

## **Audible acts: the theatre of hearing (dis)abled masculinities**

**Cassandra Loeser and Vicki Crowley**

*I listened with an ear of my curiosity.* (Nietzsche 1888)

**A**ll life has soundscapes—those that we codify through language, through movement, and give name to in such things as talk, as music, as noise, as nature and the sounds that emanate from movement, the vibrations from dancer’s body on body or the bodily percussion of feet landing lightly or heavily on sprung floor, carpet or squeaky sand. The soundscapes of life are mediated through auditory acuity and through gender, through sexuality, through race and place. To listen and to hear is an embodied act and it is an embodied practice of exchange. In a great deal of the writing on masculinities the sheer labour of achieving masculinity often receives insufficient attention. This is perhaps especially so as we try to critically engage with the reductive materialities of masculinity or to codify it as some form of normative/non-normative or hegemonic/marginal continuum. It is perhaps not until we listen closely with a curious ear to the disjunctures and conjunctures that happen when categories such as masculinity and disability collide and slide into each other that we are able to bring into a palpable presence the minutiae of masculinities’ engagements and the effort and labour that they produce, and can be seen to produce, through theatre.

This chapter draws us closely into the world of Huy Dong,<sup>1</sup> a twenty-five year old man who was born in Vietnam, flown to Australia as a baby of a few months of age and adopted by, as he refers to them, “Baptist, white middle-class parents” whose support helped foster his creativity.<sup>2</sup> In this chapter we take up the tip of the iceberg of a vast and deep story that is about Australian theatre; masculinity; homophobic and racist culture; being Chinese-Vietnamese; being given an Anglicised name and reclaiming a Vietnamese name; being unable to speak Vietnamese by being raised in an English-speaking household and because of a severe hearing disability;<sup>3</sup> and being placed in a special school for his primary education. The chapter presents and analyses aspects of Huy Dong’s story in order to take up his argument for the deep need to move into a postmodern moment where high and low culture are commingled. We explain how Huy Dong’s encapsulation of his experience of “Generation X” is crucial in grappling with the question of how to construct different, more inclusive, representations and knowings of identity. For our purposes, Huy Dong’s experience is central to the labour of ‘doing’ and ‘making’ masculinities for young men with hearing disabilities and, in this instance, a doing and making made more viable and meaningful through theatre.

## Sounding it out

There are two trajectories of theoretical and analytic attention to the body that are relevant to Huy Dong’s story—masculinity studies and disability studies—and between these there has been minimal scholarly dialogue. While it is not at all possible to do justice to these fields in a few short paragraphs it is necessary to draw attention to them as they are never outside Huy Dong’s narrative. In the arena of masculinity, the work of R.W.

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<sup>1</sup> Huy Dong’s story is drawn from a larger research project that engaged with the question of how young men with moderate to profound hearing disabilities, who communicate primarily in spoken English, construct their masculine embodied subjectivities in different spaces and locales of their everyday worlds. The project also paid detailed attention to the debates and literature of hearing impairment (Loeser 2005). Huy Dong is a pseudonym. He was interviewed on 11 June 2000.

<sup>2</sup> A number of important analyses have emerged in recent years concerning the potential impacts of transnational and transracial adoption, rural placements, and issues of racism and social isolation on the adoptee (see for example Armstrong and Slaytor 2001; Kirton 2000; Simon and Altstein 1992).

<sup>3</sup> Different classifications of hearing disability can impact variably upon people’s hearing and speech capabilities. The Oticon (1999) website is a broad guide regarding the effects of different types of hearing disability.

Connell and particularly his notion of “hegemonic masculinity” (Carrigan, Connell and Lee 1987: 86-97; Connell 1987, 1989, 1990, 1993, 1995, 2000) constitutes a significant contribution to the theorisation of masculinities outside of gender role theory. Drawing largely on the interventions of feminism and to some lesser extent poststructuralism, Connell contested the idea of a universal masculinity.<sup>4</sup> Queer theory and lesbian and gay studies have arguably made some of the most significant in-roads in opening the normative body up for scrutiny, beyond the centrality of “hegemonic masculinity”.<sup>5</sup> Despite these interventions, however, it is still possible to argue the male body within masculinity discourses remains, at core, the province of heterosexual, western, young, able-bodied biological males, with the difference incorporated as an addition to the central issue of a relatively unproblematic embodied masculinity (Halberstam 1998; Petersen 1998).

