hear:

Get over yourself.

This Song is only doing

What it has always done:

Taking in voices

From all the lands

And all the peoples,

Who have ever crossed its path.

Though that road has been messy,

It made this song.

For nothing of value,

Nothing which lasts,

Nothing human

Is ever pure.

(Pause.)

I joined the “big song,” and found the thing I had lost. A reason to hope. And now, I can go home. (Hwang, 2009, p.69)

Here, Hwang uses the “big song” to convey a queer race ideal that renders human relationships harmonious and transparent, removing the political experience of confrontation associated with racial and national differences. Big Song is a crucial musical tradition for Dong ethnic groups. As the whole group’s accomplishment, it is polyphonic singing without instrumental accompaniment (Chen, 2014). Surrounded by

lush vegetation and forests, the local Dong people draw inspiration from nature and develop indigenous music that conveys the harmony between humans and nature and the concordance between people (Chen, 2014).

In the “happy ending” DHH invents for Marcus, people are not boxed into rigid labels or categories by default. As a foreigner, Marcus is not treated differently than other local villagers. Instead, these people gesture to him to join them, and “no one stopped me” along the way. The scenario actualizes a transparent intimacy and dialogue among human subjects— between the West and the East, the self and the other (Ironically, in the Dong minority, Marcus is in a position close to a marginal other for being the only White person. But the dominance-submission dynamic is no longer applicable here). To deepen the sense that cultural and identity barriers are removed, the big song is shown to “speak to me,” allowing Marcus to understand its lyrics. As the lyrics reveal, “Nothing human/Is ever pure.” Human values and knowledge about themselves are never pure; they are largely shaped by social norms and power structures and can change over different contexts. Therefore, rather than being pure, essential, and lasting, the border of race can be fluid and queered. And Marcus’s hilarious “yellow face” experiences embody such identity fluidity. Eventually, Hwang realizes this character’s (also Hwang’s father) wish, allowing him to find a home in the East. From the scene, we find a utopian vision for those who are judged, subjugated, and excluded

for their ethnicity. Moreover, the utopia illuminates people whose wishes failed and those still struggling with their racial “faces” or searching for a new one.

Moreover, the harmony within and between people expressed in polyphonic Dong songs can be regarded as an idealistic solution to race, culture, and other identity issues covered in Hwang’s works. At the intersection between the West and East, Hwang is concerned with the oppositional collision between the two cultures. He also expressed this concern in the play. In *Yellow Face*, after the US officials pause their investigation of Chinese Americans, their opposition against China is not over. Hwang quotes a post on [realeclearpolitics.com](http://realeclearpolitics.com) by Rocco Palmieri, who writes, “Because America’s real enemy in the twenty-first century—will be China” (Hwang, 2009, p.67). It indicates that the fixed division between “we” and “others” in political discourses shows no improvement.

Hwang implants his political wish in Marcus’ participation in the Dong Folk Song, which he believes to be “a great sonic metaphor for cultural fusion” (Johnson, 2017, p.217). The “cultural fusion” mentioned by Hwang is unlike a melting-pot rhetoric, which diminishes the agency position and voices of minorities. As polyphonic music, the big song is derived from the Dong folks’ tradition of socializing in antiphonal singing (Chen, 2014). Echoing and responding to each other, performers in a piece of big song work in concord with their distinctive voices. The music queers self/other

boundary, leading Marcus to a utopian realm where the discursive barriers between white and yellow are dissolved. Beyond the limits of reality imbued with hostility and confrontation, the ending scene stages an imagination of intercultural/racial harmonious dialogues.

The dreamy scene reminds me of Muñoz's discussion of queer aesthetics, imagination, and our engagement with others. He posits that queer aesthetics "represent a joyful contemplation" that refuses the domination of the performance principle" and "allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also ourselves and others" (Muñoz, 2009, p.135). By "performance principle" he means the way social order becomes powerful in regulating people's pleasure and interpersonal relationship, a concept proposed by Herbert Marcuse. Muñoz's words here fully elaborate on how queer aesthetic dimension frees us from preestablished recognitions of ourselves and others. It is also in this way that *Yellow Face* invites the audience into contemplation of a possible harmony within individuals and groups—no need to define ourselves by producing others, no need to defend ourselves with an imposed face.

## Chapter Four

### *The Sound of a Voice and 1000 Airplanes on the Roof :* **Queerness, Sound, and Corporeal Becoming**

#### Chapter Introduction

We are all visitors. We all travel. We all ask questions. We all hope one day, looking into the eyes of another, to find part of an answer.

—David Henry Hwang, *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (Hwang et al., 1989)

In previous chapters, I demonstrated the queer aesthetic dimension in David Henry Hwang's plays that question notions of gender, sexuality, and race in US society after the 1980s. In some less well-known and more experimental works, which will be approached in this chapter, Hwang expanded his exploration of identity and power to the formation of the human concept. From gender and sexuality to race, these discursive categories, as examined in previous chapters, foreground an essential, natural, and stabilized subject. This ontological perception of the self tends to presume at first a

human identity, a common ground for social divisions to arise. It is also at the level that a default and dominant standard for humans represented by heterosexual white men is established, based on which certain marginalized entities—women and racial minorities may be regarded as “less than human” (MacCormack, 2016, p.111). A disruption of humanness, therefore, would be a more basic rebellion against the myth of stable and natural subjectivity. In a sense, the playwright’s broadened scope of inquiry is more subversive than those discussed in my previous chapters, for it challenges the very foundation of human identity.

Hwang’s portrayal of nonhuman others—more precisely, human-monster/alien hybrid—in *The Sound of a Voice* (1983) and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988) mobilizes the limits of the human self. These portrayals also present a fluid and nuanced nature of identity. This chapter, therefore, orients towards the queer space invoked in inter-species bodily combinations in Hwang’s works. The journey from gender, sexuality, and race to human identity per se outlines a nuanced and multifaceted overview of Hwang’s queer aesthetics.

The chapter will begin with a discussion of queer capabilities of nonhuman formations. I will address to what extent Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s work on the posthuman can serve as a queer reading methodology and inform a queer aesthetics that revels in unestablished and promising human configurations and relations. This

approach supports my reading of queer selves and aesthetic sensibilities in these selected plays of David Henry Hwang that involve becoming nonhuman. As I examine these texts, sound stands out as an intriguing facet that effectively expresses and facilitates the reconfiguration of human subjectivities. Thus, my analysis centers on the sonic dimensions that effectively disintegrate and transform human bodies. The introductory section will accordingly include an explanation of the queer force of sounding, which justifies my analysis of the selected plays in the chapter through a joint lens of posthumanism and sounds.

Hwang's depiction of ambiguous and hybrid in/human entities literalizes a posthuman perspective, which signifies a breakdown in the meaning of humanity. Posthumanism prompts a reevaluation of humanness, revealing it as a notion shaped by the selective and subjective views of humans towards themselves and other beings they encounter (MacCormack, 2016). In this sense, "human identity" is not a natural fact but is constructed based on anthropocentric knowledge that produces marginalized nonhuman beings. In Michel Foucault's words, the human self is "a recent invention, a wrinkle in our knowledge" that can evolve over varied historical times (Foucault, M., 2002, p.xxv). Aside from Foucault, who interprets humanity as a discursive and changeable concept, posthumanist scholars such as Donna Haraway regard human corporeality as transformable. As she claims in "A Cyborg Manifesto" (1985), "a

cyborg world” that allows people’s “joint kinship with animals and machines” presents more possibilities of bodily reality (Haraway, 1991, p.154). By breaking the boundary of human identity that distinguishes itself from monsters, animals, aliens, inanimate nature and other alleged nonhuman beings, posthuman thoughts reflect a queer tendency that refuses normative binary thinking and subject/other divide.

There is noticeable interest within the field of queer studies in the posthuman dimension. In the Foreword of Myra J. Hird and Noreen Giffney edited *Queering the Non/Human* (2008), Donna J. Haraway argues: “Queering has the job of undoing ‘normal’ categories, and none is more critical than the human/nonhuman sorting operation” (p. xxiv). Queer studies, as exemplified in this collection of essays, extend queer scrutiny to the human “specie.” These studies examine the boundaries of humans as reflected across diverse disciplines and contexts— their function in sketching out the human image in opposition to non-human others, highlighting the precariousness of the transitional zone between humans and nonhumans. More than this, incorporating Deleuze, academic efforts to queer the non/human tend to conjure new bodily expressions and relationships—not through existing normative order, but through the openness of the world.

Deleuze and Guattari’s formulation of becoming matters and corporeality manifests the intersection of posthuman thinking and queer sight. Not limited to



rethinking human bodies and organs, they propose to look at the universe as constantly moving, ongoing, and transforming— “an immense deterritorialized refrain” (1987, p.327). This worldview affirms a potential rather than an established reality. As summarized by Eugene W. Holland, for Deleuze and Guattari, “There is infinite potential for becoming to actualize itself in different beings, but only and always within the parameters immanent to this universe as we know it, with its specific constants such as the speed of light, the gravitational constant, and so on” (Holland, 2013, p.22). That is to say, Deleuze and Guattari understand the supposedly fixed categories of species as one possibility of a becoming world. The past and present are also pinned down by a certain way of actualization.

Accordingly, these thinkers highlight the rhizomatic connections between disparate communities and the dissolution of borders. The term “rhizome” is a botanical word that signifies underground stems, such as the mycelial network of mushrooms. But in Deleuze’s and Guattari’s philosophy, it is used to suggest an interwoven and tangled relationship. In contrast to a tree-like structure that follows a strict hierarchy and organization, the growth of a fungal rhizome “fosters connections between fields” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.12). A rhizomatic body is open to transformation and mutation driven by desires and intensities. As Deleuze and Guattari clarify, “Flows of intensity, their fluids, their fibers, their continuums and conjunctions of affects, the

wind, fine segmentation, microperceptions, have replaced the world of the subject”

(Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.162). The concept of rhizome offers a way to think of a mode of existence, growth, and engagement beyond linear logic. It suggests a potential for humans (and any other beings) to be freed from singular and static identification and subjectification.

Though Deleuze and Guattari are not widely regarded as queer theorists, I find their philosophy of becoming helpful as a queer approach. In doing so, I draw on Chrysanthi Nigianni and Merl Storr’s edited collection *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (2009). The book explores the productive intersection between queer theory and the insights of the two philosophers. Its introduction proposes a “new queer methodology” of interpretation and creation based on DeleuzoGuattarian affirmation of unrealized desires and bodily potentialities. This approach embraces a queer politics that values the deterritorial power of each encounter between bodies and an aesthetics liberated from normative order (Colebrook, 2009, p.21). For instance, a Deleuzian queer aesthetic values “body without organs” in Francis Bacon’s paintings (Li & Zhong, 2019). The unrecognizable and distorted flesh and faces painted by Francis Bacon epitomize, as Deleuze elaborates in *The Logic of Sense* (1969), an art that allows “intensities” to circulate and delineate disorganized flesh (Deleuze, 2003). This philosophical and artistic idea that pushes the human body beyond its limit inspired me to tap into its

confluence with queer subjectivity and aesthetics.

Deleuze and Guattari's theories offer a lens to denormalize and queer the world by encouraging the transgression of identities and the reconsidering of bodily boundaries. This lens engages with and enriches existing queer approaches, particularly those represented by Judith Butler's theorization of gender performativity. Queer readings influenced by Butler, such as those employed in my previous chapters, tend to exploit the subversive power of reiterating, parodying, and playing with the current norms and power hierarchy. However, "Is language the only air we can breathe? Is text the only land we can inhabit? Is parody the only resistance we can imagine?" Nigianni and Storr raise these questions in the introduction to *Deleuze and Queer Theory* (Storr and Nigianni, 2009, p.3). In the book, they express concern about the queer theories that regard cultural and linguistic construction as the sole dimension of self-formation (and its inherent humanist tendencies). For them, the queerness manifested in Deleuze and Guattari's accounts underscores the innovation of new and once unrepresentable existences, therefore informing an alternative way of queer theorization. The new queer perspective engaging with Deleuzian thoughts allows an exploration of relations, bodily experience and potential beyond the image and discursive system of Man. It shifts away from the repetition of existing identities and discourses and draws on an "ontology of becoming" in Deleuze's context (Storr and Nigianni, 2009, p.8). Here, the term

“ontology” does not suggest there is an enclosed and monolithic essence but rather entities that “could have been otherwise,” opening to virtualities and growing possibilities (Storr and Nigianni, 2009, p.8). From various departing points and theoretical backgrounds, queer perspectives represented by Butler and Deleuze emphasize different aspects. Employing queer theories revitalized by Deleuze and Guattari’s concepts, this chapter aims to explore the multifaceted and intricate queer expressions and aesthetics in David Henry Hwang’s plays with greater nuance.

The plays under discussion in this chapter feature experimental imagination of inhuman- and alien-like bodies. More precisely, these bodies are ambiguously situated between supernatural monsters/aliens and human beings. For example, in *The Sound of a Voice*, a play inspired by Japanese *Kaidan* (怪談, meaning ghost or strange tales) culture, the protagonist Hanako embodies disturbing female monstrosity. During her contact with a male warrior visitor whose purpose is to conquer her and “seek glory” (Hwang, 2000, p.173), she shows a mysterious power to weaken the visitor while maintaining a seemingly submissive demeanor. Similarly, *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* portrays a person, M’s, journey to find his/her identity after s/he believes s/he has encountered extraterrestrials.<sup>30</sup> The play—also science fiction—presents a bizarre “fifth” dimension that disrupts the character's normative bodily forms, functions, and

---

<sup>30</sup> “M” was played by both female and male actors in different performances.

sensations. How does Hwang rewrite the line between the human self and “othered” inhuman entities such as monsters and aliens in his posthuman portrayal in these plays? Moreover, how does the nonhuman transformation in these play’s productions embody an aesthetic of queer becoming?

As an intriguing component in both *The Sound of a Voice* and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof*, sound plays a vital role in expressing a turbulent state of human subjectivity. The edge of self in these plays is negotiated and mobilized in Hanako’s flute melody, the voice of her petals, and the alien buzz that attracts M and transforms his body and sensations, among many others. These noises, made evident against a deliberately created silence or rendered alien and unrecognizable, call our attention to a sonic world unmapped by human language and knowledge. The sonic dimension that mediates queer becoming bodies in these plays, as the main focus of this chapter, will be unpacked closely in the later sections.

