# Reliving the Past, Regarding the Future

## Tracing Critical Hope in Queer and Kinky Performance

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A Thesis Written for the Research Master Gender Studies
at Utrecht University
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37737 words

Utrecht University

**Abstract**

This thesis analyzes critical hope, a concept derived from critical pedagogy studies, as a queer way of re-configuring temporality through working with queer and kinky performance. Firstly, I argue that queer theories of temporality do not address negative affect sufficiently, and that queer notions of futurity fail to account for the role of the past and the present in these imaginations. Through emphasizing the ways in which the past persists into the present, I argue for critical hope as a necessary intervention and a fruitful modality of hoping for marginalized groups that are denied both an imaginary of a future as well as an awareness of their past. Through working with Bob Flanagan's artwork, a kinky disabled artist, and *Not Fabulous*, a queer performance piece, I argue for the necessity of understanding the ways in which the past continues to persist in the present for people with disabilities and queer and trans people of color. Within these case studies, I focus on the role of desire and shame in their re-configurations of temporality and hope. I take shame as a critically hopeful affect as it highlights the systems of oppression that continue to shame certain subjectivities for their sexual desire, and I investigate the ways in which Bob Flanagan and the performers of *Not Fabulous* portray and re-enact desire in their performances and artwork as a way to work through this shame, eventually leaving space for ecstasy, hope and community. By using affect theory, queer theory and psychoanalytic theory, I finally argue for critical hope's transformative potential as it is not only able to construct a modality of hoping that is profoundly aware of systems of oppression, but also to encourage a creative imagination of a – queer – world that is not-yet-here.

**Acknowledgments**

Thank you to my supervisor, Magdalena Górska, for your honesty, your support, your persistent belief in me and my writing, and to Layal Ftouni, my second reader, for sparking inspiration and motivation when I lost it. Another big thank you to Christine Quinan, for your valuable insights, and to Kathrin Thiele, for your support and kindness throughout the years. This program is only this critical, comprehensive and urgently important because of all the teachers in the program.

Thank you to my dear housemates (Jori, Dana and Noor), who make life so much easier, softer and kinder (*you take the sharp edges off*), and specifically to Cecilia, who carried me when I couldn't carry myself. There's no one I would have rather shared these two years with. I cherish you endlessly, and I am convinced that this ending is the beginning of so much more for us.

Thank you to Julia, Lotte and Margot, for knowing me better than I know myself, for always providing me with new and much needed perspectives, for showing me the absurdity of it all. My critical thoughts, my impulsive ideas, my hope for anything at all can all be traced back to you.

Thank you to Ana, Lola, Mengxi, Elena and Melanie, for providing me with much-needed distraction, support, breaks and relief. I believe in all of your projects tremendously, and I will miss you all very much.

Thank you most of all to my parents and my brother, for your unremitting support. I am eternally grateful that I am able to share *all* of my sides with you. I love you impossibly much.

And finally, thank you to Bob, Sheree, Ottoline, Lucas, Paula, and Igor. Your art makes me believe another world is possible (and you make me want to share it with you).

# Table of Contents

# Introduction: Hope in Desiring Differently

> *"A central paradox of any transformative criticism is that its dreams for the future are founded on a history of suffering, stigma, and violence"*
> *- Heather Love (2007, p. 1)*

## Introduction: Temporality, Critical Hope and Queer Sexuality

Understanding the past, present and future as always already intertwined is fundamental for those queers that are denied a future, for those who are constantly reminded of the past, and for those who desire for a different present. Current conceptualizations of queer futures, however, often remain void of an awareness of the past. As the above quote by Heather Love demonstrates, dreams and imaginations of the future are contingent on the histories that continue to remain present for many queers. This thesis, therefore, arises out of a concern with the current ways in which the idea of hope and imaginations for the future are constructed in queer studies. Particularly, I am interested in how certain utopian theories and theories on futurity are constructed in such a way that they neglect negative affect as a part of hope *or* construct the future as hopeless altogether (see for the former Muñoz, 2009 and for the latter, Edelman, 2004). More specifically, I am invested in understanding shame as a hopeful affect as it offers new ways of understanding the past and the present in relation to the future. I understand the positioning of shame and hope as mutually exclusive affects as a theoretical endeavor that promotes the idea that queers should move beyond shame – an affect from the past – in order to get to the future that is one of pride and happiness. Instead, I argue for the persistent role of the past in the present, and thereby in the future. Hence, I argue that imaginations of the future are necessarily contingent on an awareness of and critical engagement with the past.

Therefore, in this thesis, I propose the concept of critical hope – taken from critical pedagogy studies (Bozalek et al., 2014) – as a form of hoping that enables a recreation of a queer understanding of temporality through its emphasis on the past and present, rather than a mere focus on the future. Critical hope encourages the understanding and practicing of (Bozalek et al., p. 51):

> "the necessary tension between criticality – of privilege, charity, hegemony, representation, history and inequality – along with a hope that is neither naïve or idealistic, but that remains committed to ideals of justice, reflexivity, and solidarity"

Thus, critical hope posits criticality and hope next to each other by emphasizing the importance of an intersectional understanding of inequality, as well as imaginative activism that centers on ideals of justice and solidarity.

Therefore, in this thesis I am interested in deconstructing the relationship between hope and futurity; not by negating the idea that critical hope imagines a different – queer – future, but by emphasizing that this future can only be realized if we come to understand and work through the past and its processes of pathologization and marginalization that continue to persist into the present, as well as the shame that comes with this understanding. This argument relies on an intersectional critique of optimist views on the future (Rodríguez, 2011), by highlighting the ways in which certain folks – such as disabled people and queer people of color – remain positioned outside of this narrative of progress, sexual liberation and hopeful futures.

I specify these theoretical explorations in queer studies, affect theory and critical hope studies by engaging with the realm of queer sex, desire and sexuality. Through working with critical hope in relation to queer and kinky sexuality in this thesis, I highlight the necessity of understanding the past, present and future intertwined in affects – such as desire and shame – related to sexuality. I choose to engage with sex and sexuality precisely because it offers a productive platform to perform an analysis of shame and hope, as historical processes have defined what has become normative and "abject" sex and sexualities; processes that I argue continue to influence the present for queers in the form of (sexual) shame. However, as I argue, hope can be traced in these shameful interactions precisely because desire allows for a different way of constructing the future through working *through* and not *against* shame (Georgis, 2013).

In her essay *Thinking Sex* (1984), Gayle Rubin argues that the realm of sex and sexuality is "imbued with conflicts of interest and political maneuver, both deliberate and incidental" (p. 143). In this way, according to Rubin, sex is always

political, irrespective of the geopolitical and historical circumstances. However, I am invested in understanding the *current* urgency in addressing sex and sexuality as a political matter, as well as the ways in which viewing sexuality as political has the potential to go against ideologies of sex negativity and pathologization. According to Rubin, sex negativity refers to the western idea that sex is a "dangerous, destructive, negative force" (p. 150). In this way, sex becomes treated as suspicious, as contemporary western culture comes to understand sex as bad unless it adheres to strict norms that "justify" its practicing; such as marriage, love and reproduction (Rubin, 1984). In this way, a hierarchy of sexual value is created, in which the legitimate sexual subject is one that is heterosexual, married and reproductive. Below these subjects stand the heterosexual subjects that are not married but that continue to reproduce other desirable manners of practicing sexuality, such as monogamy. Thereafter, the lesbian and gay male long-term couples follow, which according to Rubin verge on respectability. Finally, on the bottom of the pyramid, there are those subjectivities that become associated with "deviant" sexualities, such as those who Rubin describes as "the most despised sexual castes" (p. 151). She argues that these subjectivities take the shape of "transsexuals, transvestites, fetishists, sadomasochists, sex workers such as prostitutes and porn models" (p. 151). Furthermore, as Rubin argues, any LGBT subject that does not adhere to heteronormative ideas of monogamy and stability – which I take to be queer subjectivities – are included in this category. Someone that is placed higher in this hierarchy of sexual value, according to Rubin, is rewarded with "certified mental health, respectability, legality, social and physical mobility, institutional support, and material benefits" (p. 151). Thus, sexuality is deeply embedded in other social structures, and strongly influences success or failure in other spheres of life. Those subjectivities that fall outside of the framework of respectable sexuality are subjected to "mental illness, disreputability, criminality, restricted social and physical mobility, loss of institutional support, and economic sanctions" (p. 151).

In order to construct a queer critique of hetero- and homonormativity, a distinction needs to be drawn between heteronormative and homonormative politics of sexuality, and queer politics of sexuality. Weiss (2008) argues that there is a tension between "equality as sameness with normativity" (p. 89) and "equality as freedom for difference from the norm" (p. 89). The first conception of equality can be

seen as the equality pursued by mainstream LGBT-politics, which mostly aim at assimilation, whereas the second conception is one centered in queer movements. Queer social movements aim at addressing the complex and intersectional processes of criminalization, discrimination and marginalization. The term queer – in the sense we understand it contemporarily – was coined in 1991 by Teresa de Lauretis and was consequently taken up by Judith Butler in the early 90's (Kemp, 2009). Sexuality became – and continues to be – the main terrain upon which much of queer theory and practice is based, precisely because queer opens up the term sexuality and challenges its definitions by exploring "the ways in which sexuality can be understood, and how we might dismantle or deconstruct our western assumptions about what sexuality is" (Kemp, 2009, p. 12).