In fields such as cultural, literary, film, and postcolonial studies, attention to the tensions and connections in the making and practices of masculine identities often involve a deep and nuanced analysis that is attentive to complexity.<sup>6</sup> While the attention to masculinities within these fields often names diversity, contingency and partiality, there is still, with few exceptions, scant presence of embodiments beyond the axes of sex-gender, class, race and ethnicity as abled bodies. In the few instances where disability is noted there is an acute absence of reference to hearing disability.<sup>7</sup>

The field of disability studies is no less constrained than much of the field of masculinity studies. The disabled body and the masculine body have each been constituted in the context of a long and powerful effort to construct the ‘normal’ body (Davis 1995; Wendell 1996; Thomson 1997; Gerschick and Miller 1994; Seymour 1998; Thomas 1999). Constructions of this ‘normal’ body have historically invoked binary notions of a ‘healthy’ self and the medically diseased or disabled ‘other’, drawn over other binary assumptions about gender, class and sexuality. Seymour (1998), for instance, claims that

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<sup>4</sup> We recognise that there are important critiques of Connell’s work and that scholars such as Sedgwick (1992, 1994), Buchbinder (1994, 1998), Stecopoulos and Uebel (1997), MacInnes (1998) and Petersen (1998) have long since recognised the limitations of how masculinity is understood and represented.

<sup>5</sup> See Butler 1990, 1993, 2004; Sedgwick 1990, 1992, 1994; Boswell, 1992; Jagose 1996; Seidman 1996; Halberstam 1998; Berlant and Warner 1998; Nardi 2000; Troka, Lebesco and Noble 2002.

<sup>6</sup> See Buchbinder 1994, 1998; Mercer 1994; Dyer 1997; Lehman 2000; Stecopoulos and Uebel 1997.

<sup>7</sup> See McRuer and Wilkerson 2003.

biological essentialism has been used as a powerful ideological weapon, constructing dominant ideologies of gender and disability subsequently used to legitimate relations of inequality in other areas of social life.

Medical discourses share an analysis of the body that establish it in a pre-social, biological basis.<sup>8</sup> The medical model of disability pervades constructions of the normal and non-normal body. New theories that recognised the preclusion of the social world from the medical model attended to the complexities of power in the institutional and everyday social.<sup>9</sup> However, prioritising an analysis of the body in terms of power and society provided minimal insight into the ways in which people with disabilities might adopt certain styles of interacting and engaging, or of how disabled bodies may be used as resources for identity formation, human action and desire as creative and productive possibility (Thomas 1999; Corker and Shakespeare 2002; Thomas and Corker 2002). Within disability theory neither the medical model nor the social model adequately defies issues of reductionism or essentialism (Seymour 1998; Young 2002). Little work has made use of post-colonialism, race studies or queer theory.<sup>10</sup>

These two trajectories are countered by Victoria Pitts (2003) in an argument for a post-essentialist understanding and analysis of the body. While she recognises the many efforts to divest questions of the body of the essentialism and problems of previous accounts, Pitts claims that what is fundamentally absent in medical/biological and social accounts is the notion that bodies are continually created within ongoing aesthetic practices that cannot be pre-empted. Butler's (1990, 1993) notion of the performative, for instance, provides a significant resource for such a claim and for analysing

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<sup>8</sup> Arguably this is instantiated through significant bodies such as the 1980 International Classification of Impairments, Disabilities and Handicaps (ICIDH) of the World Health Organisation (WHO). According to Davis, medical ideologies of the disabled body, such as those represented in the ICIDH model, have attributed the biological makeup of bodies as the reason for their "deviant" (1995: 29) functioning and position within society.

<sup>9</sup> Writers including Barnes (1996), Barton (1996), Finkelstein (1980), French (1993), Lloyd (1992), Morris (1993) and Oliver (1986, 1990, 1996) have employed various elements of the social model to draw attention to the ways that a dominant discourse of normativity has historically worked to control and exclude people with different impairments from the mainstream of society.