Hwang’s these two plays demonstrate the potential of the aural domain to express posthuman subjectivities and expressions. This reminds me of what Drew Daniel describes as the “raw queerness” of sound that ruptures normative life with an “indifference to human agenda” (Daniel, 2011). According to Daniel, the auditory realm manifests a chaotic, vast, and queer world exceeding human constructions of boundaries. In a 2011 essay discussing the queer capability of the “sound of the world,”

Drew Daniel reminds us that the world is queer by nature, and this fact is manifested aurally— “all sound is queer because the world itself is queer” (Daniel, 2011, p.46). As receivers of the world’s noises, our ears are indiscriminately open to and invaded by sound that exceeds the hailing of human culture and knowledge (Daniel, 2011). He states, “sound queers the self/world boundary, all day, every day. It blurs the edges of any self that the subject-machine cares to hail” (Daniel, 2011, p.44). When he writes “hailing,” Daniel uses Louis Althusser’s term to denote a process in which subjectivities, identities, and desires are shaped by authoritative language. This social indoctrination process endows meanings for perceived sounds and labels for what is hearable and worth hearing. Daniel suggests a queer way of listening beyond how we are instructed to listen. That is to say, to hear the world's vastness as what it is, unfiltered by language that produces relations, identities, and the corresponding human-centric hierarchy. The queerness of sounding reminds us of the edges of selves and dissolves the human’s “dominion over creation through the sorrowful descent into language” (Daniel, 2011, p.45). Accordingly, hearing the world can lead to a loss of self— “forgetting our ‘me-ist’ attachments to our subjective particularity” (Daniel, 2011). Sounding's disintegration of selfhood prompts me to explore posthuman portrayal in the productions of *The Sound of a Voice* and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* in alignment with the queer force of sound. Specifically, I will focus on sonic elements’

role in these plays —how they constitute the characters’ queer becoming, blur the self/other boundary and add to a queer aesthetic pleasure.

## **Part One: *The Sound of a Voice* (1983)**

### **Introduction**

*The Sound of a Voice* premiered at Joseph Papp Public Theater, New York, as part of David Henry Hwang’s 1983 production titled *Sound and Beauty*. This one-act play tells a tragic romantic story between two lonely middle-aged characters in a pre-modern Japanese setting. Hanako, the play’s heroine, lives in solitude in a forest. The play stages her interaction with a warrior visitor in her small house for days, during which they attempt to establish intimacy against a deep sense of isolation. However, as Hanako demonstrates a supernatural power that renders her inhuman, the warrior develops suspicion, fear, and anxiety towards her. Finally, despite the heroine’s request for the warrior to stay, he leaves, unable to overcome a presumed insurmountable divide between a man and a monstrous woman.

The structure and style of the play are heavily influenced by Japanese Kaidan culture. The term Kaidan/Kwaidan was coined initially by Hayashi Razan (1583-1657) when the Japanese scholar translated and collected “strange stories” (怪谈) from China.

Absorbing the vitality of Japanese local culture and customs, Kaidan gradually became a distinct literary subgenre in Japan (Reider, 2001, p.81). In the 1980s, when Hwang wrote plays in Japanese settings as a young playwright, he was fascinated by the nation's movies and literature. Hwang's *The Sound of a Voice* was inspired by Kaidan works such as Lafcadio Hearn's book *Kwaidan* (1904) and Masahiro Shinoda's and Masaki Kobayashi's films (Boles, 2013, p. 37; Cummings, 2003). For Hwang, these works were attractive because they contained "an element of tragic love, erotic undertones and often a sense of ambiguity as to whether the characters are humans or spirits" (Hwang, 1990, p. 93). And he attempted to model such a style in his work *Sound and Beauty*, which includes another play set in Japan, *The House of Sleeping Beauties*.

The influence of Kaidan culture not only sets a supernatural tone in *The Sound of a Voice* but also informs the monstrous female characterization. The nonhuman character's gendered body complicates her otherness, leading to my thoughts about the representation of monstrous women in a patriarchal cultural context. In the play, Hanako is depicted as an unknown and mysterious woman living outside the human community. Villagers spread rumors that she is an evil witch who would imprison and kill her visitors. The characterization of Hanako displays an affinity between the woman and monstrosity commonly found in Japanese Kaidan stories. As shown by Jennifer M.



Yoo, from as early as the Heian period (794-1185 CE), female spirits, monsters, and other evil, unnatural women characters were a popular subject of interest in Japanese mythic theatrical works and later in horror films (Yoo, 2022, p.1). In these works, the monstrous women seduce and murder human victims or seek revenge for the injustice they suffered, bringing trouble to a stable society. They display a transgression of gender norms and humanity, becoming the unrecognizable “other,” often shown to “require a full-blown exorcism to try and appease them” (Yoo, 2022, p.67). The way that Hanako is isolated, unwanted, and perceived as a threat by outsiders who want to eliminate her, as depicted in the play, highlights a Kaidan story pattern rooted in a patriarchal cultural context.

Despite applying the Japanese monstrous female archetype in *The Sound of a Voice*, Hwang shows more concern for the female spirit’s suffering, desires, subjectivity, and ambiguous embodiment oscillating between human and inhuman. To some extent, the play’s emphasis lies on presenting how dominant patriarchal discourses shape the otherness of female-gendered monsters rather than offering more misogynistic portrayals. The play’s theme bears on the transgression of social norms caused by the heroine’s heterogenous desire and bodies, the divisions between a human subject and a female spirit other, and the characters’ failed attempts to trespass their self/other boundaries.

Rather than interpreting Hanako as a female monster within a binary gender system, I am more interested in tapping a queer potential from her in-between states and ambiguity—her deviations from binary gender roles and in/human category. How does the monstrous female subject embody a posthuman queer being and allow us to perceive an aesthetic of uncanny, hybrid, and becoming body?

Through close reading, I find that the heroine's nonhuman expressions and transformation (into a floral spirit, as I will argue) are closely interwoven with sounding in the play's script and theatrical production. For example, the flute melody Hanako plays and the voice from the petals that share her vitalities express the character's desires and "unnaturalness." As I will demonstrate, these sounds attract the male character to listen to a broader queer world, meet with the other, and dissolve the boundary between them. Moreover, sounding in the play mediates queer desires and the becoming potential of humans. Through the transformative force of sound, the play embodies a queer aesthetic of recrafting human bodies beyond normative boundaries.

### **Hearing the Inhuman: Sound and Queer Becoming in *The Sound of a Voice***

In this section, I will read the linkage between sounding and the female characters' subversive monstrous body in *The Sound of a Voice*. This analysis is based on the play's script collected in *Trying to Find Chinatown: The Selected Plays* (2000) and its 2003 production. As I will demonstrate, sound mediates the heroine's inhuman becoming and allows the transgressive expressions of female bodies.

The play commences with a dialogue between a woman and a swordsman visitor inside her house, which is situated in "a remote corner of the world" (Hwang, 2000, p.155). Their dialogue indicates the subtle difference between hearing words and a voice. As she says: "but anything you say, I will enjoy hearing. It's not even the words. It's the sound of a voice, the way it moves through the air" (Hwang, 2000, p.156). Here, Hanako calls our attention to the subtle sonic vibration and movement between the listener and speaker rather than the content of their utterances. Her words encourage her listeners (not only the male protagonist but also the audience) to be sensitive to what their ears capture. By doing so, she restores sound from language to its more extensive and unfamiliar dimension, preparing the audience for a queer sonic world in the ensuing performance.

Sounding leads the samurai to explore the woman's enigmatic aura as a rumored witch. The unfamiliar flute melody in the dead of night vibrates in the man's eardrum as the world's untamed sonic expression and allows his contact with Hanako's

transgressive existence. When listening closely, one may capture the “inhuman, dangerous, seductive and alien” sound of the world (Daniel, 2011). In a way that queer sounding invades, attracts, and scares listeners, the sound made by Hanako’s shakuhatchi (a bamboo flute) renders her dangerous and inhuman.

On the first night at Hanako’s home, the Man hears a shakuhatchi being played. The sound arouses his alarm, and “then he sits on guard with his sword ready at his side” (Hwang, 2000, p.157). As Hanako explains, the music is played for her own satisfaction. “It’s something I developed on my own. I don’t know if it’s at all acceptable by outside standards (Hwang, 2000, p.162). The sound of her shakuhatchi is at odds with “outside standards,” namely the conventional principles and techniques involved in music recognizable for the “outside” human community and the warrior. Imbuing her flute playing with her need and supernatural power, Hanako invents her own style, pitch, and tune, a sort of queer music that exceeds normalizing logic. That being the case, the shakuhatchi sound expresses subjectivities and desires filtered out of the commonsense of how women (and humans) are regulated to exist and be heard.

In the play’s 2003 production in American Repertory Theatre, which saw Hwang’s collaboration with Philip Glass, the shakuhatchi joins the theatre music. The Japanese instrument (played by Susan Gall), alongside Chinese pipa, cello, and percussion, was integrated into the ensemble Glass used for scoring the play. In the

production, music provides more than a backdrop. It “joins the narrative of the play to help unfold the story” (Gorfinkle, 2003). For instance, the flute melody intervenes with the drama on stage. It creates “melodic long lines not provided in the text, which has a lot of short phrases back and forth,” covering “long silences and scenes *sans* dialogue” (Cummings, 2003). So, musically, the addition of shakuhachi in Glass’ composition corresponds to and amplifies the heroine’s queer sonic outputs, which join the vibrations of the play’s soundtrack.

In return, Glass’ unconventional and stylistic contribution also echoes the queer touch in Hanako’s flute playing. Glass’s composition revels in the mechanisms of repetition and minimalistic style. This quality, as observed by John Richardson and Susanna Välimäki, speaks of the undecided and unfixed state of self-formation and creates “an acoustic space of queer subjectivity that lies beyond the reach of normative binary thinking” (Välimäki and Richardson, 2013, p.229). In their case study of *The Hours* (2002), Richardson and Välimäki use the term “oceanic music” to describe Glass’ soundtrack that accentuates the turbulence of the characters’ “subject-in-process” amid binary predicaments (Välimäki and Richardson, 2013). The flowing oceanic image is also heard in the “ripples of arpeggios and repetitive warbles” in *The Sound of a Voice* (Campbell, K., 2003, p.105). In Glass’ orchestra, the repetitive and delicate pipa strings create sound-like circles of ripples on a pond, which fully display the Chinese

instrument's timbre. In a classical Chinese poem, *Song of the Pipa* (written in 816), the pipa's performance was famously described as “Thick strings clatter like splattering rain, Fine strings murmur like whispered words” (Meng, 2021). Sparking associations of such watery and fluid images as rapid raindrops and ambiguous murmuring, the effect of the Chinese instrument corresponds to the in-between selves portrayed in the play. Aside from pipa, the cyclical cello drone and the flute loop with slight differences work like spiral currents. The obsessive repetition in Glass' music reflects the two characters' anxiety in the face of the grids of human value, language, and order; spontaneously, it impacts these grids' stability with a queer force of oceanic fluidity.

Hanako plays the flute every night, louder than each day before, until in Scene Six, one night, the Man is lured to see what happens. Here, I quote extensively from the stage directions:

*Night. Man is sleeping. Suddenly, he starts. He lifts his head up. He listens. The shakuhachi melody rises up once more. This time, however, it becomes louder and more clear than before. He gets up. He cannot tell from what direction the music is coming. It seems to come from all directions at once, as omnipresent as the air. Slowly, he moves toward a sliding panel through which the woman enters and exits. He puts his ear against it, thinking the music may be coming from there. Slowly, he slides the door open just a crack, ever so carefully. He peeks through the crack. As he peeks through, the upstage wall of the set becomes transparent, and through the scrim, we are able to see what he sees. Woman is upstage of the scrim. She is carrying the vase of flowers in front of her as she moves slowly upstage of the scrim. She is transformed; she is beautiful. She wears a brightly colored kimono. Man observes this scene for a long time. He then slides the door shut. The scrim*

*returns to opaque. The music continues. He returns to his mat. He picks up the stolen flower. It is brown and wilted, dead. He looks at it, throws it down. The music slowly fades out.* (Hwang, 2000, p.164)

In the scene, the Man traces the source of the shakuhachi sound that creeps into the night's stillness, "as omnipresent as the air." He then watches Hanako's strange acts through the scrim, alongside the audience's eyesight, prying into her potentially inhuman secret.

The flute melody accompanies Hanako's ritual-like acts with the vase of flowers she holds, which becomes a part of her transformation ("she is transformed; she is beautiful. She wears a brightly colored kimono"). This scene establishes a connection between Hanako and her flowers, whose bright color is foregrounded in Scene One in the same expression. In that scene, when offering a view of Hanako's house, the stage direction mentions especially "a vase of brightly colored flowers" (Hwang, 2000, p.155). These petals' presence that "stands out in sharp contrast to the starkness" of the woman's house indicates something mysterious and queer about them and their owner (Hwang, 2000, p.155). Thus, Hanako shares the same vitality with the flowers, arousing suspicion of her supernatural identity. In contrast to the petals that she cares for, the petal stolen by the Man is withered.

Moreover, the name Hanako itself hints at her special association with flowers. In Japanese, Hana (花) means flower, petal, and blossom (*RomajiDesu English Japanese*

*Dictionary*, 2022). And Hanako (花子), meaning flower girl, is a common given name of Japanese girls. These associations indicate that Hanako might be a flower yōkai or a spirit invented by Hwang based on Asian mythology. Many supernatural entities in Japanese Kaidan culture embody an animalist worldview, in which animals, plants, and even non-living things in the world are deemed to possess souls and emotions (Foster, 2015, p.241). These yōkai growing from nonhuman existences tend to have the capability to convert their body and appearance into human-like to attract their human victims. For example, kitsune (fox spirit), one of the most representative yōkai in Japanese folktales, can disguise itself as “beautiful, seductive women” (Foster, 2015, p.178). These mysterious spirits shift between the categories of human and nonhuman. As explained by Hwang in an interview, the portrayal of Hanako derives from a reoccurring trope in Japanese horror that depicts “women who turn into foxes or evil spirits” (Hwang and McKittrick, 2003). The playwright and previous interpretation of the play do not clarify which kind of yōkai Hanako belongs to (Woo, 2003; Campbell, K., 2003). However, the presence of flowers whenever Hanako displays unnatural power, her name, as well as the vitalities shared by the character and flower, suggest she is a potential plant spirit based on flowers.