Thus, queer approximations of sexuality are intersectional in their approach. As Kemp (2009) argues: "This erotics of identity, this linking of sexuality to the wider socio-political field provides queer with a broad base from which to direct its critique" (p. 13). Queer theory is invested in understanding the different ways in which sexuality intersects with other identities such as gender, race and ability in complex, layered and systematized ways. As Cohen (1997) claims: "In queer theorizing the sexual subject is understood to be constructed and contained by multiple practices of categorization and regulation that systematically marginalize and oppress those subjects thereby defined as deviant and "other"". With the current increasing support for and authority of the right in the western world, there is an increase in processes of silencing, censuring and criminalizing sexualized and racialized subjects (Rodríguez, 2011). The response of the mainstream gay and lesbian movement to these oppressive processes is merely a projection of the homosexual as reproducing an image of homonormative domesticity that is worthy of political respect and validation (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 332). In this thesis, I define homonormativity as (Duggan, 2002, p. 179):

> "[a] politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions but upholds and sustains them while promising the possibility of a demobilized gay constituency and a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption"

Thus, following Duggan's definition, homonormative politics do not allow for a critique of and resistance to heteronormative assumptions and institutions but instead encourage a politics of assimilation in which LGBT subjects are expected and stimulated to adapt to heteronormative ideas and ideals about desire, sex and sexuality. This homonormative domesticity opposes what Berlant and Warner (1998) refer to as the publicness that is inherent to the resistance to norms of queer sex(uality), and, moreover, excludes all subjectivities that fall outside of the notion of homonormativity, such as queer, trans, and racialized subjectivities.

Following Berlant and Warner (1998), I argue that queer culture building has the radical aspirations of "not just a safe zone for queer sex but the changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex that appear when the heterosexual couple is no longer the referent or the privileged example of sexual culture" (p. 548) Thus, queer sexuality has the potential to transform the social as well as the political realm, by challenging heteronormativity, which penetrates the entire social and political sphere. It does so by challenging not only "the project of normalization that has made heterosexuality hegemonic" (p. 548), but also by unsettling "those material practices that, though not explicitly sexual, are implicated in the hierarchies of property and propriety that [are described as] heteronormative" (p. 548). The cultural products of desire and sexuality analyzed in this thesis will be taken examples of this queer culture building.

Although this thesis addresses expressions and practices of sexual desire, I am aware of the danger of equating queerness with (different) sexual desiring, as this equation excludes those subjectivities that identify as asexual. Asexuality is defined as a person "who does not experience sexual attraction" (Cerankowski & Milks, 2010, p. 651). Some people who are asexual also define as aromantic – meaning they experience no romantic interest – whereas others experience romantic but not sexual interest. Asexuality remains underrepresented, misrepresented, and is rarely a topic of interest in (feminist and queer) research. Asexual activists are countering the contemporary pathological discourse around asexuality, and aim to locate asexuality as a social and sexual identity that is viable. According to Cerankowski and Milks, a concentrated study of asexuality is needed, which should place itself at the intersection of feminist and queer studies, as "asexuality challenges many existing assumptions about gender and sexuality" (p. 655). Thus, it is not only engaging in

sexual activity that can be subversive and queer, but also the *not* engaging in sexual activity, as it challenges ideas of sexual desire as normal and natural. In this thesis, I discuss stereotypes of disabled people as asexual. With this, I point to oppressive discourses created to marginalize and objectify people with disabilities, as well as to take away their sexual agency. This argument does not invalidate the identity of asexuality as a viable sexual identity, nor does it claim that there are no queer people or people with disabilities that identify as asexual. Moreover, this thesis attempts to think sexuality beyond sexual interaction, but rather as a tool for social transformation that extends beyond the realm of the sexual into the realm of the social and the political by altering the public imagination.

This thesis aims to answer the question "How does critical hope offer a queer and necessary manner of re-imagining the relationship between the past, present and future in queer and kinky sexual interaction?". I work with this research question through two different case studies, one being Bob Flanagan, a disabled performance artist that works with BDSM, and the second one being *Not Fabulous*, a queer performance and dance piece on community, desire and shame. I offer critical hope as a necessary intervention in current queer understandings of temporality by highlighting the importance of negative affect, and in particular shame. Precisely because shame and queer sexuality are intimately bound up together, I argue that it becomes a fruitful affect in understanding the ways in which certain sexual subjectivities continue to be shamed for their desires. This understanding, I argue, is necessary in order to alter sexual and social futures.

## Terminology

### *Queer and Queerness*

In order to contextualize my research question, I engage in this section with the terms *queer, queerness* and *BDSM*. As I engage with a specific definition of *queer* that extends beyond a non-heterosexual orientation, I also include non-normative sexual practices such as BDSM in my definition of queerness. In this thesis, I explicitly distinguish between *queer* and *gay* politics. As I have elaborated upon before, homonormativity is the construct that allows gay and lesbian individuals to live relatively normative lives, in line with heteronormative constructions of what is a viable way of living one's life, for instance in the form of reproduction, monogamy

and marriage. Gay liberation activism and gay and lesbian studies in academia have promoted a politics of pride and assimilation, which leaves little room for radical practices of resistance to institutionalized normativity (Rand, 2012). As Alok Vaid-Menon and Janani Balasubramanian state in their spoken word poem *It Gets Bougie* (2015), which was written as a response to the campaign initiated by Dan Savage *It Gets Better*, a campaign much critiqued for its homonormative framework[1]:

> "It gets bougie, when there are two hundred beds for homeless queer youth in New York City and your friends are all signing off on leases for new mansions
> It gets bougie when every national gay organization in this country invests in private prisons and drone warfare
> It gets bougie when marriage and not murder is the number one queer issue"

Thus, as Alok Vaid-Menon and Janani Balasubramanian's spoken word poem illustrates, a queer critique is an intersectional critique. In this thesis, I use intersectionality as a framework for understanding the different ways in which multiple layers of oppression operate in order to uphold systematic power inequalities on the basis of identity categories such as race, gender, class, ability and sexual orientation. As Crenshaw (1991) argues, intersectionality allows for a more complex analysis that understands how these identity categories interact on simultaneous and multiple levels. Thus, I identify queerness as a construct that questions the intersecting norms upon which oppressive and heteronormative institutions are built and the ways in which they work to uphold systems of privilege and oppression, and, moreover, as an effort to resist and work through these normativities.

Queerness distinguishes itself from mainstream LGBT identities and politics by making explicit the ways in which these identities and politics fail to acknowledge the ways in which the dominant structures remain oppressive to subjectivities that

[1] "It gets better" was a campaign started by Dan Savage in 2010, aimed at offering hope and outreach to queer youth in crisis. The campaign was heavily critiqued because of its unquestioned privileged assumptions that implied that life after high school would continue to improve and involve projects

occupy more marginalized identities. As Cohen (1997) argues:

> "Many of us [queers] continue to search for a new political direction and agenda, one that does not focus on integration into dominant structures but instead seeks to transform the basic fabric and hierarchies that allow systems of oppression to persist and operate efficiently"

Thus, queerness brings with it a political awareness that focuses on modifying systems of power that are in place to oppress those subjectivities that hold the least privilege. In this way, queerness can be taken up as meaning more than a category of identity, but also as referring to a way of doing politics. Looking at queerness as a *doing* rather than a *being* allows for a creative analysis of queerness that extends beyond nonessential identities of gender and sexuality that focuses on practices of resistance (Jakobsen, 1998). In this way, Jakobsen argues, queer becomes not only a noun and an adjective, but also a verb, as in *queering* the norm. Jakobsen argues that if one considers queerness as a type of resistance to the norm, it is important to understand what one means with norm. Through this, she highlights the important of distinguishing between norms, the normal, and normativity. Jakobsen defines normativity as "a field of power, a set of relations that can be thought of as a network of norms, that forms the possibilities for and limits of action" (p. 517) Norms, then are "the imperatives that materialize particular bodies and actions" (p. 517). Finally, the normal is "the average, the everyday, or the commonsensical" (p. 517), but, as Jakobsen argues, the normal and norms can become co-constitutive in such a way that they transform the average from simply being normal to becoming normative. This is precisely the case with heteronormativity, in which the normal (being heterosexual) becomes normative through the enforcing of norms that sustain its organization (Jakobsen, 1998). Jakobsen argues that queerness cannot be reduced to simply resisting the norms, as norms organized in heteronormativity are often not only complex but also contradictory. Thus, she argues, it is important for a queer critique to engage *with* the norm(s), rather than simply go *against* the norm(s), as this would be an impossible project due to the non-coherent nature of norms.

Thus, in this thesis, I take queerness as engaging itself with an engagement with norms, normativity and normalcy. In this way, I use queerness as a radical form

of critique. I use Hall's definition of radical as "being critically aware of and accountable to the historical, economic, social, and political contexts in which one lives" (p. 213). Hall points at the radical potential of both queer and disability theory and argues that their theories and movements do not only persistently critique of normalization, but also actively desire and work towards a different, more just world (Hall, 2014). Hall's definition of radical resonates with my usage of critical hope as a hope that is both aware and critical of oppressive circumstances, and motivated to transform these circumstances. I argue that it is in this way that a queer and crip[2] critique reproduces a form of hope that is critical.

Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, I take queerness as a *doing* rather than a *being,* as viewing queerness as a practice allows for an analysis of other non-normative sexualities as resistant. In this way, subjectivities that do not fall on the LGBT spectrum can still be viewed as engaging in queer practices. E. Patrick Johnson (2001) presents the term *Quare* in replacement of *Queer* in order to offer "a way to critique stable notions of identity and, at the same time, [locate] racialized and class knowledges" (p. 3). With his proposal of *Quare*, he argues for the importance of recognizing and acknowledging the identities and voices of queer people of color, which are often ignored in the processes of homogenization that take place when discussing queer experiences. With his argument, Johnson exposes the need to focus on difference rather than commonalities, in order to investigate the complexities of queerness in relation to deviation from the norms. He argues that contemporary conceptions of queerness have a tendency to use the term queer as an all-inclusive category of identity, a notion he refers to as "the false umbrella" (p. 3) of queer theory. Through this, queer theory fails to account for enough specificity of experience. By following Johnson's theory, thus, it becomes possible to use an intersectional framework when analyzing the experiences of different queer subjectivities, such as people who might not be "deviant" from norms of gender or sexuality, but from norms of race, ability, and class. This

[2] A term used to identify radical disability politics

analysis of queerness as both a doing rather than a being, and a moving away of queerness as simply a non-essential deviating gender or sexual identity, is especially useful when I analyze Bob Flanagan's work in chapter II – who is a disabled practitioner of BDSM/kink – as working with norms, normativities and normalcy.

*BDSM and Kink*

The term BDSM is often used interchangeably with the terms SM, S&M or S/M. All terms refer to a diverse community of people that include people who engage with bondage, pain or impact play, power dynamics such as domination and submission, roleplaying, and certain fetishes such as a fetish for leather or feet. The practices of people engaged with BDSM vary from occasionally using rope bondage during sexual intimacy with their partner, to people who live in 24/7 dominance/submission relationships and people who use BDSM to explore less common – and more stigmatized – fetishes such as incest or animal play. The term *kinky* – as opposed to *vanilla,* which denotes non-kinky practices and sexual interactions – has been put forward as an alternative inclusive term to refer to BDSM practices. Often, however, a distinction is made between people who are active members of the BDSM-scene and who live the BDSM-lifestyle on a daily basis, and *kinky* people who engage with BDSM only sometimes as part of their sexual practices with their partner, or who have certain fetishes (Weiss, 2011). For this chapter, I will use the terms BDSM and kinky interchangeably, though I will specify the type of BDSM I am discussing for each section. Furthermore, the word *play* will be used to indicate sexual interaction within a BDSM or kinky context, while acknowledging that there are opponents in the community who consider the word *play* not serious enough to describe their form of practicing sexuality. However, I choose to engage with the term as it resonates with Winnicott's (1971) notion of play, which proves to be a useful tool in investigation the relation between reality and fantasy. A *scene* will stand for a designated moment in time in which certain BDSM play takes place (Weiss, 2011). Finally, with *consent*, I mean the enthusiastic, conscious and independent agreement with the performing of or receiving of specifically discussed sexual or intimate acts.

BDSM stands for B&D: Bondage and Domination, S&M: Sadism and Masochism (or Sadomasochism) and D&S: Domination and Submission. The term *Bondage* is used to refer to being restrained during sexual activity, *Domination* –

sometimes also referred to as *Discipline* – entails the use of control and/or force during sexual interaction or play, *Sadism* involves inflicting pain and/or suffering onto a sexual partner – through the use of the body as well as objects such as whips –, *Masochism* comprises of sexual fantasies, preferences or behaviors that involve being humiliated, physically harmed or tortured to increase sexual pleasure, and finally, *Submission* refers to the undergoing of control and/or force during sexual interaction or play (Reynolds, 2007). Dominant/Submissive relations – consensual power inequality – are often seen as the foundation of BDSM. Commonly, these power exchanges do not involve the infliction of pain and suffering but often use methods of mental degradation and verbal humiliation, or practices such as bondage and spankings (Weiss, 2011). Another term for dominating is *topping,* where as another term for submitting is *bottoming*.

**Arguments and Structure**

This thesis concerns itself with the impossibility of overturning norms through sexuality and gender expression, and instead works with different manifestations of the enactment of hope – through queer and kinky performance – in which hope is not about overturning the past and moving beyond the present, but instead about working *with* the past and the present. This type of hoping will be referred to as critical hope. I argue that the only way to engage with the future is to engage with the past as well as the present. I research this type of hoping through manifestations of sexuality and desire. Thus, this thesis will make an argument against the *moving beyond*, and will instead focus on the process of *working through* difficulties, negative and shameful affects. These affects will be connected to queer ideas on temporality that point to the importance of "looking backward" (Love, 2007).

This thesis can be read as a theoretical contribution in (critical) hope studies and queer studies through theorizing the hopeful potential of affects that are socially and politically constructed as negative in relation to sexuality and eroticism. I argue that non-normative sexual practices expose critical hopefulness by a re-working and a re-imagining of the past and present, and through this, the future. In order to make this argument, the first chapter aims to show that queer sexuality allows for a working-through of negative affect – in relation to the past – and therefore offers an accessing point to different imaginations of the future. I make this argument by first

expanding on queer understandings of temporality, in order to investigate the ways in which existing theories fail to account for the role of negative affect in imaginations of queer futurities. Thereafter, I theorize critical hope as queer way of relating the past and present to the future. I further specify these theoretical explorations by engaging with queer sexuality in relation to shame and desire, and theorize the ways in which queerness and shame are tied up together, as well as the ways in which shame is a critically hopeful affect through its different construction of temporality and its emphasis on the ways in which the past persists in the present. I conclude this chapter by arguing that the only way for queer subjectivities to look forward, is thus to look backward.

The second chapter analyzes the intersection between BDSM studies and disability studies to argue for BDSM as a tool to work through shame and oppressive discourses and norms for people with functional diversity. It does so by drawing from psychoanalytic theory and deploying the concepts of play and creativity in order to highlight the ways in which BDSM allows for a practice of sexuality that navigates itself between reality and fantasy, and, moreover, that can re-work heteronormative and linear notions of temporality. Critical hope is traced in these practices through analyzing the work of performance artist Bob Flanagan, who had the genetic condition Cystic Fibrosis and spent the last years of his life in a 24/7 BDSM relationship, which he documented with his partner Sheree Rose. In this chapter, I engage with his work in three sections. Firstly, I argue that Flanagan's artwork engages in a flaunting of his shame in relation to his disability, which ultimately allows for him to re-define his agency. Secondly, I engage with the ideas of (non-)compliance and containment in order to argue that he uses his artwork to work through past practices of oppression and submission, thereby connecting BDSM and his disability in a specific and unique way, that allows for him to navigate his disability differently. Finally, through employing the concept of *ecstatic time* (Muñoz, 2009), I argue that Bob Flanagan's artwork and his BDSM practices allude to a different, more hopeful futurity for people with disabilities.

In the third chapter, I engage with the performance piece *Not Fabulous,* which was directed by Ottoline Calmeijer Meijburg and performed by Paula, Lucas and Igor in May, June and July 2018 in different contexts in Germany. The three performers are queer femmes of color, and I analyze their performance in this piece in the context

of their experience of shame both within and outside of the art institution. I analyze their expression of community and desire in relation to each other and in relation to the audience as a critically hopeful act, by first expanding on the necessity of safe spaces for trans and queer femme people of color. Thereafter, I elaborate on the relationship between trans and queer femininity and shame, after which I argue that the performers have a particular way of working through that shame both by their physical movements, as well as their way of re-directing the gaze to the audience. I finally argue that the ways in which the dancers portray desire and community offer a hopeful way of imagining the future differently for trans and queer femmes of color.

In the fourth and final chapter, I theorize different elements of the case studies together with critical hope. I do so by first elaborating on critical hope, after which I divide this analysis in two parts; firstly, I engage with the critical looking-backward that critical hope stimulates, after which I show the importance of the hopeful potential of critical hope. I finally argue that both *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's artwork expose the need for a critically hopeful way of configuring the past and present in relation to the future.

# I. Queer Desire as a Critically Hopeful Navigation of Temporality

> *"Queer temporalities, visible in the forms of interruption (…), are points of resistance to this [established] temporal order that, in turn, propose other possibilities for living in relation to indeterminately past, present, and future others: that is, of living historically"*
> *- Elizabeth Freeman (2010, p. xxii)*

**Introduction: Queer Resistance of Heteronormative Temporality**

Within queer studies, temporality is theorized as multiple, complex and non-linear. Queer temporality can be read as a radical answer to, or a re-imagination of, heteronormative conceptions of time, timing and linearity. As McCallum and Tuhkanen (2011, p. 1) state, "living on the margins of social intelligibility alters one's pace; one's tempo becomes at best contrapuntal, syncopated, and at worst erratic, arrested". McCallum's and Tuhkanen's quote clearly exemplifies the multiplicity that is inherent to queer temporality; it can be understood and constructed as a "lagging behind", while it simultaneously offers a fruitful ground to re-think heteronormative temporal norms, thereby offering a sense of hopefulness. Thus, although being or feeling queer necessarily affects one's relation to time and temporality, this relationship to temporality cannot be reduced to a merely positive or merely negative one. In this way, I am arguing that temporality, queerness and critical hope stand in a very specific relationship to each other, that is, thinking them together allows for a critical way of engaging with the past, present and future.

According to Elizabeth Freeman (2010), queers disrupt the "established temporal order" (p. xxii), bringing about a sense of "asynchrony, anachronism, belatedness, compression, delay, ellipsis, flashback, hysteron-proteron, pause, prolepsis, repetition, reversal, surprise" (p. xxii). These "errors", disruptions, and repetitions can thus be read as a resisting or breaking with certain notions of temporality that construct time as necessarily progressive and linear. Thus, as I argue

together with Freeman, these queer temporal dimensions defy narratives that deem history as moving forward. This construction of history as being progressive and moving forward have enabled historical justifications of colonialism, as well as historical and current ideas on development, the nuclear family, liberation, modernity and progress (Freeman, 2010). This established temporal order that Freeman addresses is one that I define as heteronormative temporality.