<sup>10</sup> In recent years, there have been some important works published in the field of disability studies that make use of postcolonialism, racyology and/or queer theory. These include Tremain (1996), Corker and Shakespeare (2002) and Davis (1995, 2002). Shuttleworth (2000, 2001) and Smith and Hutchinson (2004) also constitute recent and significant contributions to postmodernist theorisations of disabled bodies as they are constructed in and through identities including gender and sexuality.

the complex ways in which the stylisation of gender remains a work in progress. Her notion of the performative as bringing into being that which it names, as being citational and repetitive, asserts the fabrication rather than the given-ness of gender and gendered being. Rather than this being a crippling *fait accompli*, like Butler we would assert that an apprehension of the performative not only allows but constitutes creativity and creative interventions. An apprehension of the performative also works to foreground, for our and Huy Dong's purposes, the labour of making masculinity and the reconfiguration of masculinity and disability as stylised repetitions, enacted through time, yet always mediated by discursive and material relations of power.

In order to make her argument, Butler, in part, turned to the work of Nietzsche and his account of self-construction and subjective transformation. Nietzsche's account centres on self-creativity as a potentially pleasurable means of establishing one's personal aesthetics and lifestyle in a society characterised by movement and fleeting temporality. Nietzsche argues that self-creativity is distinctly Dionysian—like the Greek god Dionysus, who was god of intoxication, dance and music, the construction of embodied subjectivity is a “voluptuous compulsion” (1968: 426) where “the Dionysian emotions awake” (1967: 36). Self-creativity, in this description of the Dionysian, involves knowledge of the self, recognising the multiplicity and exuberance of the realm of emotional experience. This notion of self-creativity draws attention to the ways that embodied individuals achieve their unique powers of self-creation in terms of being an “artist”—an artist with a will to exceed the present disposition through working on the self to create another style of being yet to be embraced (Nietzsche 1968).

The trace that we provide of the ways in which masculinity and disability are shaped and contested make way for us to hear the performativity of gendered and embodied being (including disability) that is, we believe, more capable of refusing any notions of a ‘true’ essence of identity. What becomes apparent and crucial is an approach that is able to hear beyond mere surfaces and that can listen for those possibilities for self-creation that exist beyond the various social and cultural scripts that we inherit. This is also critical if we are to better come to see and hear masculinity as an intensive and laborious mediation made all the more labour-intensive through a persistent recourse to masculinity as, in essence, white and able-bodied. It is therefore useful to hear Huy Dong's story as being attuned to the discord and harmony within extant analyses of disability as it refuses its indivisibility with gender and sexuality and embodied subjectivities in all social and

cultural domains. This is especially so where one seeks, as Huy Dong does, to reconfigure masculinity and disability as stylised repetitions mediated by discursive and material relations of power.

In the interview, Huy Dong explained the labour of identity in his own terms. Yet he never spoke of his experience of identifying as discrete or serialised; he never spoke of experiencing his masculinity outside his race or hearing disability. Each aspect of Huy Dong's identity is fluid and, at the time of the interview, it was his work and involvement in theatre that drove and fortified his desire, his knowing and unknowing practice, and his reflection on the imposition of discrete and static identity categories.

## Huy Dong's story

Huy Dong grew up in a large rural city in South Australia. His interest in the arts emerges from his experiences of drawing and acting in secondary school. In 1996, Huy Dong moved to Adelaide to complete an Advanced Diploma in Acting. During his education in Adelaide, he organised part of a performance at a rave. He completed an Honours degree in Drama Theory and Politics in 1999 and in the same year Huy Dong was awarded an international travelling scholarship to Vietnam along with two other students to film the attempted search for his birth parents and family. At the time of the interview in June 2000, Huy Dong was in the early stages of developing his career as an artist and theatre director. At this time he described himself as wanting "to create a new genesis for [...] experimental theatre [...] that is not seen in the middle-class white culture in Australia". Like many young experimental artists, Huy Dong struggled with issues of securing funding for his performance projects. He spoke about how he was planning to apply to particular overseas organisations to fund his future projects because of a general lack of interest from Australian federal and state funding sources.

Huy Dong credits the Cohn Brothers, Martin Scorsese, Scott Hicks, Mike Lee and Wong Kar-Wai among those that influence his approach to directing. His influences also include the photographic work of William Yang (discussed later in this chapter) and the multi-media approach of the Theatre of the Deaf who use sound, audio and sign language on stage as part of their productions. As being part of the Australian Vietnamese diaspora and with a twinned sense of being from "both continents", Huy Dong is interested in how the government and society of both nations work. This curiosity has partially incited his desire to pursue a career as a theatre director. He says

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that art and politics are intertwined and that he is interested in the possibilities and potentials that experimental theatre holds for representing alternative histories and knowings of culture, politics and identity.