Hanako’s integration with the nonhuman being accounts for her supernatural power to change her face (to make it younger and more beautiful) and the male



protagonist's heart in later scenes. With the continuous shakuhachi melody, Hanako nurses her flowers, which become part of her subjectivity. A review of the play's 2003 production describes the scene I quoted above as a “woman making love to the flowers that she carefully cultivates” (Walat, 2003). The erotic relationship between Hanako's body and flowers renders them a whole, with desires and vitality flowing between them in their love-making process.

In the later part of the play, the petals per se emit sound. When the samurai talks about the “stories” about the hostess—her visitors who never leave her house, he mentions the unnaturalness of the woman's flowers.

MAN: Sometimes—when I look into the flowers, I think I hear a voice—from inside—a voice beneath the petals. A human voice.

WOMAN: What does it say? “Let me out”?

MAN: No. Listen. It hums. It hums with the peacefulness of one who is completely imprisoned... (He takes a flower from the vase) See the layers? Each petal—hiding the next. Try and see where they end . . . You can't. Follow them down, further down, around and as you come down—faster and faster—the breeze picks up. The breeze becomes a wail. And in that rush of air—you can hear a voice. (Hwang, 2000, p.170)

The petals make a human voice, as Hanako's flute does (“I tried to make these sounds resemble the human voice”) (Hwang, 2000, p.163). The voice of inanimate objects tends to incite uncanny emotion, for it violates the border between the alive and

the dead (Cherry, 2009, p.105). Therefore, the flowers' voice is queer, unnatural, and threatening. But here, a more pertinent problem is: who is the voice's owner? If we follow the male protagonist's logic, the voice belongs to the prisoners of Hanako, a potential witch. Hwang's ambivalent poetics here, however, leave a larger space of interpretation that allows me to read it as Hanako's own voice. Taking the flower's interconnectedness with Hanako into consideration, the sonic breezing, humming, and wailing correspond more to the heroine's restless desire under patriarchal oppression as a gendered being and her unknown power as an abject.

In the play script, Hanako is referred to as "Woman," but her unruly monstrous body conflicts with this role in a patriarchal social order. When interpreting the undesired and devalued positions of this character, Woo Miseong points out that once women trespass their ideal image, they are not wanted, thus "fall[ing] naturally into the category of witch" (Woo, 2003, p.299). This comment epitomizes how the woman who brings trouble to the patriarchal "identity, system, order" would fall into what Julia Kristeva terms "the abject":<sup>31</sup> a confusion of self and other, life and death that causes

---

<sup>31</sup>. Scholars represented by Barbara Creed have discussed the linkage between monstrous women and the abject. Drawing on Kristeva's formulation of "abjection," Creed points out that the female monsters in visual representation reflect male anxiety and fear for female power and subjectivity (Creed, 1993, p.7). Although Creed's observation reveals the patriarchal discourses behind the "monstrous-feminine," it concentrates more on criticizing the monstrous female body than affirming its possible transcendence, which I try to explore in this case study.

the subject's reaction of repulsion, disgust and horror (Kristeva, 1982, p.4; Cherry, 2009, p.112). When demonstrating insubordinate power that renders them unable to be recognized, captured, and tamed within a patriarchal worldview, women might be associated with the monster in mainstream perceptions.<sup>32</sup> This is a human-centric concept that classifies something part animal and part "human," "unnatural," and "frightening" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2022). Moreover, the abject woman is subjected to conquest and control, repressed in a social order that favors male domination and patriarchal reproduction.<sup>33</sup> The warrior's task of eliminating the evil witch in the *Sound of a Voice* illustrates the point. The outside villagers' fear and exclusion of Hanako reflect the abjection of her monstrous female being, a hybrid human-floral configuration that disturbs the polarity of male subject/female object.

The characterization of Hanako references the affinity between women and monstrosity in Japanese Kaidan culture. However, unlike the trope of demonizing and

---

<sup>32</sup>. Some feminist researchers have addressed this association. For example, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen indicates that "the woman who oversteps the boundaries of her gender role risks becoming a Scylla, Weird Sister, Lilith, ... or Gorgon" (Cohen, 1996, p.9). It should be noted that my quotation of the OED means not to resort to authority for the definition of "monster" but to call attention to how the concept is understood in an anthropocentric worldview.

<sup>33</sup>. Recent studies such as Jennifer M. Yoo's and Sarah Stang's have investigated the monstrous women in cultural products (including Japanese horror literature, theater and films, and "AAA" video games) with Kristeva's theorization of abjection. These studies provide numerous cases in which the female monsters/*onryō* (ghost), as the disturbing and transgressive abject, tend to be punished, cleaned, murdered, or appeased to "restore normative patriarchal order" (Stang, 2021, p.ii; Yoo, 2022).

cleansing deviant women found common in such Japanese folktales, literature (Kaidan stories), and theatre (nō and kabuki) as Kanawa and Dōjō-ji, Hwang's play shed light on the abject's agency and her queer subjectivity (Yoo, 2022). To elaborate on this, let us return to the quotation from *The Sound of a Voice* discussed above. The voice of the petals, when understood as the expression of the flower spirit, cries out for the inhuman heroine's loss and repression in the normative world. The voice releases the intensities, desires, and potentialities of her queer becoming that exceeds fixed subjecthood.

Firstly, the wailing of the petals is associated with Hanako's suffering for her transgressive power. Violating the gender rules of the outside human world, the character experiences loss and failure in love. As she tells the warrior, the petals are brought by previous visitors. These men fall in love with her, but once she "steps outside the lines" they do not want her to cross, they leave (Hwang, 2000, p.168). "You didn't know that you'd done anything different. You thought it was just another part of you. The visitor sneaks away. The next day, you learn that you had stepped outside his heart" (Hwang, 2000, p.168). Hanako's words show how gender norms restrain her from being a transgressor -- her supernatural power and masculine dominance divide her from the human community. It is also for crossing the border of femininity by defeating the male protagonist that the latter insists on leaving her in the end. Talking about the despair of being unable to love across normative gender dynamics, Hanako

draws a connection between flowers, her lovers, and her heart. “To take a chunk of my heart, then leave with your booty on your belt, like a prize? You say that I imprison hearts in these flowers? Well, bits of my heart are trapped with travelers across this land. I can’t even keep track” (Hwang, 2000, p.168). As a return of the “chunk” and “bits” of her heart taken away, she obtains petals from her lovers. She takes care of them, integrating them as a part of her body, a new organ, speaking and wailing for her desire of the lack.

But more than the desire triggered passively by lack (the loss of love), the flowers’ voice allows us to hear an untamed queer desire for what is not allowed. At this level, the petals and their uncanny voice express the monstrous feminine’s transgressive subjectivity and desires that have unmeasurable potentiality. These petals remind me of tulips in Sylvia Plath’s poem ‘Tulips’ (first published in 1962). Disrupting the supposed floral connection with femininity as an object for appreciation and gazing,<sup>34</sup> Plath’s tulips are aminated and hazardous:

The tulips are too red in the first place, they hurt me.  
 Even through the gift paper I could hear them breathe  
 Lightly, through their white swaddlings, like an awful baby.  
 Their redness talks to my wound, it corresponds.

---

<sup>34</sup>. For more about the floral associations with idealized attributes of femininity -- passive, dependent, ornamental and so forth, see See Stott, Annette. “Floral Femininity: A Pictorial Definition.” *American Art* 6, no. 2 (1992): 61-77. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3109092>.

They are subtle: they seem to float, though they weigh me down,  
 Upsetting me with their sudden tongues and their colour,  
 A dozen red lead sinkers round my neck.

...

Before they came the air was calm enough,  
 Coming and going, breath by breath, without any fuss.  
 Then the tulips filled it up like a loud noise.  
 Now the air snags and eddies round them the way a river  
 Snags and eddies round a sunken rust-red engine.  
 They concentrate my attention, that was happy  
 Playing and resting without committing itself.  
 (Plath, 1960)

I think of the poem when the sound of the petals in *The Sound of a Voice* struck me. Once, when I read ‘Tulips,’ the way flowers are heard, their power, and their connection with female otherness impressed me in the same way. Through the portrayal of Plath, the female narrator in the poem, we glimpse an unrepresented, unknown, and uncanny imagery. In it, flowers are no longer inanimate and silent objects to behold. Instead, their “breath” is “like an awful baby.” With a redness that may cause harm, they occupy the once “calm air” like “a loud noise.” Behind Plath’s calm tone, there is an uncontrollable intensity proliferating in the flowers who breathe and talk. Like flowers in Hanako’s vase, whose endless layers of petals stir an accelerating swirl of breeze, the tulips show a vitality ready to spark, without people knowing how strong it is.

Hwang and Plath’s flowers emit a sound that conveys heterogeneous intensities of

the abject—those expelled from the visible and audible sphere constructed under a humanistic and patriarchal society. The flowers' sharp presence and formidable, unsettling impact speak to the potential for women to embody the abject and connect with monstrosity. In *The Sound of a Voice* and "Tulips," the female character and narrator *are* monsters. They evoke an uncontrollable tendency that arouses abjection, which Julia Kristeva claims brings a "collapse" of "meaning" in the human community and subjectivity (Kristeva, 1982, p.2). They share secrets, voices, breathing, and the power of boundary-breaking with animated petals.

Therefore, I believe that both two texts illustrate females as monsters. Or, more accurately, a monstrous subjectivity beyond the confines of traditional gender categories. The reading does not simply affirm this female portrayal's empowerment of women. Rather, it seeks to exploit the abject status of female monsters, which display a queer potential to defy and bring trouble to power structures that produce man/woman and in/human binaries.

To further clarify the queer aesthetics of female configurations' ontological and supernatural bond with floral entities, I draw on Deleuze and Guattari's theories on "bodily aesthetics" (Hu, 2020, p.139). Deleuze and Guattari configure the concept of a "body without organs." According to them, the human body is an assemblage of "multiplicities," "a living body all the more alive and teeming once it has blown apart

the organism and its organization” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.3). In other words, the body is not a closed organic entity; it flows and expands with “desire” and “pure intensities,” as becoming rather than being (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.153). The philosophical conception finds expressions in works of art that conjure creative bodily possibilities and relations.

Excluded from idealized femininity, Hwang and Plath's works' female images aligned with inhumanity demonstrate intensities that grow and become beyond social regulations. Specifically, in *Tulips*, the female narrator's wound “corresponds” to the “talks” from the flowers' “redness.” At the edge and disruption of bodily integrity, the wound is open to deterritorialization between the narrator and the tulips. Through the red flowers, the intensities and voices (“a loud noise”) of the women's unruly alterity is hearable.

In *The Sound of a Voice*, the portrayal of Hanako as a floral spirit offers a more explicit presentation of the potential of female bodies to engage with nonhuman entities. As I mentioned, the character references the yokai (spirits) trope in Japanese animism value, showcasing a mythic transcendence beyond human and plant classification. She (or it) corresponds to the “ontological exceptional being” addressed by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *The Weather in Proust* (2011) (p.16). According to her, such beings as “genius” or “tutelary spirits” that are widely drawn from Buddhist, Hindu,



Arabic, and many Eastern mythologies constitute a mysterious reality in novelist Proust's works (Sedgwick, 2011, pp.6,18). They break free from the subject's pursuit of law and truth of the world that define the mode of existence and the interaction between life and the world. In this way, these spirits endow Proust's writing with a capability to present a reality imbued with "surprises" and "refreshment" in reality, which arguably promises the "vitality of art" (Sedgwick, 2011, pp.33-34). The floral spirit in *The Sound of a Voice* also indicates the chaotic, unexpected, and ever-refreshing possibilities of the world and subjectivity. Her/its extended bodily part—the petals that share her vitality, releases the queer wailing that conveys intensities and desires of the supposed abject existence.

Again, at the end of the play, the suicide scene of Hanako unfolds her intimate coexistence with flowers. "*She has hung herself and is hanging from a rope suspended from the roof. Around her swirl thousands of petals from the flowers. They fill the upstage scrim area like a blizzard of color*" (Hwang, 2000, p.175). The "thousands of petals" surrounding Hanako's body are reminiscent of Deleuze's account of "a thousand tiny sexes," which depicts sexes as free and multiple combinations of maleness, femaleness, as well each's relation with the "animal, the plant" (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.203). Can we measure how much percent of Hanako's sex is made up of men, women, or plants? Dissolving into a "blizzard of color," the heroine's dispersive body

slips through any fixed identification.

In conclusion, in this section, I analyzed how sound mediates the queer becoming of the monstrous female character in *The Sound of a Voice*. The sounds of Hanako's flute and flowers link closely to her extended body without organs, emitting the desires, vitality, and intensity of the abject.

To some extent, the play offers an affirmative answer to the question raised by Daniel in "All Sound is Queer": "Could a new art and a new politics instruct us to listen harder and better?" (Daniel, 2011) Making audible different forms of embodiment in the vast sonic world, the *Sound of a Voice* displays the "queer aesthetics of listening to and with the world" (Daniel, 2011). Resonating the tulip's loud noises in Plath's poetry, the petals' wailing in the play offers a queer aesthetic sensation not available in normative life.

Hwang's portrayal of queer subjectivity via sounding is not only reflected in the heroine's inhumanness but also in remapping the borders between self and the other. In the next section, I will approach how sound penetrates the interpersonal boundaries of the play's characters.

## Hearing the Other: Silence, Sound, and Intersubjective Intimacy

Aside from expressing the monstrous heroine's queer configuration and desires, sound also touches upon the play's theme—the communication between two souls hailed into different gendered subjects. As Hwang comments, the “loneliness” of the play is intriguing in the sense that the characters exist in total isolation. “They are yearning to break out of it, but they don't know how to do it. They don't know how to connect with another person” (Cummings, 2003). What Hwang emphasizes is the isolation between male and female, human and inhuman, the normative limitation that prevents the self from hearing the other. The body of the play then tries to explore the possibility of one's encounter with an outsider of the human community, which is particularly embodied as the queer encounter with sound. In *The Sound of a Voice*, Hwang makes hearable to one the noises and silences that queer the self-world and self-other boundary.