Heteronormative temporality structures and organizes social life on the macro as well as the micro level. Heteronormative notions of temporality strongly relate to ideas of reproduction, monogamy and marriage, or "the time of reproduction" (Halberstam, 2005, p. 5), in which the biological clock becomes the most important measure of temporality for women and married couples adhere to strict bourgeois rules of scheduling, often shaped according to the needs of their child and to their own working schedules. In this way, heteronormative temporality is structured around ideas of both reproduction and productivity, systems that are in turn also interdependent. Freeman (2010) refers to the current organization of time as *chrononormativity,* which she defines as "the use of time to organize individual human bodies toward maximum productivity" (p. 3). In this way, time becomes organized in such a way that processes such as scheduling and concepts such as time zones, wristwatches and calendars become 'normal' and accepted manipulations of time. These temporal manipulations are set up in such a way that the population is kept at its maximum level of productivity. Moreover, heteronormative temporality co-constitutes productivity as it constructs progress in such a way that a person is expected to become increasingly independent and self-sufficient, characteristics central to neoliberalism.

I propose that queer temporality counters a vision of time that is "seamless, unified, and forward moving" (Freeman, 2010, p. xxii), and, in this way, offers a new way of engaging with the past, present and future. Thus, it is of crucial importance to understand our relationship to the past, present and future in such a way that we take into account the ways in which the past continues to be reproduced in the present, as well as how the future is always already part of the present. In this way, I argue, understanding the past – present – future as intertwined and co-dependent, allows for a critically hopeful way of imagining.

In this theoretical framework, I theorize queer temporality in relation to critical hope, that is, I propose critical hope as a queer way of engaging with the past and present in relation to the future. I propose critical hope as an intervention in existing debates on queer temporality, as I argue that those debates tend to neglect the complex ways in which the past and present continue to persist in imaginations of the future for certain subjectivities. In this intervention, I am specifically interested in senses of belatedness, flashbacks, delay and reversal in relation to affects that are socially and culturally marked as "negative" or "backward". These temporal delays and distortions will be traced in the case studies I have selected for Chapter II and Chapter III. In order to contextualize these case studies, in this section, I firstly elaborate on the existing debates on queer temporality in order to demonstrate the ways in which they ultimately do not account for both the persistence of the past and present in imaginations of the future, nor for the role desire and desirability play in imaginations of the future. In order to specify these theoretical explorations, this theoretical framework is particularly invested in understanding the ways in which this queer relationship to temporality and negative affect manifests itself in queer sexual interaction and (expressions of) erotic practices, by elaborating on the affect of shame.

**Queer Temporalities: Breaking the Dichotomies**

In this section, I engage with notions of queer temporality by elaborating on a debate between Lee Edelman (2004) and José Esteban Muñoz (2009). My intervention is one of breaking the dichotomy between optimism that lies at the core of José Esteban Muñoz' argument, and the pessimism that guides the account of Lee Edelman. I am specifically interested in the ways in which both theorists engage with notions of a futurity in such a way that they fail to pay attention to certain negative affects that *stick* to certain subjectivities – that is, affects such as shame that can both enable and disable hope and imaginaries of the future. In this way, I aim at complicating the relationship between futurity and hope by engaging with affects that are culturally marked as negative. With this, I hope to offer a platform to re-think the whiteness – and able-bodiedness, cis-genderedness, etc. – that is inherent to much queer theorizing of futurity and hope. I argue that precisely because "backward" emotions expose oppressive circumstances, they offer a fruitful basis to re-think the future in

relation to critical hope. Finally, I argue in this section that both theorists neglect the desire and desirability of certain subjectivities in relation to futurity.

As queers fail to adhere to heteronormative ideas on futurity, their position in relation to (a different) future has been theorized extensively. One of the most important contributors to this discussion is Lee Edelman, who in his influential book No Future (2004) universally rejects queer hope, utopic thinking and doing, and optimism. Central to the argument made in No Future is the concept of 'reproductive futurism', which refers to the idea that the political realm – and the way in which citizens participate in politics – is contingent on and motivated by a desire to create a better future for the children of society. Through this, the child becomes the centralized figure of the future, as an innocent symbol of heterosexual notions of temporality and futurity. This idea of reproductive futurism depends on and is constructed by compulsory heterosexuality – a process through which the figure of the queer becomes excluded from this imaginary of the future – and through this, from the entire political realm. Edelman states that "the queer comes to figure the bar to every realization of futurity, the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form" (p. 4). In this way, the queer becomes antithetical to any form of the future, thereby coming to signify social and political itself, according to Edelman.

Thus, Edelman theorizes queerness not as an essentialized identity, but rather as an identity that merely works as an antithesis to reproductive futurism. Through this process, the queer becomes representative of the death drive. The death drive, according to Edelman, is a future-negating drive; an embracing of negativity and irony as inherent to our world and identities, a drive inextricably linked to queerness, which according to Edelman, queers need to embrace. As heteronormative culture continuously reiterates the fantasy of reproductive futurism in public life and political discourse, it creates intolerable living conditions for queers according to Edelman. Through these processes of reiteration, political resistance to heteronormativity that is not itself heteronormative, becomes impossible (Giffney, 2008). Edelman states that "the death drive names what the queer, in the order of the social, is called forth to figure: the negativity opposed to every form of social viability" (p. 9). Edelman's theory is one within a larger theoretical framework within queer studies, referred to as the "anti-social thesis". Theories produced within this framework refuse to make any

claims on the future, and refuse queer theory as a promise of the future in general (O'Ruorke, 2011).

Edelman's ideas on the lack of a future resonate with aforementioned ideas on queers' failure and refusal to adhere to heteronormative notions of temporality and futurity. Political hope and imagination as it is presented contemporarily fails queers, as it was never made for them because it neglects the ways in which queers fall outside of its progressive narrative of reproductive futurism (Muñoz, 2009). Thus, this modality of hoping leaves no space to imagine the future differently or queerly, that is, a future that does not center itself on reproduction and the usual path of life which entails work – marriage – children – pension – death, with a focus on increasing independency and the nuclear family. Although Edelman's theory presents a convincing argument against heteronormative reproductions of the future, I engage with José Esteban Muñoz in order to highlight a more complex view on queers and futurity.

Muñoz (2009), in his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, critiques the unquestioned whiteness of the Child that Edelman puts forward as the symbol of reproductive futurism. He states that "the future is only the stuff of some kids. Racialized kids, queer kids, are not the sovereign princes of futurity" (p. 95). As heteronormativity is tied up with different kinds of other normativities, such as whiteness and middle-classness, the figure of the Child comes to represent a particular futurity; one that is "always already white" (p. 95). Thus, it is easier for some than for others to refuse the future altogether. Bliss (2015) argues that "Edelman does not account for those modes of reproduction that are not future-oriented, the children who do not register as such, and the 'families' that are not granted the security of nuclear bonds" (p. 86). In this way, according to Bliss, Blackness has a queer capacity to be able to reproduce without being productive or without orienting toward a (possible) future. Thus, Bliss problematizes Edelman's argument by proposing that different modes of Black queer kinship offer a potential to think the future outside of the mode of reproductive futurism as proposed by Edelman. This Black queer kinship that forms itself across generations, then, becomes the utopian in a world that continues to reproduce anti-blackness, misogyny and queerphobia (Bliss, 2015). Moreover, the idea that queer young people of color have the potential for a future at all is a queer proposition in itself considering the levels of state and hate

violence against subjectivities that are BIPOC[3] (Gumbs in Bliss, 2015). As Rodríguez (2011) argues, the future has never been a given to marginalized communities that live under circumstances of severe state control.

Muñoz', Bliss' and Rodríguez' critiques can thus be read as a complication of Edelman's argument by highlighting the unquestioned whiteness that is central to Edelman's theory of *No Future*. Muñoz theorizes queer temporality, and more specifically, queer futurity radically different from Edelman. Although he criticizes the assumed future that lies at the core of the figure of the Child – thereby assuming the child has a certain privileged identity that can conceive of a future at all – he proposes that queer theory and practices are necessarily endeavors working towards a future. In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz insists that queerness is not-yet-here but is on the horizon, as an "ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future" (p. 1). According to Muñoz, queerness is centered on the radical rejection of the here-and-now, as the current social sphere is infused with gay pragmatism and homonormativity. Thus, reproductions of queerness in modern, neoliberal times do not represent what Muñoz refers to as "utopia", as they often follow homonormative ideas of progress. The future that is promised in these representations merely follows "straight time": the time of "reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 22). This homonormative notion of temporality and belonging is suffocating and leaves little room for imagining a different here-and-now. Living within straight time while asking, imagining and desiring for another time and place creates a desire that is utopian and queer. The present – of gay pragmatism – is not enough for queers, who do not have the privilege of belonging to the majority, of having normative taste and of fitting expectations (Muñoz, 2009). According to Muñoz, although negative affects such as shame have the potential to bind queer people together or to provide them with a sense of belonging, hope is the emotional modality *par excellence* that offers queers access to the future, as minoritarian subjects continue to be cast as hopeless.