After completing his Honours degree Huy Dong moved to Melbourne and has since written, directed and performed in many artistic productions. In 2002, he compiled and published an anthology of poems, articles and essays written by Vietnamese and Australian writers, artists and contributors who documented some of the problems and issues faced by Vietnamese communities in Australia. In 2003, Huy Dong co-wrote and directed a theatrical production. The production aimed to raise understanding and awareness about the issues facing young Vietnamese Australian people with a disability. In 2005, Huy Dong wrote and performed a theatrical autobiography that was shown as part of a theatre festival. He has also performed in an experimental multi-media theatre project about Vietnamese youth sub-cultures.

Huy Dong believes that theatre has the capacity to produce alternative communities of social and national belonging. His belief is predicated on remembrances of racist, homophobic and ableist beginnings. Huy Dong recognises Anglo-Australian representations of masculinity in both traditional artistic forums and everyday culture as interpreted through a lens that subordinates Asian masculine representations and disabled bodies. His mediation of Australian masculinity is embedded in the prevailing aesthetic image of the hard, developed, labouring, white, heterosexual male body. In the following excerpt, he lays claim that this aesthetic image draws on and covers the constitutive racial, sexual and disabled conventions by which Australian masculinity is mobilised:

Because of my deafness I use a lot of visuals. I didn't have the language capacity. [...] I learnt to draw by myself [...] because I couldn't understand the outside world. [...] I wanted to do nudes when I was at high school. [...] Probably why I'm a bit bisexual because I love males. [...] It's a fantasy of Tarzan. [...] I mean every artist needs to do a Michelangelo and [...] because of my [...] rebellious nature as well to desire something you cannot have [...] I wanted to become that. The physical body [...] of the white man's system [...] you know I thought [...] my Asian body I thought was weak as compared to the great Anglo-Saxon body. [...] Like I didn't have the physical body that you require to grow, you know, as a male in Australian society. [...] I got harassed by

fellows here in Australia because I'm like Vietnamese. [...] This is where the Oriental desire really came in, when I have old middle-aged white men coming up to me and asking me whether I want to have sex with them. [...] And masculinity in the fact that we are 'Coolies' which is where [...] you automatically establish that master/servant relationship. [...] In Australia [...] we've got space everywhere [...] but we've a bigger resistance to how to get intimate. [...] Because I'm actually a person of both continents of Asia and Australia that is the other part of masculinity I like, which is how Asian bodies work [...] here.

Paul Gilroy (1993) writes that visual technologies are an important aspect of the visible present to be linked with what might be called technologies of existence. Technologies of existence form self-knowledge as well as knowledge of 'others'. The visual is the mode through which Huy Dong compares and differentiates his gendered subjectivity from Australian masculinity as an aesthetic ideal. This process of differentiation is constituted not only by Huy Dong's understanding that hearing disability has limited his possibilities of knowing the "outside world" of speaking and hearing. He identifies two distinct processes that affect the operation of social expulsion instituted along race and gender axes of differentiation. First, a self-contrasting of his "Asian body" with both "Tarzan" and "Michelangelo"-like "physical body [...] of the white man's system" leads to the self-labelling of his body as "weak". Secondly, the experience of harassment by "fellows here in Australia" is understood as a result of a racialised signifying structure where the "Oriental" male body—a body simultaneously identified as "Coolie"—invokes the articulation of a discourse of a "master/servant" relationship. This excerpt from the interview with Huy Dong reveals there is no line of demarcation between his masculinity, hearing disability, racial and sexual identity. Instead, as Butler would frame it, "these vectors of power require and deploy each other for the purpose of their own articulation" (1993: 18). Each process of differentiation serves to instantiate the limits of normative masculine subjectivity from which Huy Dong is positioned as digressive.

In order to counteract this, Huy Dong aspires to construct his gendered identity by inscribing his body with a white heterosexual discourse of idealised masculinity. The crafting of the "Tarzan" and "Michelangelo"-like body with pencil on canvas may be read as an expression of Huy Dong's desire to rework this masculine aesthetic on the canvas of his own body. This point is illustrated when he says, "I wanted to become that [...] [t]he physical

body [...] of the white man's system". The performance of drawing is a visual form of subjective and social exploration that is denied through difficulties in abiding by the rules that structure verbal encounters.