The queerness of sound is manifested when the world becomes too quiet. Both characters show their fear of silence. The samurai says, “I can't sleep in too much silence. It scares me. It makes me feel that I have no control over what is about to happen” (Hwang, 2000, p.156). Therefore, he used to sleep by a waterfall, which

“rumbled like the sounds of a city” (Hwang, 2000, p.156). For Hanako, a silent evening is “choking.” She explains that when she is alone at night, she “hears nothing. . . The air began to be oppressive—stale” (Hwang, 2000, p.163).

Their fear of silence is two-fold. Silence firstly threatens humans for its vastness. It heightens one’s sense of hearing, allowing the invasion of unrecognized sounds. In this sense, silence deprives one of the capability to control what is known (“I have no control over what is about to happen”) (Hwang, 2000, p.156). By mimicking the familiar sound of a city, the warrior is able to fall asleep. On another level, the horror of silence lies in its emptiness, which is more related to the woman’s feelings. The dead silence represents one subject’s isolation from other voice owners, creating a choking loneliness. When the warrior decides to leave her, Hanako again mentions the dreadfulness of the silence in her house: “This house—my loneliness is etched into the walls” (Hwang, 2000, p.174). She links it to “crevice,” darkness, something “worse than death”:

WOMAN: Beware...The ground on which you walk is weak. It could give way at any moment. The crevice beneath is dark.

MAN: Are you talking about death? I'm ready to die.

WOMAN: Fear for what is worse than death.

MAN: What?

WOMAN: Falling. Falling through the darkness. Waiting to hit the ground. Picking up speed. Waiting for the ground. Falling faster. Falling alone. Waiting. Falling. Waiting. Falling. (Hwang, 2000, pp.174-175)

The quotation portrays a desperate feeling of isolation. In the context of the play, it reflects the despair of being unable to break down ontological boundaries between the self and the other and achieve an inter-subjective relationship. Hanako warns the warrior of the consequence of enclosed man-made zones— the inescapable dead silence.

To some extent, the woman's house creates an enclosed silent realm that reminds the two characters of their loneliness and the boundary of their existence. As Daniel writes, "Hearing the queerness of sound might help us echolocate the edges of subjection and encounter everything that stands outside the hailing process" (Daniel, 2011). The silence simultaneously increases the characters' aural sensitivity to the sound of the other. Accordingly, the queer sound they make invades each other's subjective privateness, exceeding the voices supposed to be heard and rearranging the relationship supposed to be understood.

In the first contact between the warrior and Hanako, the latter's sound of pouring tea is foregrounded. Trivial as it seems, the sound of water dripping when a host serves her guests is easy to slip through people's attention and be ignored. In the scene, however, made more explicit against the stillness of the woman's house, the sound is captured and appreciated with care. The warrior comments: "The tea—you pour it

well...The sound it makes—in the cup—very soothing...” (Hwang, 2000, p.150). The sound made by the other being is captured. Yet to be evaluated and judged with an assumption of its owner (domestic female or dangerous witch? Human or nonhuman? us or them?), the sound enters the warrior’s ear, bringing a touch of intimacy with a “soothing” effect. The pure sound of water pouring, as a queer sound of the world, is indifferent to the human habit of categorization and signification. In the space rendered too quiet, the sound’s shape and movements between ears are amplified. They mediate the encounter between the man and everything except his subjecthood.

Likewise, the sound of the warrior’s breathing and Hanako’s flute touches upon the boundaries of these characters’ selves. Hearing the man’s breath, Hanako can fall asleep “shamelessly” (Hwang, 2000, p.157). The sound of the outsider breaks her state of isolation and offers her a sense of coexistence with other beings. Also, each night, the heroine’s flute melody rises. It penetrates walls and fills the room where her guest sleeps, creating contact with strange and unknown sounds and existence. The flute sound, as I have discussed, arouses the man’s curiosity and exploration of Hanako’s queer identity. It literally invades the character’s hearing domain, which is encroached by discursive values and systems (for instance, the normative language).

In Scene Five, the bondage of the two characters associated with the queer force of sounding is fully expressed. During his stay in Hanako’s house, the samurai offers to

help his host remove a stain on the floor that has existed for a long time. When he does the labor, he utters a rhythm made up of numbers:

“MAN: I hardly stand a chance. (Pause) But I’ll try. (He begins to scrub) One—two—three—four! One—two—three—four! See, you set up . . . gotta set up . . . a rhythm—two—three—four. Used to practice with a rhythm. One—two—three—four. Yes, remember. Like battle . . . like fighting, one—two—three—four. One—two—three—four. Look . . . there it goes . . . got the sides . . . the edges . . . fading away . . . fading quick . . . toward the center to the heart...two—three—four. One—two—three—four—dead!

WOMAN: Dead.

MAN: I got it! I got it! A little rhythm! All it took! Four! Four!

WOMAN: Thank you.

MAN: I didn’t think I could do it . . . but there—it’s gone—I did it!

WOMAN: Yes. You did.

MAN: And you—you were great.

WOMAN: No—I just watched.

MAN: We were a team! You and me!

WOMAN: I only provided encouragement.

MAN: You were great! You were!

(Hwang, 2000, p.163)

In a play dominated by short dialogues and long silences, the length of the rhythm quoted is salient. The repetitive noises of counting from one to four witness a short alliance of the pair who deal with the stain together. Immersed in the work rhythm that does care about the known positions and relationships in human society, the two characters form a queer partnership, temporarily unmindful of their subjectivities.

When describing his alliance with the other (a crowd of birds at night) in the

world triggered by these animals' queer noises, Daniel writes, "I have been included in the sound of crows in the night... The indifference of animal being to my desires puts us into a partnership without community. We have nothing in common, yet here we are, together in the night, sounder and sounded" (Daniel, 2011). The queerness of sound reminds us of the connectedness across differently labeled species and genders, encouraging us to meet others and form a queer relationship with them, "a partnership without community" (Daniel, 2011).

To return to the play, with every scrub of the characters' cleaning efforts, the rhythmic sound of labor engages Hanako, a culturally female other, with the male protagonist, impacting their isolated selves. The bonding moment brings the warrior a thrill of joy at his union with Hanako: "We were a team! You and me! ... You were great! You were!"

Though Hanako is not involved in the two characters' labor directly, she shares the same moment where the sound of the world--as a sound of work, a background sound in human society always industrialized, alienated, and ignored-- is played loudly (Daniel, 2011). The sound reflects the world's vastness exceeding man-made misunderstanding, stereotypes, and antagonism. It dissolves boundaries of subjection, disrupting a normative understanding of assembles. Hanako is therefore included in a "team" with the male character, greeted and complimented for her presence in their



alliance.

As I have examined above, sounds of pouring tea, breathing, flute, and joint labor enable the play's characters' inter-subjective engagement. The play's ending, however, illustrates Hwang's pessimistic attitude toward the possibility of one breaking the edges of selves and achieving an understanding with the other/abject beyond social norms. In the end, unable to tolerate his powerlessness in the woman's realm, the warrior insists on leaving. When he comes back, his host has hanged herself, signifying their failure to communicate. The character finds Hanako's shakuhachi and "begins to blow into it" (Hwang, 2000, p.178). "He tries to make sounds. He continues trying through the end of the play" (Hwang, 2000, p.178). However he tries, the sound can never reach the other character. And his endeavor of imitating the sound of a human voice with a flute to dispel the sense of isolation is as self-deceiving and in vain as Hanako's. Though it remains unknown if the female protagonist is dead as it seems, the tragic scene illustrates ultimate aloneness brought by the essentialist divide between us and them: men-women, human-nonhuman, and so on, which features the blocking of every queer sound in the world.

Presenting hybrid monster/human configuration and disturbed edges of subjection in alignment with sonic queerness, Hwang's *Sound of A Voice* demonstrates a queer aesthetic concerning alternative human bodies and different perceptions of selves. The

play prompts us to hear the excluded and supposedly uncanny desires and intensities of transgressive women, presenting heterogeneous modes of human becoming. Resorting to sounding, Hwang also shows the isolation and suffering brought by self-other oppositions and demonstrates how the queerness of sound enables an encounter with the other beyond discursive boundaries.

## Part Two: *1000 Airplanes on the Roof* (1988)

### Introduction

On July 15, 1988, a hangar at the Vienna airport witnessed another collaboration between David Henry Hwang and Philip Glass—which preceded their co-work of the 2003 production of *The Sound of a Voice* by two decades. In the 90-minute work titled *1000 Airplanes on the Roof*,<sup>35</sup> Hwang interrogates again the nonhuman otherness in relation to the human’s perception of self. However, different from the nonhuman becoming epitomized by the monster-human hybridity I examined earlier, this play inquires about inhuman subjectivity via presenting extraterrestrial contact and the human body’s alien transformation.

With slide projections designed by Jerome Sirlin and Glass’ spacious and futuristic music, the performance staged “M” (Patrick O’Connell), a New Yorker’s monologue throughout his journey in and out of his/her mind.<sup>36</sup> The story of *1000 Airplanes* echoes the 1980s UFO fever in the US that reflects people’s curiosity and anxieties about extra-human existence. In the 1990s, alien abduction had become a cultural phenomenon in the USA, with a surge of reported cases of contacting aliens and

---

<sup>35</sup>. I will refer to this play as *1000 Airplanes* in the rest of the section.

<sup>36</sup>. The character was played by both male and female actors in various performances.

a rise of “alien love” addressed by Neil Badmington (Badmington, 2004, p.66).

Americans’ curiosity about UFOs, extraterrestrial visitors, and other related things was reflected in the prevalence of cultural products such as *The X-Files* from the 1990s to the 2010s.<sup>37</sup> In his book *Alien Chic Posthumanism and the Other Within* (2004), Neil Badmington reads the public’s mixed feelings of obsession and fear towards aliens as reflecting a dualistic “Us and Them” awareness (Badmington, 2004, p.85). He argues that though shifting from hatred to love, people’s concern for these supernatural creatures still adheres to a humanistic view that projects aliens as inhuman others (2004, p.85).

Like a protagonist in a piece of tabloid news about bizarre alien encounters, M is shown to suffer from the consequences of an alleged UFO abduction—disruption of identities, loss of memories, and alienated sensual experiences of time and space.

Climbing over rooftops and walking through city buildings, M recalls his vague past and date with a girl, after which he slides into a series of otherworldly events. In a rupture of landscapes and time, a moment about a farmhouse flashes back. It is precisely

---

<sup>37</sup>. *The X-Files* was a TV series produced by Fox Broadcasting Company. It was aired from September 1993 to May 2002. The alien love was also spread into other global areas with the popularity of conspiracy theories. For example, at the beginning of the Twenty-first century, I witnessed Western UFO fever’s influence on Chinese public culture as an elementary school student. There were counterparts of *The X-Files* and books about “unsolved mysteries of the world,” which include many alien abduction cases shared by Western narrators.

when M's life, as well as his body, is changed by a descending sound from the sky. "I have been visited by beings from other worlds," the character tells the audience (Hwang et al., 1989, p.39). Turning more like his alien visitors, he learns the secret of space travel—although the adventure is destined to be forgotten, as requested by the alien visitors. After being diagnosed (or rather, interrogated) by a doctor, M returns to reality. The sound in his head, however, continues to threaten his supposed human normalcy.

As a "theatrical hybrid—one-third music, one-third text, and one-third design," *1000 Airplanes* impressed viewers with its ambiguity in terms of genre (Hwang et al., 1989, p.9). The experimental efforts of artists in different areas motivate a queer force of boundary transgression. In this stage work proliferated with queer sensibility, I pay special attention to the way that sound manifests itself as a queer matter and engages with nonhuman becomings.

Like in the *Sound of a Voice*, *Sound* orients us toward nonhuman possibilities, a horizon Hwang outlines with passion in the script. The play title—*1000 Airplanes on the Roof*—itself literalizes a scene of unearth sounding. The dense, vast, unearth hum and buzz conveyed in the title haunts the whole play. As a review of the play's 1988 production describes, the performance began with "a sound that gets louder, until a listener thinks a jet is about to land in his or her vibrating stomach" (Campbell, M.,

1988). This vibration remains, appearing from time to time in the protagonist's narration and causing his "out-of-body experience" (Campbell, M., 1988). Absorbed in the sound, we may (like the quoted listener) vibrate with the world that is queer in nature and conceives alternative aesthetic sensibilities beyond the humanist position.

In this section, I will first approach how sound (as a becoming matter itself in the work) allows the dissolution of human subjectivity and evokes a queer beauty. Then, I will explore how sound in the play recrafts human/nonhuman relationships and enables a queer encounter and understanding of the alien other.

## **“What Am I Turning Into?”: Transformative Sounds and Alien**

### **Becoming**

The choice of an airport as the play’s debut site is highly relevant to its nonhuman theme and atmosphere. As the loud sound in the play’s opening filled in the theatrical space, one could easily associate it with an aircraft’s engine roar during take-off or landing. What can also be recalled is a weird feeling of being taken away from the earth—the pushes from acceleration, weightlessness, and possible tinnitus or earache. The alien sensation of disrupted human normalcy is precisely what the protagonist M experiences and expresses. As a medium between the body and the world, the hearing realm is highly interlinked with humans’ normative and possible non-normative experiences. This is well-articulated by Claire Colebrook, who claims. “As a disturbance that is primarily materialized through bodies, sound situates itself as a medium through which a body’s relationship to heteronormative temporalities, socialities, and desires can be mediated, disrupted, and transformed” (Colebrook, 2009, p.21). Hwang’s *1000 Airplanes* embodies this perspective. As the play unfolds with M’s narration, the audience is informed and dragged into the character’s world transformed by an alien sound.