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[3] Black, Indigenous and People of Color

Muñoz argues that the utopia comes to represent a non-prescriptive horizon of possibility that can shine through in aesthetic objects and encounters. He conceptualizes queerness as a doing – for and toward the future – rather than a being. Through this, queerness becomes a way of imagining the future that radically rejects the here-and-now, a "warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality" (p. 1). Queers, in Muñoz' view, are viewed by the social imaginary as hopeless people without a future. However, he considers hope to be the strongest "modality of emotional recognition that structures belonging" (p. 97) for queers. The politics of emotion become the politics of hope for Muñoz, as for him, hope is "the emotional modality that permits us to access futurity, par excellence" (p. 98). In this chapter, I argue that Muñoz' conception of hope is not an emotional modality on its own, but, instead, that this hope – which I define as critical hope – can be found within other affects. I am specifically focusing on shame as a critically hopeful affect as it exposes historical and contemporary structures of oppression and domination. Through working with expressions of desire and sexuality in relation to shame, I aim at identifying critically hopeful ways of imagining futurities. I choose to work with expressions of desire and sexuality by subjects that have been historically excluded from discourses on sexuality in order to construct my argument. It becomes particularly important to highlight the ways in which queer sexuality that is not practiced/performed by white, gay, able-bodied cis-gender men is subversive, following Rodríguez' (2011) argument that sexual possibilities for female subjects or subjects of color remain un-imagined, as they are subject positions "vacated of erotic impulses" (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 335). I would like to extend this argument that it is those subjectivities that are female, disabled, queer, trans, femme, of color and fat that remain viewed as lacking in sexuality and desire, and particularly those subjects that live on the intersections of these oppressions. Particularly because this thesis highlights negative affects and the presence of historical awareness in these affects, it challenges ideas of normative temporality that are attached to heteronormative and homonormative sexualities, as they continuously and persistently exclude non-normative subjectivities from their discourses on the future. Thus, following Rodríguez' critique, I argue that critical hope becomes a useful concept in demonstrating that sexuality needs to be an essential part in theorizing queer futurity.

Moreover, as critical hope emphasizes critical awareness, I argue that its value becomes most apparent when understanding shame as a critically hopeful affect.

Through working with Bob Flanagan – a disabled performance artist – and the performers in *Not Fabulous* – who are queer, trans-femme people of color – I hope to shed a different light on the ways in which desire, futurity, hope and shame relate. In the next section, I elaborate on the ways in which shame and desire have been theorized together in relation to queer sexuality and desire/desiring, and, finally, I argue that queer sexuality is political precisely because it is able to expose shame as a hopeful affect when it is worked through rather than hidden or overcome.

**Hopeful Eroticism: Investigating Queer Desire and Shame**

I argue that queer sex and the community around queer sexual practices have the potential to produce a sexual as well as a social world that "opposes the majoritarian public sphere and its gendered and raced relations of heterosexuality" (Weiss, 2011, p. 159). It is in these sexual practices, that alternative ways of world-making can be traced in the form of queer projects that develop, foster and elaborate on collective and non-heteronormative ways of being intimate and having relationships (Weiss, 2011). Queer social and sexual practices are collective forms of world-making; a term referring to the idea that these practices have the potential to form different knowledges, affects and senses of belonging (Floyd, 2010). In this way, "queer cultural production is both an acknowledgement of the lack that is endemic to any heteronormative rendering of the world and a building, a 'world making', in the face of that lack" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 118). This world-making, as this thesis argues, can be traced in queer and kinky sexual interactions and aesthetic productions thereof; as the realm of the aesthetic and the political cannot be separated. According to Floyd, "performative gestures (…) bleed into sociopolitical reality, that exceeds the bounds of the static aesthetic object" (p. 112). Thus, as I argue, expressions of (kinky and queer) desire have the potential to extend beyond the subject and object of desiring, as they allow for a different collective imagination.

This thesis argues that sexuality has the potential to allow for a working through of affect and – oppressive – normativity. I am working with queer and kinky desire and sexuality precisely because – as mentioned in the introduction – sexuality holds a powerful political potential, and, moreover, is a fruitful space to perform an

affective and hopeful analysis, particularly regarding the affect of shame. As Erickson (2007) argues: "Sex, because it is linked to the enjoyment of the body, is another area wherein lies the potential for disruption. During sex we are vulnerable and most of us are very aware of our bodies. Heartbeats, breath, exchange of fluids and definitely touch all intertwine in the creation of (an) "out" body(ies) (…) pleasure also propels us to face our fears and insecurities" (p. 46). In this way, the political potential of sexuality becomes particularly salient when bodies that are constructed as lying outside of desire/desirability are engaging in sexual practices.

The touch of sex has the potential to exceed normative restrictions through which recognition does not come forth to certain subjectivities (Rodríguez, 2011). Similarly, Ahmed (2004) argues that "when bodies touch and give pleasure to bodies that have been barred from contact, then those bodies are reshaped" (p. 165). Thus, the very acts of sex and touch offer a potential to certain subjectivities to experience recognition. In this way, a different position in the social world can be affected through sexual interaction. As Ahmed argues: "pleasures open bodies to worlds through an opening up of the body to others" (p. 164). The worlds that are opened up through pleasures, I argue, are those worlds in which a re-considering of agency, autonomy and the right to fulfillment takes place, thus, a world in which sexual practice(s) and spaces are encouraged, accessible and safe for minoritized subjects. In this way, sexual practices and expressions of desire can evoke a sense of critical hope as these practices and expressions encourage a different way of viewing desire and desiring altogether. Thus, as I argue, the present can be re-worked through sexual practices. As I have discussed before, sexual practices allow for a re-signifying of norms, bodies and social/sexual interactions in the present, thereby re-working the future.

As this chapter thinks hope, futurity and desire together, it becomes important to look at the ways in which queer theorizing has a tendency to neglect certain subjectivities in their thinking on sexual desire and futurity. Juana María Rodríguez (2011) argues that both Lee Edelman's and José Esteban Muñoz's positions fail to imagine sexual possibilities for women of color and people with functional diversity as these subjectivities are seen as "vacated of erotic impulses" or "always already asexual or simply undesirable" (p. 335). Sexual determination and access to sexual and erotic pleasure is crucial for these sexual subjects "that have been thought to be

outside the real and imagined spheres of radical sexual sociality" (p. 335). This thesis argues that it is precisely these sexual subjectivities that are most shamed for their sexual practices and preferences, and that, through this, these sexual subjectivities hold the most potential for a radical re-exploration of the relationship between shame, desire and critical hope. Moreover, through this argument, this chapter complicates the much-theorized relation between hope and futurity by arguing that in order to remain critically hopeful, it is crucially important to be aware of the ways in which the past persists into the present for queers through the affect of shame. The following quote by Loree Erickson (2007, p. 48) clearly exemplifies my argument on the social potential of the desire and sexuality of people who remain excluded from discourses on desire and desirability:

> "(…) Being desired, trusting that, reciprocating that, cracks us open. Part of this cracking open also cracks open society (…). Remaining open and vulnerable is scary because of shame, past hurts (systemic and interpersonal), and the very real chance of harm, but it is also important because the only other option is to be closed off from our selves as well as others (…). Images that show off some of the sites of shame make us face our greatest fears and insecurities face on. We need obviously disruptive bodies. We need those of us who do not necessarily have the ability or desire to deny our bodies or our needs and wants to realize that instead of only feeling the fear, shame and loss that can permeate the ways we think and feel about bodies, within, there also resides comfort, beauty and hope"

Thus, the critically hopeful potential that I am investigating extends beyond the sexual interaction but seeps into societal structures by challenging practices of shaming and oppressive circumstances that are both systemic and interpersonal. In this way, sexual interactions become spaces in which difficulties are recognized and worked through rather than simply moved beyond. Thus, as I argue, spaces of shame can also become spaces of comfort and hope. It is of crucial importance to acknowledge affects that are culturally marked as "negative" in order to work through oppression in the past and in the present. In this way, as I argue, a conception of the future can only be constructed in a framework that includes a heavy emphasis on "backward" emotions and that

understands the ways in which the past continues to influence the present, and, in turn, how the past and present necessarily impact our understanding of our future.

Sara Ahmed, in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004), defines shame as "an intense and painful sensation that is bound up with how the self feels about itself, a self-feeling that is felt by and on the body" (p. 103). Shame is culturally and socially defined as one of the primary negative affects and evokes a sense of embarrassment often leading a subject to seek hide from the person(s) present or turn away from their gaze. In this way, shame involves both a sense of exposure, as well as an attempt to hide. Ahmed argues that "on the one hand, shame covers that which is exposed (…) while on the other, shame exposes that which has been covered" (p. 104). The covering often comes in the form of turning away one's face or looking down, while the exposure comes in the shape of the regard of the other(s) witnessing the shame. In this way, the person attempting to cover themselves is always already failing at doing so; as exposure is a prerequisite for shame to be felt. Shame, then, is about the relation of the self to itself, as much as it is about the way in which the subject that is shameful appears to the other(s) (Ahmed, 2004). In this way, shame can point at a crucial part of the self, as in shame, "our worries and concerns about our investments in relationality and belonging come through" (Georgis, 2013, p. 234). Similarly, psychoanalysts and phenomenologists have argued that shame provokes the 'whole self' (Ahmed, 2004); meaning that the entire integrated personality is at work (Winnicott, 1971).

Some persons and communities are more prone to shame than others, as their sense of identities are most often turned to shame. According to Michael Warner (1999), shame, when it comes to the realm of the sexual, is inherently political. Although embarrassment is a universal human quality, (sexual) shame is attached to some bodies more than others, or "some people stand at greater risk than others" (p. 3). The consequences of this shame can range from public humiliation to being beaten or jailed. The people whose primary affective experience in relation to their sexual identity is shame are often excluded from narratives of normalcy such as heterosexuality, monogamy and vanilla sexual practices. However, shame does not only take the form of explicit public shaming by so called "moralists", but the norms that enhance a feeling of shame also come forward in the form of isolation, silent inequalities, and a lack of public access (Warner, 1999).