It is instructive to note that Huy Dong's desire to "become [...] [t]he physical body [...] of the white man's system" is matched by an opposition to the violent, racist and misogynist practices that he associates with "the white man's system". He says: "I don't respect, [don't] always respect men, especially when they get drunk and because they get aggressive [and] [...] claim their women like property." His affirmation of the status ascribed to a white aesthetic ideal is fused with a distinct dislocation from the violent characteristics he assigns to masculine Anglo-ethnicity. This demonstrates how the condition of being a masculine subject is fragmented and contradictory. It is in this ambivalent structure of feeling and desire that Huy Dong mobilises a pluralistic and contradictory form of Australian masculinity.

Huy Dong's involvement in constructing a pluralistic gender identity is incited by the possibility of intimacy through a realignment of culturally different male bodies in Australian national space. Recognition of the wide space of the Australian outback and the felt need to police the boundaries of the nation as expressed through the maintenance of an Oriental desire and a "master/servant relationship" reveals the contradictory elements of repulsion, fascination and fear that ascribe his gendered social position. Huy Dong believes his masculine identity can be re-imagined as having a spatiality of permeable borders. He turns to the popular cultural forms of photography and performance as a significant resource for reinscribing a more permeable spatiality to perform a new Asian-Australian masculinity:

When he—William Yang—did *Friends of Dorothy* [...] I never knew how attractive [...] the Asian male body can be and with films like *Fallen Angels* and some of the Chinese filmmakers now they're pushing a brand new aesthetic [...] and I thought,

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<sup>11</sup> *Friends of Dorothy* was presented as a monologue with slides by William Yang as part of the 1999 *Feast Lesbian and Gay Cultural Festival* in Adelaide. The show was conceived as a selective social history of three decades of lesbian and gay culture in Sydney. The photographs presented in slide format were compiled into a book that was published in 1997.

<sup>12</sup> *Fallen Angels* (1995) is written and directed by Wong Kar-Wai and set in contemporary Hong-Kong. It depicts the plight of a disillusioned hit-man embarking on his last hit as he navigates the affections of his female partner. Cinematographer Christopher Doyle uses fast cuts, hand-cameras and light-visuals in a fashion that has often been compared to the 1960s' films of Jean-Luc Godard.

they're brilliant, they're gorgeous. [...] So I did acting and quit sketching but I never [...] was given the chance to take roles because of [...] the way I speak and my vocal delivery. That's why I want to be a director and work behind the scenes and I can create an environment which is suitable for basically all the populace and not—the arts [...] not only segregate the disciplines like Aboriginal and non-indigenous work emerging currently in Australia. Then you've got the discriminative thing [...] the alternatives [...] like the gay arts and stuff like that. [...] But I want to work in a totally non-bias fashion and create a theatre company that's [...] a form of explanation and communication of the Other. [...] It's necessary for me to be able to push the two polarities together and that's where I think art and culture is. [...] I want to be able to create a new genesis [of] [...] experimental theatre [...] that is not seen in the middle-class white culture of Australia. What we should be doing at the moment is reinvigorating and reinventing the self [...] becoming [...] postmodern.

Huy Dong describes the “brand new aesthetic” of Asian-Australian male bodies in the photographs of William Yang and the cinematic mediations of Chinese filmmakers as “attractive”, “brilliant” and “gorgeous”. His attraction to these representational images invites consideration of the role of such cultural resources in his own mediation of alternative forms of gendered knowledge and subjectivity. William Yang's photographs in his show *Friends of Dorothy* relate to Yang's own background as an Australian-born Chinese male who identifies as gay. Yang employs images of muscular gay Asian male bodies in his exhibition that help illustrate what he describes as “moments in time in a haphazard document of Sydney's gay subculture” (Yang 1997: 3). What is significant, however, is the way a racial discourse embedded in the corporeal images presented in *Friends of Dorothy* subverts Huy Dong's aesthetic equation of Asian male bodies as abstract and silent visual “things”. For Huy Dong, Yang's photographic images of gay Asian men are partially representative of, yet intrinsic to, the beautiful bodies that constitute Sydney's gay subculture. These images help rechart the significance of performance as a resource for the projection of an alternative future of increasingly fluid identities and subjectivities.