The sound, as M tells us, first appears with a strange scene he spots when he lives

in a converted farmhouse before:

Instead I see again the powder blue of the countryside, with streaks of clouds like the fingers of a hand, some white, others grey or pink—a hand reaching over the horizon. And then I barely remember. I barely remember that one day, many years ago, the skies split open. And from the hole where the sky had been, descended a sound. A sound I still fight to forget. (Hwang et al., 1989, p.23)

This life-changing moment, etched in the narrator's memory, manifests itself as unprecedented and otherworldly. The colorful "streaks of clouds" anticipate something mysterious and sublime beyond human capabilities and perception—the descending of a sound that invades M's normal life. Breaking the tranquility of a countryside landscape, the sound comes like an alien visitor, or perhaps it is the alien visitor with an appearance beyond human cognition.

In M's monologue that reveals his interiority, we are informed how the imperceptible being brings disorder to the figure's human subjecthood. An obvious indicator of the disorder is the disruption of M's memory. After the event of the alien sound, he is often stuck with his identity—who he is and what he does before. As shown in the quoted text, the narrator cannot locate the exact time of the event: "I barely remember...many years ago". The forgetfulness unties him with anchors in the human community, breaking his sense of a contingent self.



With his past becoming obscured, M also details how the sound refreshes his body sensations. When recounting his post-alien-encounter experiences, he underscores a series of unusual perceptions of sounds beyond what a human being is supposed to hear, see, and feel. These experiences include seeing, tasting, and touching sound. In Parts Two and Three of the play, M says: “I see the sound. I taste the sound. And, so, absorbed into sound;” “There was only sound, sound and light, light to see, and sound to... sound to touch” (Hwang et al., 1989, pp.31, 41). In another case of such accounts, M describes rains falling down “like slivers of sound” which surround and envelop him “until I stood at the center of a solid pillar of sound” (Hwang et al., 1989, p.36).

These portrayals unfold for the audience rich imaginations of sound’s potential to transcend rules, principles, and logic recognizable for and accustomed by human beings. They resonate with Deleuze’s affirmation of matters’ becoming capacity— “there is no longer a matter that finds its corresponding principle of intelligibility in form” (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.342). In a Deleuzian move, the aural in *1000 Airplanes* manifests itself as a queer existence—not awaiting a humanist hearing, it unexpectedly descends into the normative air and reassembles the order of M’s bodily function. Becoming visible, touchable, edible, and capable of absorbing other objects, sound in the play breaks from its ontological definition as well as the associated human sensory normativity.

Embracing corporal and acoustic potentialities, *1000 Airplanes* offers an aesthetic experience and imagination beyond essentialist thinking about the human self and the world. It affirms a queer aesthetic sensibility that resonates with Deleuze's philosophy. As Claire Colebrook explains, this aesthetics "would not be the representation or formation of identities but the attempt to present pure intensities in matter, allowing matter to stand alone or be liberated from its habitual and human series of recognition" (Colebrook, 2009, p.21). Correspondently, the play's queer visions of sound and human corporality offer us what is not limited by one actualized reality in the here and now. The liberated forms of sound experienced by M invent new ways of human sensations, reflecting the mutative possibilities of a standardized body being a site of disorder, abnormality, and fluctuation.

It is the irresistible transformative force of the sound that bewilders and frightens the play's protagonist, who questions, "What am I turning into?" (Hwang et al., 1989, p.42) The way in which sound transmutes M. does not end in emerging with queer forms and bringing new bodily sensations. It transforms the human body into an alien entity in an invasive way.

In this context, the queer sound is expressed slightly differently from that in the *Sound of a Voice* I examined in the previous section. Compared with the intimacy between sounding and nonhuman configuration in the latter, *1000 Airplanes* displays

sounding's violent invasion of the human body and subjectivity and accentuates its transformative force. This process is partly embodied in the changes in M's body surface and organs—M's glowing body with “organs of an eighty-year-old man” (Hwang et al., 1989, p.22). Moreover, in Part Three, ensuing another visitation of the “sound waves,” M provides a vision of him being implanted with a silver globe from his right nostril, the bleeding and pain involved in the flesh penetration. These images reflect a “body horror” as they blur the distinctions of external and internal, human and nonhuman, and “self and other” (Jancovich, 2002, p.6). They illustrate how the boundary of a human subject--embodied as skin and flesh—is disturbed and disintegrated as the effect of the presence of alien sound.

Sound's effect on M's nonhuman perception is also illustrated in its disturbance of the characters' senses of the world's dimensions, particularly time and space. Haunted by the reoccurring mysterious sound, M enters into a queer state where his sense of time and space becomes distorted like uninhabited and unformed acoustic flows. The spatiality conventionally constituted by three dimensions is rendered boundless and unstructured— “all space compressed onto the head of the pin” that is “at once infinitely small and infinitely large” (Hwang et al., 1989, p.32). Space also becomes random. Guided by the alien sound, the protagonist can transport freely to diverse locations. As Hwang writes, M “go[es] where the [sound] waves travel,” appearing in a copy shop,

city streets, inner apartment, spaceships, the realm of his mind, and other places (Hwang et al., 1989, p.41). To further impress the audience with the dissolution of spatial order, near the end of the performance, the play's narrator is shown to be transported into a globe "across all the five dimensions" by looking inside his brain (Hwang et al., 1989, pp.31, 45). These scenes are presented graphically in the actor's interaction with "a kaleidoscope of images" projected in the show's "black box" theater (Walsh, 1988). According to a review of the play's premiere, Jerome Sirlin created for the show "a cinematic illusion in which the actor can dash up the steps of an apartment building and vanish inside or float high above New York" (Walsh, 1988). The textual and theatrical expressions of space allow the audience to be immersed in a dreamscape otherwise that offers a new spatial sensation.

In addition to space, time as the fourth dimension becomes meaningless; it is "bending. Fluid. Like any other object, moving freely in space" (Hwang et al., 1989, p.15). The bizarre fluidity of time is intensively exemplified in what M experiences in his room. The morning after his terrible date and a series of fractured perceptions, he is awakened by an alarm's ringing—an alarming noise that anticipates a collapse of time. As M reaches his clock, in the play's script, a dash "-" disrupts this move; what follows is a confusing shift of day and night, rapid transitions of sky colors outside his window. Accompanied by a "metronome" "clicking," "humming," and "singing an aria," time

becomes “a lottery” (Hwang et al., 1989, p.26). Again, the alien sound with transforming force catches the protagonist. The fluid sonic vibrations of the clock as well as the unreal metronome resonate and entangle with a queer order of time, a corporal experience that is not already here.

As a vital element that enhances the overall appeal of this performance, Philip Glass’ music incarnates the queer force of sound in relation to inhumanity. Following the machine roaring in the opening I mentioned earlier, a spacious and electric acoustic realm is opened. Along with repetitive undercurrents of keyboards and wind synthesizers that constitute rhythm and melodies, mysterious whispers, soprano voice, and soprano saxophone rise and subside, conjuring up lurking alien existence (Walsh, 1988; Campbell, M., 1988). In addition, to create a futuristic atmosphere, Glass scored the play with “a highly evolved technology of digital sound and computer systems” and “new instruments” (Hwang et al., 1989, p.7). Absorbed in Glass’ future/virtual-oriented music (that I can only access through his album), I got a sense of floating in a boundless universe imbued with otherworldly echoes. In this sense, *1000 Airplanes* offers a piece of modern music that, as Deleuze describes, opens onto and captures the unrepresented “forces of the Cosmos” rather than reflecting the latter through territorializing and harnessing them (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.342). In this sense, the show’s humming and buzzing torrents of the universe correspond to “cyclical, swinging and

floating cosmic music” (Välimäki, 2007, p.188). Such music expresses “a chaotic world in constant flux” and a developing subjectivity (Välimäki, 2007, pp.187-188). In short, the soundtrack works as a musical equivalent to the play’s depiction of unstable human subjectivities.

So far, I have unpacked queer capabilities and aesthetics of the sound in the script and music design of *1000 Airplanes*’ 1988 production in relation to nonhuman transformation. To some extent, “What am I turning into?” the question of the protagonist can also be replaced by “what can sound bring to and transform us.” Accordingly, the play brings an aesthetic imagination of movements and mutations of sound and our body as ongoing matters and concepts. In the next section, I will approach how the sonic realm in this play envisions a queer relationship between ourselves and nonhuman others, therefore responding to identity issues raised in the play.

### **Encounters With Alien Hives: Buzzing and a Queer Alliance**

In the 1988 sci-fi melodrama, Hwang leads the audience, along with the protagonist, to raise questions about his bizarre experiences impacted by extraterrestrial existence. Aside from “what am I turning into,” another critical question posed in the

play is: Why and how do the alien visitors travel across space and create their encounter with M in the fifth dimension? Following M's adventures, we hear an answer:

Now I understand why they travel. Why any of us ever feels the need to walk across a room towards another being, whose heart beats and whose flesh smells of life. We are all visitors. We all travel. We all ask questions. We all hope one day, looking into the eyes of another, to find part of an answer. We all perceive. (Hwang et al., 1989, p.48)

It can be said that the answer is what the play concerns most. It orients the character's voyage throughout the whole piece. When the alien sonic power reaches M again in the First Part, he is seized with panic, loneliness, and extreme anxiety about his subjectivity due to his sheer existence. The character shows a desperate need to connect to others—most obviously, the girl he dates with. The “beating of her heart. The blood pumping through her veins...the sound of her life” comforts him (Hwang et al., 1989, p.13). We can find similar expressions in the quoted text above: “Another being, whose heart beats and whose flesh smells of life.” The contact with “another being” seems to be the ultimate reason why M, alien visitors, and “we” addressed in the script travel—literally across spaces to another planet or metaphorically throughout one's life. That is, to engage with a living entity with blood and flesh rather than that whose nuances are reduced by identity-based cultural constructions and stereotypes to a distant image. In

this sense, the purpose of the protagonist's and the aliens' travel is not to find their identities but to find and engage with the other, through which to be free from the prison of identity.

The journey of the protagonists' searching for (and spontaneously breaking from) identity is inherently led by sound. Alien sounds and beings lure M to be one of them and initiate his becoming-alien transformation. The process is shown in a scenario in the protagonist's memory. As M recalls, after the descending of aliens on a farm takes place, he is attracted by a hive of bees nearby. The hive attracts him and converts him "like an alien":

After the night the sky opened, I remember spending hours watching the hive. The buzzing growing louder and louder, until it filled my brain, circling round my head. Growing louder and louder, because one day, after weeks of watching and listening, one day, I walk towards it. Not with the spaceman's uniform, but only my body, exposed and vulnerable as it is every day in the world. I walked up to the hive. Then, like an orb, I held it. And the pain that followed seemed to relieve me of all my questions. Until I woke up in the hospital bed. Covered with welts and blood. And so, looking no longer human, I rose up like an alien. (Hwang et al., 1989, p.34).

The text closely presents the process of M's fascination with the hive driven by his "listening" to its buzzing. In the beginning, he watches it from a distance. His curiosity about the hive manifests in the long hours he spends in the activity. As the sound of bees grows stronger, he keeps watching and listening to them for weeks, until



one day, he “walks towards it.” The character’s action of “walking towards” conveys a self-forgetting obsession with the object he is listening to. Regardless of the “pain” on his fingers from touching the hive, he is more concerned about its relief of “all my questions” regarding the buzzing hive. The transition to M’s waking up on “a hospital bed” signals his “waking” moment from the fascinating experience, which brings his alien transformation— “covered with welts and blood...I rose up like an alien”.

The image of a hive of bees embodies alien visitors in the play. Like an infection spread through fascination, the contact between the character and the bees infects the former with alienness. In one later scene, M narrates that he becomes “another part of the hive,” indicating his alliance with the pack of aliens (Hwang et al., 1989, p.41). The portrayal of the extraterrestrial creatures’ transformation and recruitment of the protagonist via fascination would seem a vivid reification of the way animal packs work in Deleuze and Guattari’s philosophy. Unlike a mass or a collectivity, a pack is a loose band. It stands for an assemblage without a totalized identity, number, hierarchical order, or organization (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987, p.33). A pack of animals—like wolves, bees, and vampires, as listed by these theorists, proliferates through fascinating, recruiting, and infecting (whereby desire plays an important role) instead of reproduction that features genealogy; it opens for any entity that transgresses its supposed identity and affiliation (MacCormack, 2009, pp.140-143). MacCormack

points out that to be fascinated in a pack is an “irreversible making-queer” process (2009, p.147). For it mobilizes discursive classification and produces entities and alliances that are once non-imaginable and unrepresented.

Similarly, the quoted text from *1000 Airplanes* illustrates how M is gradually captivated by the extraterrestrial sound, which, as the noise of a swarm of bees, recruits and converts him into an alien-human hybrid. In Hwang’s writing, this hive is “thousands of creatures working as one,” an assemblage of independent creatures with irreducible heterogeneity. Also, it shows a stunning contagious capability—thousands of bees, ready to populate the pack through infection. As displayed in detail in the quotation above, its sounds release alien hive particles that fascinate M and accelerate his detachment from the human mass he belongs to before. In the script, the hive’s buzzing is intensively represented, drawing the audience’s attention to the character’s deep contemplations and associations with the hive and its noise in the subsequent scenes. Among these associations (“I stood at the center of a solid pillar of sound,” for example), one analogy is quite fascinating:

The sound was...as if, on the roof, there had been...a thousand airplanes. A thousand airplanes on the roof. (Hwang et al., 1989, p.36)

If wolves infect through biting, as Deleuze suggests, then the hive of aliens infects

through sounding (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). One thousand airplanes flying over a rooftop is thunderous to the ears. It is both a visual and sonic wonder, inducing a meditation about its presence. In this vision, the airplane itself is deterritorialized. As a supposed transportation vehicle, they function as sound-makers; not working alone, they appear in a swarm, like a hive of bees, spreading their sonic intensities. Perhaps the play's title, even the play per se, serves as a site of fascination—they capture and infect those human “victims” who listen to and lose themselves in a pack's deterritorial sonic output.