I argue that queer subjects have a particularly important relationship to shame, as they have been historically excluded from discourses of openness around sexuality, and have instead been encouraged to hide their desires. It remains important to understand the ways in which past practices of law, psychiatry, medicine and anthropology historically pathologized the sexual practices and non-reproductive pleasures specifically of people with functional diversity, (queer) people of color, and (queer) women, as these practices continue to influence the social and sexual reality for these subjectivities (Rodríguez, 2011). Women and people of color have been subjected to practices of sexual sacrifice, disciplined through censure and public shame, pathologized and criminalized. Through these practices, the binary of shame versus pride is created, in which some subjectivities have the possibility to be 'out and proud', whereas others are 'doomed' to remain shameful. As Love argues, "social negativity clings (…) to those who lived before the common era of gay liberation – the abject multitude against whose experience we define our own liberation" (p. 10). Investigating the critically hopeful potential of shame becomes an important endeavor within this framework, as certain subjectivities remain excluded from discourses on progress and pride. For those queers, shame offers "a refuge, a site of solidarity and belonging" (p. 9) that willingly embraces "those queers whose identities or social markings make them feel out of place in gay pride's official ceremonies: people with the 'wrong' bodies, sadomasochists, sex workers, drag queens, butch dykes, people of color, boy-lovers, bisexuals, immigrants, the poor, the disabled" (p. 9). Viewing shame as an affect that has the potential to bind people together then offers an interesting way of theorizing futurity in a communal manner.

I want to make a case for the transformative potential of shame in order to theorize the position of queer subjectivities differently. Particularly considering my argument that we need to insist on the importance of the past and the present in order to imagine the future differently, I consider shame an important affect in showing us how to navigate temporality. In *Feeling Backward: Loss and the Politics of Queer History* (2007), Heather Love proposes that the experience of "feeling backward" that queers experience has a transformative potential. She defines feeling backward as a "disposition toward the past – embracing loss, risking abjection" (p. 30). In mainstream culture, Love (2007b) argues, the image of the gay as cheerful is continuously reproduced, while traces of the history of gay sadness,

shame and despair are erased. Sara Ahmed (2010) argues that happiness is a socially constructed concept, through which certain feelings gain a cultural and social signification as either 'bad' or 'good' in which "bad feelings are backward and conservative and good feelings are forward and progressive" (p. 50). In this way, bad feelings are understood as oriented towards the past, whereas good feelings become representative of moving on towards a (better) future. Thus, feeling bad becomes seen as a "kind of stubbornness that 'stops' the subject from embracing the future" (p. 50). In this way, bad feelings come to signify a lack of future. These emotions that are culturally and socially marked as 'negative' – such as shame and melancholia – have been theorized as belonging to queerness. As Ahmed (2004) asks: "Do queer moments happen when this failure to reproduce norms as forms of life is embraced or affirmed as a political and ethical alternative?" (p. 146). Ahmed's argument revolves around a rejection of the turning of shame into pride, but rather an affirmation of the "enjoyment of the negativity of shame, an enjoyment of that which has been designated shameful by normative culture" (p. 146). Thus, "negative" or "backward" affects also have a potential that does not only allow for enjoyment, but also has the potential to build community. Moreover, queer pessimism and negative affects have the potential to expose certain oppressions or difficulties. As Cvetkovich (2012, p. 110, emphases added) claims:

> "Rather than seeing negative feelings of failure, mourning, despair, and shame as *getting in the way* of politics or needing to be *converted* to something more active in order to become politics, such work attends to felt experience as not only *already political* but *as transforming* our understandings of what *counts* as political. The encounter between feeling and politics is thus open for discussion of forms of activism that can *address* messy feelings rather than trying to *banish* them, and that can more fully *embrace* the role of practices that resemble "therapy" (such as "processing") within politics"

Thus, as Cvetkovich argues, negative feelings need to be understood as inherently political. Processing and working through complicated feelings then become a necessary work in order to transform our realities.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have argued that sex and sexuality become a productive site for addressing "messy feelings" – and in particular shame – and engaging in a working-through of them. Therefore, I have argued that what lies at the core of the criticality in critical hope is precisely this working-through of negative affects such as melancholy, shame, sadness and anger. I argued that it is precisely because "negative" affects do not adhere to social and cultural discourses on progress and happiness, that we can understand them as exposing continuing injustice. Thus, the only way to understand and move towards a queer future is to embrace and engage with the past, a search that can be accessed through the affect of shame. This is particularly important since the past continues to persist in the present for queers – influencing the ways in which they can imagine their future to begin with.

Chapter II concretizes these theoretical explorations by focusing on Bob Flanagan, a disabled performance artist who was mostly active during the '80's and '90's. Through displaying his BDSM practices in public performances and in his artwork, his work centers on questions of agency, shame and disrupting narratives of privacy, secrecy and asexuality that are often part of discourses on people with disabilities. In Chapter III I engage with three queer femme performers of color that co-created a piece called *Not Fabulous*, in order to investigate the ways in which community and desire can offer relief in working through the shame that comes with inhabiting a femme brown body.

The case studies are contextualized through employing affect theory, queer theory and psychoanalytic theory, as reading these theories together offers a fruitful perspective on queer temporality in relation to critical hope and shame. I explore the case studies in an attempt to highlight the importance of the working through of negative affect in order to remain critically hopeful, as well as the understanding that shame is a powerful affect in exposing that what is still missing, as well as that what refuses to let us go.

# II. Creativity through (Non-)Compliance and Containment: Tracing Critical Hope in the Artwork of Bob Flanagan

*"Forty years have come and gone and Bob is still around;*
*he's tied up by his ankles and he's hanging upside down.*
*A lifetime of infection and his lungs are full of phlegm;*
*the CF would have killed him if it weren't for S&M"*
*- Bob Flanagan in Sick: The Life & Death of Bob Flanagan (Dick, 1997)*

*"Queerness's time is the time of ecstasy. Ecstasy is queerness's way"*
*- José Esteban Muñoz (2009, p. 187)*

**Introduction: Bob Flanagan, the Supermasochist**

Queer theory and practices continue to articulate possibilities for understanding temporality and futurity differently. In this chapter, I am invested in understanding these different re-configurations of temporality in relation to crip and kinky sexual practices. Through constructing queerness as a *doing* rather than a *being*, queer sexual practices can become queer not only because of the gender (expression) and sexual orientation of participants, but also because of *the way in which* sex is practiced. When drawing a link between queer theory and disability theory, it becomes clear that due to dominant tropes such as disabled people as non- or asexual, it is crucially important to understand disabled sexuality as a queer practice. Moreover, queer and crip studies are often theorized together as they share a common ground in understanding both queer and disabled subjectivities as marginalized due to processes of normativity and normalization (Clare, 2001). Hall (2014) points at the "transformative, critical potential of both queerness and disability" (p. 204), and argues that queer and crip temporalities are both characterized by a desire for the not-yet. Furthering the argument that queer futurities are constructed in sexual practices

that allow for a re-working of the past and present, this chapter theorizes and puts to work the connections between BDSM studies and disability studies.

Compulsory heterosexuality brings about different systems of oppression that normalize and naturalize other normativities such as able-bodiedness and non-kinky sexualities. McRuer (2004; 2006) argues that compulsory able-bodiedness is contingent on and co-constructed through compulsory heterosexuality. According to him, able-bodiedness is experienced as simply natural, meaning that its rarely questioned or justified. However, although the aforementioned norms are of a compulsory nature, they are also "intrinsically impossible to embody" (McRuer, 2004, p. 51). When discussing able-bodiedness, McRuer argues, it becomes clear that it can only be defined through pointing at what it is *not*; namely, disabled (McRuer, 2006). However, the ideal of the able-bodied individual is rarely attainable to anyone, as each individual faces the continued possibility of "illness, injury and destruction" (Morell, 2003, p. 80).

Despite this unattainable norm of able-bodiedness, disabled people continue to face stigmatization, harassment and discrimination in the workplace, in the housing market and in their personal lives (Barnes, 2012). Moreover, when looking at desirability and disability, it becomes clear that people who identify as disabled continue to be seen as less desirable. According to García-Santesmases Fernández et al. (2017), people who identify as disabled are seen as either asexual innocents or oversexed perverts, leaving them with a very limited sense of agency in determining the ways in which they practice sexuality. Despite the fact that people with functional diversity have the same range of sexual desires as people who are able bodied, their desires remain largely unfulfilled, which impedes their quality of life and their sexual self-esteem (Erickson, 2007). Sexual exploration and expression often remains stigmatized and hindered for individuals with disabilities or functional diversity[4], as

[4] Throughout this chapter, I use the terms *individuals with disabilities, people who identify as disabled,* and *individuals with functional diversity* interchangeably, in order to contribute to a process of increasing self-identification and decreasing pathologization, as pointed out by García-Santesmases Fernández et al. (2017).

they are often infantilized – and through this, deemed asexual (Reynolds, 2007). Therefore, the visibilizing of people with disabilities as sexual becomes a radical, queer act, as it challenges ableist and other (hetero-)normative ideas.

