
An essay by Ho Ming Leung

Disidentification. I remembered my childhood was spent watching cartoons, mainly cute ones like carebears, my little pony, Gummy bears, Teddy Ruxpin, Darkwing Dark, Chip and Dale, Duck Tales, and spliced in between with educational ones like Sesame Street, The Elephant Show and Under the Umbrella Tree. With the savings I had, I would buy cassettes of soundtracks of Disney animation movies. Among my favourites were Beauty and the Beast, The little mermaid, Aladdin, The Land before time, American tail and American tail 2 - Fievel goes west. In my spare time, when I am not doing homework, or watching tv or sleeping, I would be trying on my mother's lace nightgowns, putting on her make up and then in another instance, don on some blankets and jump on my parent's spring mattress pretending to be Guanyin flying in the skies and then settling a red metal basket upside down on the bed and sat on it, pretending it was my lotus and I was Guanyin doing meditation. (later I found out she was actually a male Indian prince). When I was slightly older, watching I love Lucy was the highlight of my day after coming back home from primary school. I learnt how to eugggh from her and that gave great training later when I moved on to being hooked by Fran Drescher in The Nanny and acquired the nasal sound of hers especially the catchphrase mr sheffield...of course in my repertoire of songs I know how to sing are the ones from the movie musical The sound of music, and I loved how captain von Trapp sang in his deep baritone in edelweiss and I tried singing the same as he did, luscious and stirring. I loved how Lucy and Ricky are a happy couple and that Fran eventually married mr sheffield and Maria climbed the mountain with the captain and her 7 newly acquired children. I forgot to mention that in addition to all these English tv, I also watched mandarin and cantonese tv with my parents and usually the couples were in some sort of marital troubles. Every year during my holidays, my mum would take me back to Ipoh Malaysia to visit my maternal grandmother. 2 of my aunts lived with my grandmother, one the youngest who is a pianist and practices on her piano every late night and who is a christian. The other the eldest, still single now, who takes primary care of my grandmother and also buys me breakfast every morning and who is a taorist. My favourite breakfast is wanton mee bought in the Sen Wo Yun old market. My dad because of work would be in Singapore and the way my parents communicated, in order to save money, is to dial 3 times and hang up to each other. I think I took up piano because of the influence of my auntie, and my favourite pop song that I can play and remember by hard is a Chinese one titled xin bu liao qing (new never-ending love). We stopped going back to Ipoh after my maternal grandmother passed away. My memories of the old single storey semi detached house which used to house my maternal grandfather and his 2 wives and his 12 children(3 boys and 9 girls), were the swing in the garden, the ceiling fans, the reclining lounge chair made of plastic nylon strings, the marriage photos of my aunties and uncles hung on the wall near the entrance and the smelly but lovely dogs, as well as the story of the 9th daughter who was given away when she was a baby because there were too many mouths to feed and a baby boy infant who died. The last cartoon or rather animation I really enjoyed is the Prince of Egypt, and I remembered belting out When you believe, trying to reach the high notes of the song like Mariah Carey and Whitney houston. This song carried me through my junior college days. A few years before the prince of Egypt was aired in the cinemas, I was told by a female classmate that I sashayed. Ever since then, I practiced hard to walk like a man, and I think I succeeded because I've been commended that I walk like a male model. Now people say I walk like a dancer. Well, I am a dancer and also a choreographer and in recent times an independent artist. With all jobs cancelled and postponed this year due to covid19, I was lucky to be given a micro residency to work on a workbook in the

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CB period on my project and I decided to spend the time to unpack how I employed disidentificatory strategies using the movie in the mood for love directed by Wong Kar Wai and starring Maggie Cheung and Tony Leung as a source of inspiration. According to theorist José Esteban Muñoz, disidentification are ways those outside the racial and sexual mainstream negotiate majority culture by transforming these workings for their own cultural purposes. It is also something of a performance in its own right, an attempt to fashion a queer world by working on, with, and against dominant ideology. At this point I would also like to add that while working on the project, I was able to define my practice which is adopting ways of viewing and creating with the female gaze as defined by theorist Jill Soloway and questioning how as a cis male I can work on that. Watching in the mood for love, I was mesmerised by Maggie Cheung's stunningly beautiful, statuesque screen presence, her hair always worn glamorously up, with discreet droplet earrings and whose elegant roof raising sexy form the camera is wont to follow as she sashays along alleys and into corridors. At the same time I was smitten by Tony Leung's desperately poignant sensitive face which is at once lined and boyish. I wanted to embody both of them and partake in wanton mee together with them. What's between them is a secret liaison whose every glance and touch has a silent static crackle of tension: not sexual tension precisely, but the tension of two people who are consciously duplicating the form of their partner's adultery, with all the snatched restaurant meals and meetings in hotel rooms, but forgoing the sexual denouement and refusing to make the four-cornered puzzle snap into place. They have become siblings rather than lovers, a brother and sister orphaned by the absence of trust, and sustained by they own faint odour of incest. (1) Their situation closely reminds me of my inner self negotiation with my performativity of my gender, the yin and yang within me. There is a scene where Maggie and Tony playact imaginary scenes of her confronting her husband. She asks him: "Do you have a mistress?" And in the end of the playacting, she said " I didn't expect it to hurt so much. " I felt as wounded as they were as I thought of the day I disassociated myself from my yin and that Maggie was yin confessing her pain to me. Right now, I feel very comfortable of how I am. to go back sashaying would be equally blasphemous. But what I think will work is in distilling the essence of what allures me of yin and trying it on. The slight subtle epaulement of the neck, the coy glance now and then, the soft shoulders hanging down, softening instead of being hard all the time. Just slightly teasing people's expectation of how I should perform my gender and being confident of growing into myself. Looking back into my childhood, when I was transversing between modes of campyness and mischief boyishness, I remembered buying sailor moon paper dolls books from the trishaw man uncle that comes by my maternal grandmother's house every other day ringing his bell to sell knick knacks and snacks. I would cut the paper dolls out, and enjoy putting various clothes and accessories on it. I can't remember whether I was already then projecting myself onto the dolls but this memory inspired me to create a paper doll in the mood for love series for this micro residency workbook to work on disidentification strategies. While cutting the figures from images of Maggie I found on the internet, I found myself unconsciously moving my body subtly into the pose of the figure I was cutting and felt as if I was experiencing the same emotion as Maggie as when she was in that pose. Perhaps it was the mirror neurons in my brain actively working, that created a sort of visual kinesthetic empathy through the physical act of tracing the figure. If you are interested in a little experiment, I wonder if you can try also cutting my paper dolls while listening to a playlist https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLp4iqaCrUMYEPTGx0_Rg3aQ6ghAOvrplk that I have mixed together. And at the end of the activity, perhaps you can describe to me or imagine me, how I am, what I like to wear and project onto me, ho ming leung.

(1)<https://www.theguardian.com/film/2000/oct/27/1>