M's auditory contact with the alien hive brings him to a zone of pure multiplicities that penetrate discrete bodies and identities carved out through anthropocentric discourses. Becoming a human-alien hybrid, he forms a queer alliance with other lives, which cancels the oppositions of human and nonhuman, subject and object, self and other. The image and boundaries of the self are built upon and sustained through humanists' interests and perspectives. As Sartre posits, “Man is nothing else but what he purposes” (1959, p.300). An anti-anthropocentric position, however, proposes to create unpredictable inter-species connectivity. As Patricia Maccormack suggests, “posthumanism is a form of queer desire” that creates “connections” rather than “division” with other beings (2016, p.113). M's integration into a queer pack allows him to meet with and understand others that were once imperceptible.

In *1000 Airplanes*, Hwang portrays a beautiful moment of M's intimate meeting with his alien visitors, embodying a queer human-nonhuman engagement. After M breaks through his singular self and joins the hive, he is able to see and know other beings. Through a silver globe lodged in his brain, the character enters the fifth dimension, where the extraterrestrial and he gaze at each other closely. The text writes: "I have been looking into his face. Seeing in his eyes, a mirror reflecting myself. And, all this time, he has been looking into my eyes, and he, too, has seen himself" (Hwang et al., 1989, p.44). When staging the scene, the show's projection graphs demonstrate the actor of M curling and standing in a globe, looking at the sights it envisions, including his own face. The globe in the visual design may represent the alien's eyes. "Looking into" each other's eyes, the human narrator and the alien are capable of seeing what the other sees, namely their own reflections. The scene conveys a cross-species intimacy; it suggests the possibility for the subject shaped by human-centric value systems to meet with and know the other by seeing the world through the latter's eyes. In the alien's words, "By this, we know you. And you know us" (Hwang et al., 1989, p.36). In breaking away from the confines of human corporeality and becoming alien-like, M achieves an intersubjective connection with the othered creature. His collective and shared eyesight with the alien indicates that one can see and understand the other—their perspectives, feelings, and experiences—by changing the territories of normative

body and subjectivity.

“We are all visitors. We all travel,” Hwang writes in the play. Like M, who suffers from the huge gap between self and others, people tend to be travelers who want to know how to reach the destination of mutual understanding. And by staging a human’s queer engagement with the inhuman triggered by the latter’s sonic infestation, Hwang displays that a becoming self is enough to reach, hear, and understand the other across boundless space.

In the chapter, I explored the interplay of queer aesthetics, posthuman portrayals, and sound in David Henry Hwang’s two experimental pieces, *The Sound of a Voice* and *1000 Airplanes on the Roof*. The chapter focuses on the playwright’s challenge and reflection on the notion of human identity—among other dimensions of selfhood (gender, sexuality, and race) examined in the preceding text. As the final part of the research, it is also devoted to exploring Hwang’s queer aesthetic expressions that transcend human subjection, the root of social norms and self-other divisions. Thus, with the progress of my reading, I gradually deepened my investigation of the concept of queer and traced its multifaceted manifestation in Hwang’s body of work.

To better capture the complexity of the queer sensibilities in works approached in the chapter, I introduced a queer methodology enriched by Deleuze and Guattari’s theories. It allowed me to unpack Hwang’s thoughts and artistic ideas of queer selves

from broader and more encompassing perspectives. As shown in previous chapters, the playwright traverses gender and racial categories with camp playfulness, transgender portrayal, and queer utopian fantasy. These styles reflect an endeavor to queer discursive identities by displaying their precariousness and artificiality while envisioning an illuminative fantasy world where they are no longer valid. In the texts reflecting on the notion of humans, however, Hwang takes an alternative trajectory in attempts to defy the essential limitations of subjection. That is, to experiment with human's unactualized potential, to image a new mode of bodily embodiment traditionally considered nonhuman, monstrous, and alien. In other words, the chapter shows Hwang's more significant efforts to actively portray the unexpected creativity of entities in the world, including human selves. This corresponds to Deleuze and Guattari's conception of becoming and a queer aesthetic inspired by these theorists.

In the chapter, I choose sound as the aspect to cut into the aesthetic expressions of corporals, desires, and relations exceeding humanistic norms in the selected plays of David Henry Hwang. As I mentioned earlier, sound emerges in these works as an intriguing facet that expresses the characters' transhuman becoming subjectivities. Influenced by Drew Daniel's discussions on the queer capacities of sound, I incorporated sonic perspectives with queer aesthetics and in/human configurations focused on the character. The integration of these lenses is challenging yet rewarding

work. However, by bringing numerous complex concepts and approaches together, the chapter can inevitably risk intertwining intricate concepts and the difficulty of connecting them cohesively. Therefore, I will take some time to clarify how different concepts work with each other as I build up layers of my arguments.

In *The Sound of a Voice*, I approached sounding's mediation of the othered and abjected woman monsters' heterogeneous intensities. In particular, I interpreted closely feminine human bodies' potential to expand with and share vitality with inanimate objects. The mysterious connection between the play's heroine, Hanako, and her flowers suggests the character's potential non/human position as a floral yokai/spirit. The petals' wailing speaks of the inhibited desires and intensities of the monstrous woman other, like tulips in Plath's poetry, conveying an unrepresented queer force repressed in a patriarchal society. The extension of women's subjectivity to plants incarnates Deleuze and Guattari's bodily aesthetics of a Body Without Organs, namely a body detached from predetermined orders and functions. With flowers sounding, glowing, and swirling as a part of Hanako's existence, the figure presents possibilities of living and being beyond a fixed understanding of the world.

Additionally, the sonic serves as a reminder of the world's queerness and a solvent of human subjecthood, for its wide spectrum exceeds the signifying force of language and knowledge. The queer sound Hanako emits, as well as the amplified

silence and noises in her house, expose the male character and the audience to the aural dimension beyond normative signification. In this way, *The Sound of a Voice* blurs the ontological boundaries of self and a broader range of existences by making audible female and inhuman others.

Differing from the first text approached in the chapter, in *1000 Airplanes*, the sound is rendered as a queer matter that invades, disintegrates, and alienates the protagonist M's human identity. As an alien wave outside of Earth, it does not follow the principles recognizable to the protagonist and the audience. Therefore, the portrayal of its inscrutable presence and the collapses it causes on the order of M's bodily perception in the play unveils a queer aesthetic realm that presents unactualized possibilities in the world. Besides, the sound in the play is vital in recruiting the human protagonist into an alien community and deterritorializing the figure's identity. The buzzing of alien visitors who take shape as a hive of bees on a farm attracts and transforms M into a non/human hybrid. This scenario of transformation triggered by alluring sounds, as I read, echoes with a process of fascination conceptualized by Deleuze and Guattari, through which a pack infects creatures supposedly belonging to other groups with its intensities. In this sense, *1000 Airplanes* exhibit the capacity of the sonic to queer human/nonhuman binary opposition and bring the human and aliens into an alliance across anthropocentric limitations.



## Chapter Five

### Conclusion

I can tell what I saw next; it was not a miracle.  
 A beautiful villa stood in the sun  
 and from its doors came the smell of hot coffee.  
 In front, a baroque white plaster balcony  
 added by birds, who nest along the river,  
 —I saw it with one eye close to the crumb—

and galleries and marble chambers. My crumb  
 my mansion, made for me by a miracle,  
 through ages, by insects, birds, and the river  
 working the stone. Every day, in the sun,  
 at breakfast time I sit on my balcony with my feet up,  
 and drink gallons of coffee.

We licked up the crumb and swallowed the coffee.  
 A window across the river caught the sun  
 as if the miracle were working, on the wrong balcony.

—Elizabeth Bishop, “A Miracle for Breakfast” (1972, p.4)

As I come to this juncture, a moment where I will review my entire project,  
 Elizabeth Bishop's poem “A Miracle for Breakfast,” with its bright, aloof imagery,  
 comes to my mind. This poem's conjured images have been the accompaniment of my  
 writing of my entire thesis. These poetic images have, from the start, most excitingly  
 embodied queer aesthetics for me. A reader might think that I seem to have forgotten

about Hwang and his plays, but I believe there is no better choice to begin my conclusion than this poem. “A Miracle for Breakfast” crystallizes and encapsulates the sense of beauty and vertigo that have been brought to me by the queer moments in Hwang’s plays. This marvelous sensation motivates me to look at every possible facet of the charming gem of queer aesthetics, as manifested in Hwang’s work.

In Bishop’s poem, the word “miracle” holds a central position. It starts by depicting a group waiting for a charitable breakfast on a cold morning. When writing this trivial, ordinary, even bleak scene, the author offers a rather personal observation and imagination that makes the scene extraordinary. In it, the narrator’s posture shows physical and spiritual plenty—sated with food, daylight, and mansion, “I” raise my “feet up,” which immerses the reader into a poetic meditation. In the world of this poem, spectacular miracles can and are happening in the mundane and tiny. They can reside on a balcony, a crumb, close to which “[I saw] galleries and marble chambers.” In this way, a small crumb is capable of feeding the speaker’s personal sensations and spirits. In ‘A Miracle for Breakfast,’ Bishop allows us to see how a private everyday moment transforms into a spectacle open to possible wonders, the infinite layers of the world under the observation and imagination of the subject, perhaps as they always are.

We now revisit my discussion on how art and beauty allow us to “fly off over the combat zone” and into the world in the project’s introduction. Aesthetic experiences can

take us out of our fixed, regulated, and normative view of reality and reveal aspects of reality's queer panorama, such as "surprise" in Proust, the "wow" moments in Muñoz's account, or the "unprecedented" beauty elaborated by Elaine Scarry.<sup>38</sup> Perhaps queer aesthetics is never resistant to miracles. By "miracles" here I do not refer specifically to something associated with religious belief or mysticism but to the way in which life exists and can be perceived beyond the scope of what is already "known." In this sense, everything is yet to be named and signified, and the subject is yet to form as a "being" that is confined within oppressive categorizations regarding gender, race, and human identities.

It is worth adding here a comment provided by Lynda Hart and Peggy Phelan in their 1995 article "Queerer than thou: being and Deb Margolin." When expressing the concern that queer identity has also become an "ontological truth claim," they quote a passage by Margolin and ask, "Like an eidetic image, could queerness be"

a dreamlike mental image that appears to the dreamer on the deepest, most magical, most repeatable level; an image as inevitable as breath or rain; an image that velvet, so full of feeling and texture. (Hart & Phelan, 1995, p.281)

This example a pertinent illustration of not only queerness but queer aesthetic

---

<sup>38</sup> For my previous discussions on Proust and Elaine Scarry, please see the introduction of the thesis. For Muñoz's accounts of "wows" in O'Hara's poems (Muñoz, 2009, p.5).

sensations. In it, the dreamer crafts a kaleidoscope of “magical” visions and tactile impressions, which creates a remote echo of Bishop’s observation of a breakfast.

As I have argued in this thesis, Hwang’s works lead us to the queer aesthetic dimension embodied by Bishop’s poem and celebrated by Hart and Phelan, offering glistering moments that exhibit the potency of ourselves, sexually, culturally, and corporally. Hwang does not identify as queer or use the term to describe his writing. However, the exploration of the edges of the self in his works allows us to have a multi-dimensional and deep investigation of queer aesthetic expressions. Rooted in the US reality from the 1990s to the 2010s, his work encourages us to question seemingly natural identities and related barriers. Thus, in his works, we are led to peek at and sense a series of queer miracles, what, elsewhere in their article, Hart and Phelan refer to as “things we would be otherwise blind to” (Hart & Phelan, 1995, p.281).

In the project, I have traced the queer selves and aesthetics embodied in the playwright’s productions that cover themes from sex and gender, race to posthumanism. As both a pupil and scholar, in approaching these works in this order, I find my understanding of queerness and its artistic expressions gradually refreshed and deepened. Thus, it can be said that Hwang’s works allow me to decipher many possible branches of this aesthetic sensibility.

In the first part of the thesis, I focus on those works of Hwang that disturb the

standard sexuality and gendered bodies produced by heteronormative orders. I read the rich queer aesthetic expressions in theatrical and cinematic productions of *M. Butterfly* from 1988 to 2017 as a celebration of campiness, trans subjectivity, same-sex eroticism, and queer potential.

In the next part, the playwright's fantasy of queered race is closely analyzed. It is shown that the (sodomasochistic) display of fluid race personas in *Bondage* and *Yellow Face* achieves rich camp sensations, which make fun of and explode colonial racial classifications and ideologies. Moreover, I point out that the two works explicitly anticipate a queer utopia stripped from ideologies attached to skin colors, opening an aesthetic vision for the possibilities of denaturalized race. In some more experimental theatrical works, Hwang presents how sounding can be a dissolvent of the self-boundary of a human being, therefore showing a queer capacity.

In the final part of my analysis, I investigate how we are allured to hear and meet with the othered configurations—the floral spirit in *The Sound of a Voice* and alien visitors in *1000 Airplanes on the Roof*. Their sounds embody or trigger the becoming possibilities of human bodies, evoking a queer aesthetic aligned with the work of Deleuze and Guattari and of Drew Daniel.

Mining the thoughts and experiments on self-exploration beyond established identities in David Henry Hwang's play, the project probes rich manifestations of queer

aesthetics. They illuminate many possible ways of self-existence, desire, and engagement with others and the world. Though I attempted to bring forth a comprehensive view of queer aesthetics, it is worth noting that my work may only capture a fraction of the whole, given that I focus on one playwright's works.

There are vast efforts to be made in this research field, a field in which new insights, approaches, and interpretations of other artistic works can further enrich. My study and Hwang's writings have illustrated the potential of the concept of queer—how it can be applied in extensive post-feminist, postcolonial, posthuman, and sonic contexts and reinvent itself as a dissolution to any established borders. This suggests a broad space for raising the next research questions. Moreover, more queer aesthetic research can be done on American theatre or other art genres. When approaching Hwang's plays, I include close readings of intriguing episodes or moments in other theatrical (*Angels in America*, *Angry Inch*), cinematic (*Fatal Attraction*), and literary productions (Sylvia Plath and Elizebeth Bishop's poems). These works of art show the unmined dimensions of queer aesthetics. It is, for example, worthwhile to further dig into the resonance of utopian queer aesthetics in American theatre and literature on the brink of the Millennium, a small attempt I made in Chapter Three. The queer moments of the past restore illuminative force for criticizing what is missing or eclipsed in the here and now. As Muñoz reminds us, "It is important to call on the past, to animate it, and put the past

into play with the present” (Muñoz, 2009, pp.27-28). To sum up, extensive exciting queer miracles remain yet to be brought to light. In the present, the world continues to be dotted with combat zones for people of different nations, races, genders, and other identities. Occasionally, these zones can be turned into literal battlefields. This makes these miracles all the more precious, inspiring, and necessary.