In this chapter, I make this argument by engaging with the performance artist and self-proclaimed "Supermasochist" Bob Flanagan. I argue that Flanagan's open display of sexuality in his artwork and performances challenges these various stereotypes surrounding people with functional diversity, and, moreover, offers a space to re-think the relationship between disability and sexuality for other people with functional diversity. The subversive power that his work holds becomes even stronger because of the fact that Flanagan does not only engage with public sexuality, but with public kinky sexuality. As I elaborate on in this chapter by engaging with Flanagan's work in relation to his disability, BDSM has the potential to increase a sense of agency and to offer a space to re-work structural trauma. Therefore, without equating disabled sexuality with kinky sexuality – which would reproduce the dangerous trope of disabled sexual people as necessarily perverted (García-Santesmases Fernández et al., 2017) – I choose to focus on the intersections of BDSM studies and disability studies by engaging with Flanagan's work, as it offers a fruitful space to re-think concepts of agency, shame, negotiation and (non-)compliance.

Bob Flanagan was born with Cystic Fibrosis (hereafter referred to as CF), a genetic disease of the lungs and pancreas for which there is currently no cure. CF is hereditary and causes the body to produce an excess of thick, sticky mucus, which fills and consequently clogs the air passages of the lungs. This process makes breathing increasingly difficult, and causes repeated lung infections. As a result of his condition, Bob Flanagan passed away in 1996 at the age of 43, outliving his life expectancy by almost 40 years (Dick, 1997; Juno & Vale, 2000). I will explore Flanagan's practices as critically hopeful through examining the ways in which (non-)compliance and containment takes place in these practices, as well as how they construct a different narrative of temporality, and thereby allow for a queer imagination of the future. I argue that precisely because Flanagan uses BDSM to work through periods of hospitalization and processes of objectification – in a contained space-time –, his work can be read as critically hopeful as he works through shame and humiliation.

Bob Flanagan grew up in Southern California as the eldest of five children. Two of his sisters were also born with CF. One of them died at the age of 21, the other at six months. Flanagan spent most of his childhood in the hospital. The major symptom of CF is that the thick mucus that is produced due to a certain genetic disposition settles in the lungs. As the mucus is a fruitful breeding ground for bacteria, people who are diagnosed with CF often suffer from pneumonias and other bacterial infections, which can be extremely painful. Furthermore, CF prevents the pancreas from producing enzymes that benefit digestion, leading to digestion problems and severe stomachaches (Juno & Vale, 2000). Flanagan explains that the severe stomachaches would often lead him to rub against the pillows of his hospital bed, which eventually turned into an erotic act. For Flanagan, it felt like a way in which he could take control over his pain, therefore increasing his sense of agency, which will be elaborated upon later in relation to the concept of critical hope. Flanagan started experimenting with kinky activities from an early age. During puberty, he often played with bondage, through hanging himself on hooks by his wrists or arms or using ropes to tie himself to the bed. He also had exhibitionist tendencies from an early age, and would engage in practices such as fasting or over-eating (Juno & Vale, 2000).

In his childhood, Flanagan started practicing art and drawing, with his parents' support. He continued to be an artist until he died, with the majority of his later work focusing on his BDSM practices. Next to being an artist, Bob Flanagan had a career in the comedy scene. His artwork and performance art is infused with humor, as well as his way of approaching his CF and his imminent death. In the early '80s, Flanagan met his partner Sheree Rose, with whom he constructed a 24/7 dominant/submissive relationship – Flanagan being the submissive – and who was his main partner in his writing and artwork. Their BDSM relationship was mostly based on Rose, the sadist, giving Flanagan, the masochist, pain. This was done through different procedures of spanking, slapping, piercing, bondage, breath control, and cutting (Juno & Vale, 2000). Flanagan recounts (in Juno and Vale, 2000, p. 30):

> "On our very first date – we'd only known each other for a few hours – I said that my fantasy was to be a woman's full-time slave night and day, and do everything she said, and only have sex when and how she dictated, and clean

her house and take care of things and just be her servant. She thought that was a good idea. That was literally the beginning of our whole relationship"

Rose and Flanagan stayed together until his death on January 4, 1996. With the exception of the last year of his life, in which Flanagan felt too sick, they shared a D/S dynamic for the full 16 years of their relationship. Rose was there when Flanagan died as a consequence of his CF, a scene Flanagan had requested beforehand would be in the documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan* (Dick, 1997), a documentary from which I draw much of the discussed material.

In this chapter, I analyze several works of Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose in order to make three different arguments. I mainly draw from *Visiting Hours*, an exhibition at the Santa Monica Museum of Art in 1992, in which Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose transformed a part of the museum into a simulation of a medical clinic. In this exhibition, multiple performances, video installations and artworks were displayed, of which I will analyze a selection. I have chosen those artworks that related most to the concepts of flaunting, containment and (non-)compliance, the concepts that I explore in this chapter.

In the first section, I argue that Flanagan's open display of kinky sexuality in his artwork and performances offers a new way of portraying a person with functional diversity as sexual through approaching his work with the concept of flaunting – that is, working through the sites of deepest shame and putting them on public display. I will make this argument by drawing from the live performance *Nailed* from 1989 and the video installation *The Scaffold* – which was part of *Visiting Hours* – from 1991. In *Nailed*, Flanagan nails his penis and scrotum to a board on stage while singing the song *If I Had a Hammer* recorded by the Weavers in 1949 (Sandahl, 2000), and *The Scaffold* portrays Flanagan's body parts being mutilated on seven different screens (Dick, 1997). Secondly, I approach *Visiting Hours* by analyzing the ways in which Flanagan's BDSM practices become a way of re-visiting the past and re-working this past in the present through concepts of containment and (non-)compliance as theorized in psychoanalytic theory. For my final argument, I take a closer look at one particular artwork within *Visiting Hours*, namely *Wall of Pain* – a collage of pictures of Bob Flanagan's face showing different facial expressions during different moments

in which Sheree Rose is beating Flanagan –, to investigate the ways in which this piece represents Muñoz' (2009) notion of ecstatic time.

**Agency, Performativity and Flaunting in *Nailed* and *Scaffold***

The disabled body is often portrayed as "weak, asexual, and hidden from the public view" (Reynolds, 2007, p. 41). By working with Bob Flanagan's *Nailed* and *Scaffold*, respectively a live performance and a video installation, I argue that Flanagan's work counters these damaging portrayals of the disabled body. I will make this argument by drawing from Loree Erickson's notion of *flaunting* (2007), which suggests that the performance of shameful acts can have a liberating and hopeful aspect for people with functional diversity. Through engaging with these two artworks, I argue that Flanagan powerfully counters ableist notions of the disabled body as asexual and hidden and that he works through shame and humiliation by re-claiming his agency publicly.

In *Nailed*, Flanagan exposes his genitals wounded and nailed to a board to the audience. A taping of *Nailed* is part of one of the final scenes in Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan' (Dick, 1997), and was also displayed on a video screen as part of the installation *Scaffold*, upon which I will elaborate later. In *Nailed*, the viewer watches Flanagan read a story about an accident he experienced while engaging in auto-masochism. He explains in a detailed manner how he nailed the wrong part of his penis to the board, and the bloodbath it created. After the audience laughs, he is handed a piece of wood, and subsequently, he starts executing the act he just described, except this time in the "right" part of his penis, that is, just piercing the skin (Dick, 1997). During the nailing session, the song *If I Had a Hammer* is played to which Flanagan sings along. The lyrics of this song include "If I had a hammer/I'd hammer in the morning/I'd hammer in the evening/All over this land/I'd hammer out danger/I'd hammer out a warning/I'd hammer out love between my brothers and sisters/All over this land"[5].

[5] In the song "If I had a hammer" by the Weavers, the hammer is a metaphor for power and was meant as a support for the American Progressive Party in 1950. During the '60s and '70s, the song was often used as a protest song against the Vietnam-war (Gibson, 2014).

Flanagan, when discussing this particular performance, recounts (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 56):

> "[The nailing is] really easy to do, but really hard to watch. I get a charge out of doing that in public because the audience – especially the men – are just squirming; it drives 'em crazy"

Thus, with *Nailed*, Flanagan creates a performance that becomes, according to him, more painful to watch than it is actually experienced by himself. Thus, he does not only display his body in an extremely vulnerable manner – through exposing and mutilating his genitalia in an almost comic-like way – but he also creates a sense of "unwatchability" by engaging the audience in the experience in such a way that they start to feel the pain themselves. After taking the nails out, Flanagan lets the blood drip on a glass platter shown to the audience, imitating the end of a porn film by replacing the ejaculation of sperm with the ejaculation of blood.


Figure 1: Poster for *Nailed* (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 74)

The poster for *Nailed* reads: “Feats of superhuman endurance! Exhibitions of forbidden practices! Bizarre self-mortifications! Extremes of human self-abuse!”. These lines demonstrate both what Flanagan will perform (self-mortifications, self-abuse), but also his judgment of his performance (superhuman endurance, weird sex rites). By acknowledging the strangeness and extremity of the performance, he creates a circus-like atmosphere for his performance. By engaging with “forbidden” and “extreme” practices, I argue that in *Nailed*, Flanagan’s vulnerability allows him to expose himself as working through his shame by exposing his genitals wounded and nailed to the audience.

Figure 2: *Nailed* in Los Angeles, 1989 (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 45)

As a result of his condition, during his childhood, Bob Flanagan experienced feelings of humiliation in relation to the exposure of his body. He was subjected to various medical treatments that required him to stay in certain poses for extended periods of time, often without clothing. Moreover, since his digestion did not function well, he often went through repeated periods of vomiting and diarrhea. The humiliation that Bob Flanagan reports in processes of hospitalization during his childhood and beyond (Juno & Vale, 2000) is a common experience for people with functional diversity, that

is often reinforced by representations of people with disabilities as weak and vulnerable. As Loree Erickson (2007) argues: "Representations render us as miserable, dependent, heroic and entirely unattractive" (p. 42), and these representations often become internalized.