The affective sensations of “attraction” Huy Dong experiences in relation to the “brand new aesthetic” of Asian male bodies in the work of Yang, as well as some contemporary Chinese filmmakers, articulate a desire to (re)narrate Australian gendered corporealities in the arts arena. Narration for Huy Dong

takes the form of acting that is later replaced by the practice of directing theatre. Huy Dong wants to be a director to “create an environment which is suitable for basically all the populace” and that is neither exclusionary nor discriminatory. The new vocabulary that Huy Dong desires to create is detached from, yet incited by, both the invisibility and hypervisibility that marks his experience of the everyday social. It is also detached from the modernist commitment of “middle-class white culture” to binarise racial, ethnic, classed and sexual identities into fixed hierarchical positions.

Huy Dong’s initial introduction into the world of acting and directing can be seen as a technique by which he navigates between “Tarzan/Michelangelo” and “Oriental/Coolie”, “image” and “reality”. His navigation of these concepts compels an acknowledgement of the *visibility* of queer Asian bodily desire as a strategic intervention into the ideological processes that maintain white, able-bodied masculinities as culturally dominant. Yang’s and some Chinese filmmakers’ constructions of Asian masculinities and sexualities incite Huy Dong to be admiring and appreciative rather than simply objectifying and voyeuristic. Huy Dong’s interpretation of these images helps consolidate his political imperative to pursue a vocation directing theatre. His political imperative is to identify and disrupt the limits of an idealistic white, masculine, able-bodied aesthetic as sole optic through which to elaborate an alternative ethics of social existence and interactive exchange.

Huy Dong believes that images of diverse Asian–Australian masculinities and sexualities can subvert the racist meanings attached to such bodies in the Australian public realm. He believes that theatre offers possibilities for the affirmation of a polysemy of Australian gendered, raced and sexual subjectivities. Huy Dong also understands theatre as tendering opportunities for increased “intimacy” among different bodies. The disruptive potential of the semiotic image in theatre represents the most important source of revolutionary power for *all* groups who have been marginalised and silenced because of their discursively ascribed subordinate status. Theatre offers possibilities for the self to “become [...] postmodern”—that is, through different modes of performance and display, acting bodies in theatre can create representations of self that are fragmented, changing and disruptive of boundaries.

In the following excerpt, Huy Dong articulates the potentiality of theatre to promote the emergence of this desired cultural condition into a national phenomenon. He believes this potential will emerge in what he calls the

intermediate space of “Generation X” which spans the boundaries of gender, class and race:

I won't be directing any Australian play unless I see some good relevance to our generation [...] Generation X [...] below thirty, thirty-five. [...] Because we've developed a core of ethical and social principles and environmental principles that's not been explained through the media. [...] We do not see each other in terms of race, we do not see each other in terms of gender, we do not see each other in terms of class [...] it's just an assimilation of all elements of our culture. I'm talking about we as [...] the new controllers of the future, we've got to set ourselves the visual explanation of where we want to go [...] and utilising sound, audio [...] using your sign language on stage. And the use of language which is the written language which is projected on the screen. I love to even experiment and have just deaf actors, impaired or deaf actors and blind actors on stage and see how they relate. [...] And like kinds of different discourses, like it may be Hispanic, it may be Oriental, it may be Anglo. [...] It's not a top-down approach [...] It's political. It's knowing the community and knowing the characters that are real to you [...] because I'm an outsider I can really look in and I [...] don't go to sides anymore. [...] It's given me the ability to be a better director and to analyse society.

Huy Dong maintains that to be a director of theatre is to practice a visual (re)creation of an environment suitable to “all the populace” beyond the male/female, hetero/homo, Australian/Asian, disabled/abled, white/Other oppositional stances that are critical in thinking national identity formations. Theatre is “a form of explanation and communication of the Other”—a practice that enables him to speak from his embodied self through the direction of performing bodies on stage without reifying himself as the metonymical subject of his speaking. By way of the imagistic portrayal of “deaf”, “blind” as well as “Hispanic” and “Oriental” bodies on stage—bodies whose interactive performances are not scripted in advance but are live engagements in interaction—Huy Dong suggests a lacuna of emergent identities and relationships as a technique for subverting the fixity of Australian economies of identity and belonging. This subversion, while under his direction, recognises the power of the actors' bodies to construct the meaning of the play itself. Thus, he creates a context that allows multiple bodies to “speak” for themselves.