## References

Althusser, L. 1971. *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*. New York: Monthly Review Press.

Alvarez, A.N. 2002. Racial Identity and Asian Americans: Support and Challenges. *New Directions for Student Services*. **2002**(97), pp.33-44.

Amin, K. 2016. Haunted by the 1990s: Queer Theory's Affective Histories. *Women's studies quarterly*. **44**(3/4), pp.173-189.

Antoniou, L. 1996. *The Second Coming: A Leatherdyke Reader*. Los Angeles: Alyson Books.

Austin, J.L. 1962. *How To Do Things With Words*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Babuscio, J. 1993. Camp and the Gay Sensibility. In: David, B. ed. *Camp Grounds. Style and Homosexuality*. University of Massachusetts, pp.19-38.

Badmington, N. 2004. *Alien chic: Posthumanism and the other within*. New York: Routledge.

Bataille, G. 1988. *The Accursed Share: An Essay on General Economy*. I. New York: Zone Books.

Bataille, G. 1991. *The Accursed Share: an Essay on General Economy*. II,III. New



York: Zone Books.

Bennett, A. and Royle, N. 1995. *An Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*.

Longman.

Bergman, D. 1993. Introduction. In: Bergman, D. ed. *Camp Grounds: Style and*

*Homosexuality*. Univ of Massachusetts Press, pp.3-16.

Bergstrom, A. 2018. David Cronenberg: *M. Butterfly* (1993). *3 Brothers Film*.

Bishop, E. 1972. A Miracle for Breakfast. *Poetry. Sixtieth Anniversary Issue 1912-*

*1972: First Appearances*. CXXI, pp.3-4.

Bloch, E., Plaice, N. and Plaice, S. 1995. *The Principle of Hope. Vol. 1*. Cambridge,

Massachusetts: MIT Press.

Boles, W.C. 2013. *Understanding David Henry Hwang*. Columbia, South Carolina: The

University of South Carolina Press.

Bornstein, K. 1994. *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us*. New York:

Routledge.

Braidotti, R. 2013. *The posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity.

Brier, J. 2018. Aids and Action (1980–1990s). In: Romesburg, D. ed. *The Routledge*

*History of Queer America*. New York: Routledge, pp.95-106.

Bryer, J. 1995. *The Playwright's Art: Conversations with Contemporary American*

*Dramatists*. New Brunswick, N.J: Rutgers University Press.

- Butler, J. 1993. *Bodies that Matter, on the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*. New York: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1997. *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Butler, J. 1999. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. 2 ed. New York and London: Routledge
- Byrne, R. 2013. *Aesthetic Sexuality: A Literary History of Sadomasochism*. New York: Bloomsbury.
- Califia, P. 1979. A Secret Side of Lesbian Sexuality. *The Advocate*. (283), pp.19-23.
- Campbell, K. 2003. In the realm of the voices. *American Theatre*. **20**(8), pp.103-106.
- Campbell, M. 1988. "1000 Airplanes" Opens in New York. *The Associated Press*.  
December 15.
- Chan, J. 2001. *Chinese American Masculinities: From Fu Manchu to Bruce Lee*. New York: Routledge.
- Chao, S.-Y. 2013. *Processing Tongzhi Imaginaries: Chinese Queer Representation in the Global Mediascape*. Ph.D thesis, New York University.
- Chen, M.Y. 2012. *Animacies: Biopolitics, Racial Mattering, and Queer Affect*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Chen, S.-H. 陈守湖. 2014. Dong zu da ge sheng tai tan xi 侗族大歌生境探析. *Guizhou*

*she hui ke xue*. (11), pp.90-94.

Chen, Y. C. 1997. 陈泳超. *Bai she zhuang gu shi de xing cheng guo cheng* 《白蛇传》

故事的形成过程. *Yi shu bai jia* (02), pp. 1-3. doi:CNKI:SUN:YSBJ.0.1997-02-

013.

Cherry, B. 2009. *Horror*. London: Routledge.

Cho, S. 2018. *Transforming Gender and Emotion: The Butterfly Lovers Story in China*

*and Korea*. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Chua, P. and Fujino, D.C. 1999. Negotiating New Asian-American Masculinities:

Attitudes and Gender Expectations. *The Journal of Men's Studies*. 7(3), pp.391-

413.

Chua, Z.B. 2018. Metamorphosis. *BusinessWorld*. [Online]. 10 December. [Accessed

July 19]. Available from: [https://www.bworldonline.com/features-high-](https://www.bworldonline.com/features-high-life/2018/12/10/202640/highlife-feature-david-hwang-tale-of-two-butterflies/)

[life/2018/12/10/202640/highlife-feature-david-hwang-tale-of-two-butterflies/](https://www.bworldonline.com/features-high-life/2018/12/10/202640/highlife-feature-david-hwang-tale-of-two-butterflies/)

Cleto, F. 1999. Introduction: Queering the Camp. In: Cleto, F. ed. *Queer Aesthetics and*

*the Performing Subject: A Reader*. Edinburgh University Press, pp.1-42.

Cohen, J. J. (1996). *Monster theory: Reading culture*. Minneapolis: University of

Minnesota Press.

Colebrook, C. 2008. How Queer Can You Go? Theory, Normality and Normativity. In:

Giffney, N. and Hird, M.J. eds. *Queering the non/human*. Aldershot, Hampshire,

England: Ashgate, pp. 17-34.

Colebrook, C. 2009. On the Very Possibility of Queer Theory. In: Nigianni, C. and Storr, M. eds. *Deleuze and Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, pp.11-23.

Connell, R.W. 2005. *Masculinities*. 2nd ed. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cooperman, R. 1995. Across the Boundaries of Cultural Identity: An Interview with David Henry Hwang. In: Maufort, M. ed. *Staging Difference: Cultural Pluralism in American Theatre and Drama*. New York: Peter Lang, pp.365-373.

Corliss, R. 1987. Killer! *Fatal Attraction* Strikes Gold as A Parable of Sexual Guilt. *TIME*.

Cotten, T. 2012. *Transgender Migrations: The bodies, borders, and politics of transition*. New York: Routledge.

Creed, B. 1993. *The Monstrous Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*. New York: Routledge.

Cronenberg, D. 1996. *Cronenberg on Cronenberg* London: Faber & Faber.

Cruz, A. 2016. *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography*. New York University Press.

Cummings, S.T. 2003. Pipa pair: Philip Glass and David Henry Hwang discuss *The Sound of a Voice*. *The Boston Phoenix*. May 23 - 29, 2003.

Daniel, D. 2011. All sound is Queer. *The Wire*. 133.

De Lauretis, T. 1987. *Technologies of Gender: Essays on Theory, Film, and Fiction*.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

De Lauretis, T. 1991. Queer theory: Lesbian and gay sexualities an introduction.

*differences*. 3(2), pp.iii-xviii.

Deleuze, G. 2003. *Francis Bacon: the Logic of Sensation*. London: A&C Black

Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. 1987. *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and*

*Schizophrenia*. Minneapolis & London: University of Minnesota Press.

Deleuze, G. and Sacher-Masoch, L. 1989. *Masochism*. New York: Zone.

Dhuill, C. 2010. *Sex in Imagined Spaces: Gender and Utopia from More to Bloch*. New

York: Routledge.

Dinshaw, C., Edelman, L., Ferguson, R.A., Freccero, C., Freeman, E., Halberstam, J.,

Jagose, A., Nealon, C. and Hoang, N.T. 2007. THEORIZING QUEER

TEMPORALITIES: A Roundtable Discussion. *GLQ*. 13(2–3), pp.177–195.

Ehlers, N. 2012. *Racial imperatives discipline, performativity, and struggles against*

*subjection*. Bloomington, Ind: Indiana University Press.

Elam, H.J. 2002. Towards a New Territory in ‘Multicultural’ Theater. In: Uno, R. and

Burns, L.M.S.P. eds. *The Color of Theater: Race, Culture and Contemporary*

*Performance*. New York: Continuum.

- Eng, D.L. 1994. In the Shadows of a Diva: Committing Homosexuality in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. *Amerasia Journal*. **20**(1), pp.93-116.
- Eng, D.L. 2014. In the shadows of a diva: Committing homosexuality in David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*. *Asian American Sexualities*. Routledge, pp.131-152.
- Fanger, I. 1993. Face Forward. *Boston Herald*. 5 February.
- Feng, M. 2000. *Stories Old and New: A Ming Dynasty Collection*. Seattle, United States: University of Washington Press.
- Foster, M.D. 2015. *The Book of Yokai: Mysterious Creatures of Japanese Folklore*. Oakland: University of California Press.
- Foucault, M. 1978. *The History of Sexuality Volume I: An Introduction*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. 1984. Michel Foucault: an Interview: Sex, Power and the Politics of Identity. *The Advocate*. (400), pp.26-30, 58.
- Foucault, M. 2002. *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Routledge.
- Fried, M. 1980. *Absorption and theatricality: painting and beholder in the age of Diderot*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Gallop, J. 2000. The Ethics of Reading: Close Encounters. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing*. **16**(3), pp.7-17.

- Garber, M. 1992a. The Occidental Tourist: *M. Butterfly* and the Scandal of Transvestism. In: Parker, A. ed. *Nationalisms & sexualities*. New York: Routledge.
- Garber, M. 1992b. *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing & Cultural Anxiety*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Gates, H.L., Curran, A.S., Dalton, K.C.C. and Emanuel, S. 2022. *Who's Black and why?: a hidden chapter from the eighteenth-century invention of race*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- Gorfinkle, C. 2003. Philip Glass's musical voice is forever changing. *The Patriot Ledger*. May 17.
- Gotanda, P.K. 1991. *Yankee dawg you die*. New York: Dramatists Play Service Inc.
- Haedicke, J.V. 1992. David Henry Hwang's *M. Butterfly*: The Eye on the Wing. *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism*. pp.27-44.
- Halberstam, J. 1995. *Skin shows: Gothic horror and the technology of monsters*. Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, J. 1998. *Female Masculinity*. Durham: Duke University Press.
- Halberstam, J. 2005. *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York and London: NYU Press.
- Hallin, D.C. 1986. *The "uncensored war": the media and Vietnam*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- Halperin, D.M. 1995. *Saint Foucault: Towards a Gay Hagiography*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Haraway, D.J. 1991. *Simians, cyborgs, and women: the reinvention of nature*. London: Free Association.
- Haraway, D.J. 2008. Foreword: Companion Species, Mis-recognition, and Queer Worlding. In: Giffney, N. and Hird, M.J. eds. *Queering the non/human*. Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, pp.xxiii-xxvi.
- Harris, J.O. 2019. Slave Play. *American Theatre*. **36**(6), p42+.
- Hart, L. and Phelan, P. 1995. Queerer than thou: being and Deb Margolin. *Theatre Journal*. **47**(2), pp.269-282.
- Holland, E.W. 2013. *Deleuze and Guattari's A thousand plateaus': A reader's guide*. New York: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hornby, R. 1986. *Drama, Metadrama and Perception*. New Jersey: Associated University Presse.
- Hu, Y. 2020. *Keywords in Western Literary Criticism and Contemporary China: Volume 2*. London: Routledge.
- Huang, M. Z. 2007. 黄明政. Dong zu da ge su yuan侗族大歌溯源. Mian yang shi fan xue yuan xue bao, 26(9), pp.82–85.
- Huang, S. 1987. Two Studies on Prototype Semantics: Xiao 'Filial Piety' and Mei



Mianzi 'Loss of Face'. *Journal of Chinese Linguistics*. **15**(1), pp.55-89.

Hwang, D.H. 1989a. *M. Butterfly*. New York: A Plume Book.

Hwang, D.H. 1989b. People like us. *The Guardian (1959-2003)*. Apr 21.

Hwang, D.H. 2000. *Trying to Find Chinatown: The Selected Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Hwang, D.H. 2002. A New Musical by Rodgers and Hwang. *New York Times*

Hwang, D.H. 2009. *Yellow Face (TCG Edition)*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Hwang, D.H. 2011. Foreword. In: Yew, C. ed. *Version 3.0 Contemporary Asian American Plays*. New York: Theatre Communications Group.

Hwang, D.H. 2014. Racial Casting Has Evolved-And So Have My Opinions. *The Guardian*. May 12.

Hwang, D.H. 2017. *M. Butterfly: Broadway Revival Edition*. New York: Penguin Random House LLC.

Hwang, D.H. and DiGaetani, J.L. 1989. 'M. Butterfly': An Interview with David Henry Hwang. *TDR (1988-)*. **33**(3), pp.141-153.

Hwang, D.H. and McKittrick, R. 2003. words from garden: An Interview with David Henry Hwang for American Repertory Theatre. *American Repertory Theatre*.

[Online]. April 24. Available from:

<https://americanrepertorytheater.org/media/articles-vol-1-i-4-words-from-a-zen-garden/>

Hwang, D.H., Glass, P. and Sirlin, J. 1989. *1000 Airplanes on the Roof: a Science Fiction Music-drama*. Salt Lake City: Gibbs-Smith.

Isherwood, M. 2020. Toward a Queer Aesthetic Sensibility: Orientation, Disposition, and Desire. *Studies in art education*. **61**(3), pp.230-239.

Jancovich, M. 2002. General Introduction. In: Jancovich, M. ed. *Horror, the film reader*. London: Routledge.

Jay, K. and Young, A. 1992. *Out of the Closets: Voices of Gay Liberation*. New York: New York University Press.

Johnson, M. 2017. *Performing American Identity: The Plays of David Henry Hwang*. Doctoral dissertation thesis, University of East Anglia.

Jouet, M. 2017. *Exceptional America: What Divides Americans from the World and from Each Other*. Oakland: University of California Press.

Kia, N. 2007. Asian Americans' Experiences of "Race" and Racism. In: Vera, H. and Feagin, J.R. eds. *Handbooks of the Sociology of Racial and Ethnic Relations*. Boston, MA: Springer US, pp.131-144.