Huy Dong's approach to theatre can also be seen to translate into an exercise in communal transformation. There is clearly a profound transformation from the marginalised "I" to the "we", as theatre offers not only a space where Huy Dong can take seriously how "he", as "I", is individuated. Theatre also allows him to identify the way "our generation [...] Generation X [...] below thirty, thirty-five" do not see each other in terms of race, class and gender. Huy Dong's narrative of discovering the multiplicity of identities that make up Australian society—a narrative he says is absent from white middle-class culture—involves his positioning and situatedness within a broader generation and collective community. Huy Dong believes this practice of inclusion should constitute new modes of experimental theatre.

The expression of multiplicity and the bringing together of the seemingly discrepant in theatre become important ways of reworking the historic nationalistic injustices of segregation of the subordinated groups of Generation X. By constructing subjective representation within a framework that can accommodate social relations between margin (Hispanic, Oriental, deaf, blind) and centre (Anglo), Huy Dong is fashioning an alternative tradition of action and authority that disrupts the privilege ascribed to the white, able-bodied, middle-class and conservative male role. In this context, he can be seen to be performing what Edward Said calls a "contrapuntal reading". For Said, the contrapuntal necessitates an ability "to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant" (1993: 36). It involves an understanding that "various practices can be read and understood together since they belong to comparable fields of human experience" (1993: 36).

Huy Dong takes account of the margin and the centre, that of white middle-class culture and that of resistance to it, by way of extending his readings to include what has been forcibly excluded. He is utilising theatre as a space to explore what new forms of politics can emerge when marginal bodies are seen as important to the fashioning of a particular style of life in Australia. This representational strategy of reading margin and centre together participates in and performs the process of what Huy Dong calls an "assimilation of all elements of our culture". This process aims to subvert hierarchical modes of becoming through the performative relation of multiple and discrepant identities to an alternative futuristic condition of national social and political existence.

The project Huy Dong describes illustrates the importance of performance as a language of identity contestation and subversion informed by personal

embodied histories of exclusion. This exclusion is predicated on a white able-bodied aural/oral masculine cultural order. Huy Dong's seduction into the visual realm of culture is forged through the desire to reclaim all bodies from their abjection in the Australian social formation. To undertake this task, Huy Dong ascribes a political imperative where acting bodies move and touch each other on stage without reference to a prior script. The interactions between diverse ethnic, racialised, 'abled' and gendered bodies are improvised tactile engagements directed by the actors themselves. The language for interaction and communication developed here is also projected by way of the aesthetic media of sign language and written text on screen. These media are defined by Huy Dong as visual explanations that contest the core principles that structure traditional modes of social engagement and belonging in Australia. Considering that the visual is how Huy Dong interprets the social world "because of [his] deafness"—and it is the visual in theatre that he believes has the potential for a nationalist corporeal liberation—his story endorses a privileging of alternative forms of interactive engagement that, in this instance, subverts the power of the aural/oral as dominant language and communicative strategy for the future. It demonstrates the value of the visual intermediation of gender, race and disability and the possibility of turning that mediation into an embodied performance of a non-hierarchical style of collective ethical being.

## Conclusion

Huy Dong's experience of doing theatre is an ongoing negotiation of the normative values of male corporeality that structure white Australian masculinity, and his aspiration for an ambivalent and more permeable subjectivity that is acknowledged and celebrated in Australian culture. It is by the very means of an embodied sensibility constructed through Huy Dong's problematic history of interactive spoken engagement, and his difficulties securing a viable masculine positioning in the Australian everyday, that theatre gains significance as a shifting site of anti-racist, anti-ableist and anti-homophobic social and cultural practices. Fashioned through a diversity of aesthetic styles of social interaction and communication on stage that include the utilisation of moving bodies, sign language, and the projection of textual images on screen, this shifting site simultaneously performs Huy Dong's desire for an alternative mode of masculine belonging in the Australian body politic. This alternative mode of masculine belonging repudiates assumptions that privilege the spoken word as singular mechanism through which knowledge and subjectivity can emerge. Huy

Dong celebrates the affective experiences of pleasure, ecstasy, and intimacy through the embodied and sensate diversity of communications and practices that the forum of performance incites and permits.