Kondo, D. K. 1997. *About face: Performing race in fashion and theater*. Routledge.

Kondo, D.K. 1990. "M. Butterfly": Orientalism, Gender, and a Critique of Essentialist

Identity. *Cultural critique*. (16), pp.5-29.

Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Krogman, W.M. 1945. The Concept of Race. In: Linton, R. ed. *The Science of man in world crisis*. New York: Columbia University Press, pp.38-61.

Kushner, T. 1994. *Angels in America Part Two: Perestroika*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Kushner, T. 1995. *Thinking About the Longstanding Problems of Virtue and Happiness: Essays, A Play, Two Poems and A Prayer*. London: Nick Hern Books.

Lee, Q. 1993. Between the Oriental and the Transvestite. *Found Object*. 2, pp.45-66.

Leitch, V.B., Cain, W.E., Finke, L.A., McGowan, J., Sharpley-Whiting, T.D. and Williams, J.J. 2018. *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Third ed. WW Norton & Company.

Leon, R. 1989. One Fine Play We Will See. *Times*. 17 March.

Levrau, F. and Loobuyck, P. 2018. Introduction: mapping the multiculturalism-interculturalism debate. *Comparative Migration Studies*. 6(1), p13.

Li, Y.H. 李银河. 2009. Nue lian ya wen hua 虐恋亚文化. Inner Mongolia: Nei meng gu da xue chu ban she.

Li, Z. and Zhong, Z. H. 李震 and 钟芝红. 2019. Wu qi guan shen ti: Lun de le zi shen ti

mei xue de sheng cheng 无器官身体: 论德勒兹身体美学的生成. *文艺争鸣*. 4.

Lin, H.-C. 1997. Staging Orientalia: Dangerous “Authenticity” in David Henry Hwang's

“M. Butterfly”. *The Journal of American Drama and Theatre*. 9(1), pp.26-35.

Liu, R.K. 2001. The Symbolic Importance of Insects in Jewelry. *Transactions of the*

*American Entomological Society (1890-)*. 127(2), pp.167-171.

Louie, K. 2002. *Theorising Chinese Masculinity: Society and Gender in China*.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lyons, B. 1999. “Making his Muscles Work for Himself”: An Interview with David

Henry Hwang. *Literary Review*. 42(2), pp.230-244.

*M. Butterfly*. 1993. [Film]. Cronenberg, D. dir. USA: Geffen Pictures, Miranda

Productions Inc.

MacCormack, P. 2009. Unnatural Alliances. In: Nigianni, C. and Storr, M. eds. *Deleuze*

*and Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press pp.134-149.

MacCormack, P. 2016. Queer posthumanism: Cyborgs, animals, monsters, perverts. *The*

*Ashgate research companion to queer theory*. Routledge, pp.111-126.

MacKinnon, K. 2005. The Mainstream AIDS Movie Prior to the 1990s. In: Moor,

G.H.A. ed. *Signs of life: Cinema and Medicine*. London and New York:

Wallflower Press, pp.33-44.

Maher, A. 2013. Interview with David Henry Hwang. *The London Magazine*. May 30.

- McMahon, G. 2006. *Camp in Literature*. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co.
- Meng, J. 2021. Pipa: Ancient Tunes on Emotionally Charged Strings. [Online].  
 [Accessed 2023 May 5]. Available from:  
[http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/2018/videos/202102/t20210219\\_800236405.html](http://www.chinatoday.com.cn/ctenglish/2018/videos/202102/t20210219_800236405.html)
- Meyer, M. 2005. Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp. In: Griffin, H.B.a.S. ed. *Queer Cinema the Film reader*. Routledge, pp.137-150.
- Moss-Coane, M. 1996. David Henry Hwang. In: Kolin, P.C. and Kullman, C.H. ed. *Speaking on Stage: Interviews with Contemporary American Playwrights*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, pp.277–290.
- Moy, J.S. 1990. David Henry Hwang's 'M. Butterfly' and Philip Kan Gotanda's 'Yankee Dawg You Die': Repositioning Chinese American Marginality on the American Stage. *Theatre Journal*. **42**(1), pp.48-56.
- Moy, J.S. 1993. *Marginal Sights: Staging the Chinese in America*. University of Iowa Press.
- Muñoz, J.E. 1999. *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Muñoz, J.E. 2009. *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*. New York: New York University Press.

Munro, T. and Scruton, R. 2020. Aesthetics. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. [Online].

Available from: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/aesthetics>

Newton, E. 1993. Role Models. In: Bergman, D. ed. *Camp Grounds: Style and*

*Homosexuality*. Univ of Massachusetts Press, pp.39-53.

Noureldin, H. 2017. Metadrama and the Deconstruction of Stereotypes: David Henry

Hwang's *M. Butterfly* and *Bondage*. *Cairo Studies in English*. 2017(1), pp.65-85.

Orenstein, C. 2018. *M. Butterfly* by David Henry Hwang (review). *Asian theatre*

*journal*. **35**(2), pp.490-495.

Ovid. 1851. *Metamorphoses*. London: H.G. Bohn.

*Oxford English Dictionary*. [Online]. 2023a. s.v. zone, [23 October 2023]. Available

from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/1149121340>

*Oxford English Dictionary*. [Online]. 2023b. s.v. perform, [4 November 2023].

Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/4548535633>

*Oxford English Dictionary*. [Online]. 3rd ed. 2022. s.v. Monster, [Accessed 12

September 2022]. Available from:

<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/121738?rskey=k5N6NN&result=1&is>

Advanced=false

Park, S. 2006. *The Performance of Race in Asian American Drama*. thesis, University

of Southern California.

- Phelan, S. 1997. Introduction. In: Phelan, S. ed. *Playing with Fire: Queer Politics, Queer Theories*. New York: Routledge, pp.1-8.
- Plaice, N. Year. Introduction. In: Bloch, E. *The Principle of Hope. Vol. 1*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, pp.xix-xxxiii.
- Plath, S. 1960. Tulips. *Poetry Foundation*. [Online]. [Accessed 12 November 2022].  
Available from: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/49013/tulips-56d22ab68fdd0>
- Puccini, G. 2001. Madam Butterfly Libretto. In: Fisher, B.D. ed. *Puccini's Madam Butterfly: Opera Classics Library Series*. Coral Gables, Florida: Opera Journeys™ Publishing.
- Pugh, T. 2016. Camp Sadomasochism in Tennessee Williams's Plays. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*. **58**(1), pp.20-44.
- Reed, C. 2011. *Art and homosexuality: a history of ideas*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Reider, N.T. 2001. The Emergence of “Kaidan-shū” The Collection of Tales of the Strange and Mysterious in the Edo Period. *Asian Folklore Studies*. pp.79-99.
- Rich, B.R. 2013. *The New Queer Cinema: Director's Cut*. Duke University Press.
- RomajiDesu English Japanese Dictionary*. [Online]. 2022. s.v. Hana, [Accessed 9 November 2022]. Available from:

<https://www.romajidesu.com/dictionary/meaning-of-hana.html>

Romesburg, D. 2018. Introduction. In: Romesburg, D. ed. *The Routledge History of*

*Queer America*. New York: Routledge, pp.1-11.

Saal, I. 1998. Performance and Perception: Gender, Sexuality, and Culture in David

Henry Hwang's "M. Butterfly". *Amerikastudien/American Studies*. **43**(4), pp.629-644.

Samshasha. 1997. *Zhongguo tongxingai shilu (A History of Homosexuality in China)*.

Hong Kong: Pink Triangle (First Edition 1984).

Sartre, J. 1959. Existentialism is a Humanism. In: Kaufmann, W. ed. *Existentialism*

*from Dostoevsky to Sartre*. New York: Meridian Books.

Savran, D. 1995. Ambivalence, Utopia, and a Queer Sort of Materialism: How "Angels

in America" Reconstructs the Nation. *Theatre Journal*. **47**(2), pp.207-227.

Scarry, E. 2001. *On Beauty and Being Just*. United States of America: Princeton

University Press.

Sedgwick, E.K. 1993. Queer Performativity: Henry James's The Art of the Novel.

*GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. **1**(1), pp.1-16.

Sedgwick, E.K. 1994. *Tendencies*. first ed. London: Routledge.

Sedgwick, E.K. 2011. *The Weather in Proust*. Durham & London: Duke University

Press.



- Seidman, S. 1996. Introduction. In: Seidman, S. ed. *Queer Theory Sociology*.  
Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell, pp.1-29.
- Sieg, K. 2002. *Ethnic drag: performing race, nation, sexuality in West Germany*.  
University of Michigan Press.
- Skloot, R. 1990. Breaking the Butterfly: The Politics of David Henry Hwang. *Modern  
drama*. **33**(1), pp.59-66.
- Smedley, A. 1998. "Race" and the construction of human identity. *American  
anthropologist*. **100**(3), pp.690-702.
- Smith, D. 1993. Face Values: The Sexual and Racial Obsessions of Playwright David  
Henry Hwang. *New York Magazine*. **11**, pp.41-45.
- Sontag, S. 1966. *Against Interpretation, and Other Essays*. New York: Dell Pub. Co.
- Spargo, T. 1999. *Foucault and Queer Theory*. Cambridge: Icon Books.
- Stang, S. 2021. *Maiden, Mother, and Crone: Abject Female Monstrosity in Roleplaying  
Games*. Ph.D. Thesis, York University.
- Storr, M. and Nigianni, C. 2009. *Deleuze and Queer Theory*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh  
University Press.
- Sullivan, N. 2007. *A Critical Introduction to Queer Theory*. New York: New York  
University Press.
- Taylor, J. 2012. *Playing it Queer: Popular Music, Identity and Queer World-making*.

Peter Lang.

*The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. [Online]. Fall 2020 Edition ed. 2020. s.v.

Multiculturalism, Available from:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2020/entries/multiculturalism/>

Theodor, R. 1941. *Masochism in Modern Man*. New York: Grove Press.

Thomas, C., Aimone, J.O. and MacGillivray, C.A.F. 2000. *Straight With a Twist: Queer Theory and the Subject of Heterosexuality*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Thompson, A. 2021. Did the Concept of Race Exist for Shakespeare and His Contemporaries?: An Introduction. In: Thompson, A. ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Race*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.1-16.

Trask, S. 1999. Tear Me Down. Mitchell, J.C. and Shor, M. *Hedwig and The Angry Inch*. [CD]. New York: Atlantic Recording Corporation.

Välimäki, S. 2007. Musical migration, perverted instruments and cosmic sounds: queer constructions in the music and sound of Angels in America. *Essays on sound and vision*. Helsinki University Press.

Välimäki, S. and Richardson, J. 2013. Disaffected sound, temporalized visions: Philip Glass and the audiovisual impulse in minimalism and postminimalism. In: Kyle, G., et al. eds. *The Ashgate Research Companion to Minimalist and Postminimalist*

*Music*. Farnham: Ashgate, pp.219-237.

Viertel, J. 2008. Fun with Race and the Media. *American Theatre*. [Online]. 1 April.

[Accessed 24 May 2023].

Wah-shan, C. 2000. *Tongzhi: Politics of Same-sex Eroticism in Chinese Societies*. New York: Howorth Press.

Walat, A. 2003. The Sound of a Voice. *TheaterMania*. [Online]. June 5. Available

from: [https://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/the-sound-of-a-voice\\_3590.html](https://www.theatermania.com/new-york-city-theater/reviews/the-sound-of-a-voice_3590.html)

Walsh, M. 1988. The Opera As Science Fiction. *TIME*.

Washington Post. 1997. Campaign Finance Key Player: John Huang. *Washington Post*, 13 May, p. A01.

William, C.B. 2017. Inspiration from the “Really Real”: David Henry Hwang’s “Yellow Face” and Documentary Theatre. *Comparative drama*. **51**(2), pp.216-233.

Wong, Y.J., Owen, J., Tran, K.K., Collins, D.L. and Higgins, C.E. 2012. Asian American Male College Students’ Perceptions of People’s Stereotypes about Asian American Men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*. **13**(1), p75.

Woo, M. 2003. Gender Trouble in Asian American Literature: David Henry Hwang’s *The Sound of a Voice*. *영미문학페미니즘*. **11**(2), pp.291-317.

*Xian dai han yu ci dian* 现代汉语词典. 2005. 5th ed. Beijing: Shang wu yin shu guan.

- Xing, J. 幸洁. 2016. *Xing bie biao yan: hou xian dai yu jing xia de kua jie li lun he shi jian 性别表演: 后现代语境下的跨界理论与实践*. Hangzhou: Zhejiang da xue chu ban she.
- Xu, B. 徐贲. 2010. Ban zhuang zheng zhi, ruo zhe di kang he camp mei xue 扮装政治、弱者抵抗和“敢曝 (Camp) 美学”. *Wenyi lilun yanjiu*. (5), pp.59-67.
- Xu, D. R. 2007. 許端容. *Liang Zhu gushi yanjiu 梁祝故事研究*, vol. I, 6. Taipei: Xiuwei zixun keji.
- Xu, W. 徐蔚. 2007. Nan dan: Xing bie fan chuan -- zhong guo xi qu te shu wen hua xian xiang kao lun 男旦: 性别反串——中国戏曲特殊文化现象考论. Ph.D. thesis, Xiamen University.
- Yoo, J. M. 2022. *Monstrous Wives, Murderous Lovers, and Dead Wet Girls: Examining the Feminine Vengeful Ghost in Japanese Traditional Theatre and Horror Cinema*. Ph. D. thesis, University of Hawai'i at Manoa.
- Zhang, A.-Z. 张霭珠. 2009. Niu yue nv tong xing lian biao yan de cheng shi kong jian yu shen ti mei xue 纽约女同性恋表演的城市空间与身体美学—析论“开裆裤剧团”的性别操演. *Xi ju yi shu (Shanghai xi ju xue yuan)*. 2009(2), pp.39-49.
- Zhang, Q. M. 张秋梅. 2018. Mei Guo Ya Yi Shen Fen De Cao Yan Xing: Huang Zhe Lun Huang Mian Kong Zhi Xin De Jie Du 美国亚裔身份的操演性: 黄哲伦《黄面孔》之新的解读. *Xi ju yi shu*. (5), pp.92-99.