The sensual and Dionysian experiences discussed by Huy Dong cannot be considered as carefree and individuated exercises of pleasure. They should be seen as part of an attempt to implicitly and explicitly articulate and assert difference in the face of dominant meanings – meanings often directed at the reinforcement of feelings of marginality, powerlessness and exclusion, particularly for “Generation X”. This is illustrated in his comment that theatre is “a form of explanation and communication of the Other”—an “Other” whose ethics and politics are not usually recognised or heard within the mainstream. Resistance to, and the transformation of, essentialist representations of knowledge and subjectivity involve forms of closeness and proximity with others in order to deal with the oppression and exclusion of “Generation X”. This proximity that joins Huy Dong’s “I” to others forms a tenuous and creative “we”. It is here that theatre, as the making visible of those identities concealed by notions of identity as self-presence and singular, becomes the basis for a transformative and collective ethics and politics. In contrast to the either/or choice imposed by binarisms, Huy Dong’s story prompts a way of understanding the necessary movement of racial, sexual, disabled and masculine identities as performed within the exigency of caring for others in wider communities. Directing theatre actively challenges and exposes an extreme proximity to experience—it may be seen as an act of abstraction but one that always already retains connections with the lived. His story demonstrates that an openness to the sensual and Dionysian in scholarly analyses can reveal the multiple layering of the making of masculinity as intersected across and through raced, classed, gendered, sexual and disabled positions and spatial arenas.

Huy Dong’s story enables us to hear disabled masculinities as an ongoing performative mediation across the sites of spoken exchange and the communicative practices facilitated by the forum of performance. His creative capacity to (re)construct identity in and across cultural and social contexts of spoken encounters and performance shows the temporality and contingency of masculine and disabled identities. Participation in the arts renders meaningful a strengthening of masculine corporeal affiliations—an experience that is largely unavailable in spoken encounters. The diversity of the affective relations that Huy Dong experiences in the construction of his gendered subjectivity in artistic space resonates with the perspective of Nietzsche (1968: 633-4) that scholars cannot know in advance what the body

is capable of doing or achieving. Huy Dong's story shows that the hearing-disabled masculine body's capacity for becoming cannot be charted a priori. Subjectivity always has the potential to expand its capacities. His story suggests an understanding of the body as never finished, always in the process of becoming something other through affective, symbolic and lived experience. In this way, it is the disabled ear that hears masculinity as replete with many meanings and knowings. It is the disabled ear that turns and tunes to a lack of fixity—the “always” in the construction of masculinity and disability that renders both identities processes of hard labour and a labour that theatre helps to make present.

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An Audible Original from Audible Theater, *Proof of Love* is an Emerging Playwrights Commission, written for and available exclusively on Audible. Constance thought she had a happy life and a loving husband. Suddenly, a tragic accident splinters her upper-class black family - and forces Constance to face uncomfortable truths about her marriage and herself. *Proof of Love* is the explosive, funny, and moving new one-woman play by Chisa Hutchinson, member of the first class of talent supported by the Audible Playwrights Fund. 5 out of 5 stars. Unexpected. When playing the theater, the child tries a lot of roles. The child independently comes up with the plot and voices the characters, conveys their mood and actions. It is known that a stuttering child, entering a specific image, can speak freely. Through various types of theater, it is necessary to develop fine and general motor skills in children and to select games for theatricalization in the first stages of working with stuttering children according to the "teacher" children scheme, and in the latter, "child" children. In addition, theatrical games should develop speech situations conducive to encouraging the development of speech and speech communication skills [5]. Intonation is one of the most important expressive means of speech. Audible acts: hearing (dis)abled masculinities™, in *What A Man's Gotta Do?*, ed. Bollen, J., Kiernander, A. and Parr, B. (NSW, Centre for Australian Language, Literature, Theatre and Screen Studies), pp. 222-240. Mac an Ghail, M. 1994. *The Making of Men: Masculinities, Sexualities and Schooling* (Buckingham, Open University Press). McClary, S. 1991. *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press). The theatre of England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth I and often extended to the close of the theatres in 1640. The technique of calling upon your own memories to understand a character's emotions. A group of theatrical artists working together to create a theatrical production. The overall structure or shape of a work that frequently follows an established design. Forms may refer to a literary type (e.g., narrative form, short-story form, dramatic form) or to pattern of meter, line, and rhymes (e.g., stanza form, verse form). Theatre that focuses on public performance in the front of an audience and in which the final production is most important. In literary and dramatic studies, genre refers to the main types of literary form, principally tragedy and comedy.