In this way, disabled bodies that perform sexual desire become 'out' disruptive bodies that defy assimilation to what society comes to define as sexual and desirable (Erickson, 2007). According to her, disability and sexuality are tied up through the affect of shame. The processes through which people with disabilities get stuck in a "state of sexual self-hate" (Waxman in Erickson, p. 43, 2007) put them in a state of continuous shame. According to Erickson, "sexual culture itself is saturated with shame" (p. 43), and this holds particularly true for people with functional diversity. Shame, in this way, isolates people and separates them not only from each other, but also from their own bodies and selves. By hyper-visibilizing his desires in *Nailed*, Flanagan therefore re-considers the construction of the disabled, sexual body. This "un-concealing" can be paralleled to Erickson's (2013) notion of *flaunting*. Erickson argues that "rather than hide away, deny, and ignore those very sites of the deepest shame, we must not only embrace them and learn from them, we need to flaunt them" (p. 306). She proposes flaunting as a strategy to battle oppressive narratives that stereotype disabled people as asexual, and argues that pornography becomes an excellent site in which this flaunting can take place as it allows for a flaunting of bodies that are deemed shameful. I extend this argument by claiming that public performance and art installations, such as *Nailed*, can have a similar effect as pornography in providing a platform to engage in flaunting shame.

By humiliating himself – rather than being humiliated by others – Flanagan performs another particular kind of working through shame. His "out" disruptive body creates a sense of uncomfortableness in the audience as he performs auto-mutilation. However, by creating a narrative of endurance – thereby countering the idea that he is weak – and adding a comedic *and* political element to his performance by playing the song *If I Had A Hammer*, he complicates the narrative of the disabled body as merely vulnerable. Moreover, the very externalizing of shame by confronting the audience with this extremely vulnerable act – which in turn makes the audience uncomfortable, while Flanagan remains comfortable and self-secure – disrupts the state of sexual self-hate that is often put on people with functional diversity.

Therefore, I argue that through publicly declaring and performing his kinky sexuality in *Nailed*, Flanagan troubles the boundary between private and public shame, and therefore unsettles the isolative effect of shame. The power that comes with this working through and complicating of shame, I argue, is critically hopeful, as Flanagan uses exposure and vulnerability – which can be read as shameful affects – to work through the humiliation that was involuntarily put on him during his childhood and beyond.

As mentioned before, a fragment of *Nailed* was also part of *Scaffold*, a video installation which was in turn part of *Visiting Hours*. *Scaffold* consisted of seven hanging monitors that displayed different loops of the various parts of Flanagan's body being manipulated. The seven monitors are set up in such a way that they mimic Flanagan's body, but in a fragmented manner. Flanagan's body parts are subjected to practices such as bondage, tickling and stitching. The fragmentation of the body parts can be viewed as a type of objectification as the body parts are visually separated, and, moreover, as they are tied up, bound and stitched together.

Figure 3: Still from *Scaffold,* performed in 1991 (Dick, 1997)

In one of the screens of *Scaffold*, the viewer can watch Flanagan's penis sewn up, mimicking a process of castration that has been common in the history of the

treatment of people with disabilities (McRuer, 2004; 2006). Therefore, sexual shaming that is often part of the way in which disabled people are treated, is in *Scaffold* turned at himself. By taking control over the way in which he is humiliated, and exercising this humiliation himself, Flanagan works through sexual shame in a powerful way.

Moreover, the fragments of Flanagan's body parts being mutilated are alternated with fragments of cartoon figures going through similar processes. For instance, the "mouth" monitor first displays Flanagan's mouth being sewn up by Sheree Rose, after which a hippopotamus from the cartoon Betty Boop accidentally gets their mouth zipped up through a fault of the sewing machine (Juno & Vale, 2000). The comedic element that was part of *Nailed* thus also returns in *Scaffold*. By adding an element of absurdity to the auto-mutilating action, Flanagan wants to represent the "ultimately … pleasurable" (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 92) element of auto-erotic SM. As Allen (2013) argues: "Rather than mutilation sanctioning the display as pain, it is flaunted as pleasure" (p. 52). This pleasurable experience of auto-erotic SM is thus heightened by the adding of comedic elements to *Scaffold*, thereby also taking away some of the heaviness and the fear that is often associated with SM. As Flanagan states: "The fact that I see humor in SM is unusual to other people; they're wrapped up in the "horror" of what they're watching" (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 93).

Although Flanagan, in both *Nailed* and *Scaffold*, openly displays his auto-mutilated body, he states (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 77):

> "It's odd, because I'm basically shy about showing my body. I would never take my shirt off at the beach— I don't go to the beach! I never go to the pool because I'm very shy about my body. But in the context of a performance, I have this attitude: 'This is it!' That's part of conquering the image of me as an ill person, going, 'This is the hand I was dealt'—total acceptance"

In this quote by Flanagan, it becomes clear that through his public BDSM performances, he contests what Berlant and Warner (1998) refer to as heteronormativity's imperative of sex in the private and intimate realm. Within this framework, sexuality becomes not only private, but also a distraction of "unequal conditions of their political and economic lives" (p. 553), as it takes place outside of

the space of the public or the political. Berlant and Warner call for the support of "forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity" (p. 562). Thus, open displays of sexuality offer a potential to work through feelings of shame and embarrassment – which are often in the realm of the private – in the realm of the public, where an audience is confronted with a certain refusal of an adherence to norms and ableist stereotypes. In this way, I argue that Flanagan's artwork and public performances are a critically hopeful way of engaging with sexuality. He quite literally exposes himself to an audience in powerfully vulnerable states-of-being, and in this way, encourages the audience to re-think their own assumptions about people with disabilities. I read Flanagan's artwork, in which he brings performances, photographs, videos and objects of his sexual play with his partner Sheree into the public as such a public affective, erotic and personal display that becomes accessible, available to memory and sustained through collective activity. Due to the collective nature of many of his performances – which I elaborate on when I discuss *Visiting Hours* in the following section –, Flanagan and Sheree bring the sexual into the political realm, exemplifying the subversive potential of public performance.

In this section, I have argued that through displaying his sexual body openly in *Nailed* and *Scaffold*, Flanagan offers a space in which a different construction of identity can be imagined altogether. This "un-concealing" defuses power that is primarily constructed through the mystery and invisibility that surrounds the sexuality of people with disabilities (Juno & Vale, 2000). In this way, Flanagan *flaunts* his deepest sites of shame in such a way that he works through them. I argue that therefore, Flanagan does not move beyond the past, but instead works through the past in the present – eventually in order to construct a different idea of futurity, as I will elaborate on in the final section. In the next section, I investigate the ways in which this working through takes place in relation to (non-)compliance and containment in *Visiting Hours*.

## Re-visiting the Past, Working Through the Present: (Non-)Compliance and Containment in *Visiting Hours*

In this section, I engage with *Visiting Hours* (1992), an exhibition in which Bob Flanagan – together with his partner Sheree Rose – transformed a part of the Santa

Monica Museum of Art into a simulation of a medical clinic by building a waiting room, displaying an anatomical doll that was dripping simulated mucus and sperm, and exhibiting a chest X-ray that showed cloudy lungs and pierced nipples. Moreover, Flanagan built a wall in the space consisting of 1400 alphabet blocks with the repeated initials of "SM" and "CF" mixed in with illustrations of medical equipment, nipple clams, glue guns, butt plugs and different needles, and installed a video installation portraying videos of himself naked and bound up. Bob Flanagan himself lay in a re-created hospital room in the middle of the gallery for eight hours a day over a six-week period and spoke with visitors as they encountered him. During these encounters, he engaged in a dialogue about medicalization, body imagery and disease (Juno & Vale, 2000).

Figure 4: Detail of the CF/SM Alphabet Block Wall in *Visiting Hours* (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 62)

In *Visiting Hours*, Flanagan mixes elements of SM and CF in a medicalized setting. In this section, I am particularly interested in the ways in which medical objects are utilized and referred to in this particular exhibition in such a way that they offer Flanagan a way to work through the structural trauma – of medicalization, humiliation and ableism – that he went through as a result of his CF. In order to complicate the process of working through trauma and shame in Flanagan's work, in this section, I engage with psychoanalytic theories of creativity, repetition and repair.

Winnicott (1971) theorizes a transitional space of play, which comes to represent the space between the inner and the outside world. In childhood, children

often use a transitional object – such as a blanket or a stuffed animal – to create this space which represents the space between the child and the mother. The transitional object helps the child to separate the me from the not-me and the me from the mother. In adulthood, this transitional space of play, then, often comes to take form in the realm of culture, and becomes a space in which the inner and outer worlds are connected in a creative manner. In adulthood, one needs to navigate this transitional space between the inner and outside world in order to be creative. Part of navigating this space is practicing what Winnicott refers to as non-compliance, which opposes compliance. Compliance – that is, a following of the rules and roles, as well as an adhering to norms – has the effect of "making us feel like nothing matters and that life is not worth living" (Winnicott, 1971, p. 87). Winnicott argues that compliance and creativity are mutually exclusive; the true self – whose source is desire and meaning – is the opposite of the false self – the compliant self –, which comes from the forced necessity to deal with the external world, or "reality" (Mitchell & Black, 1995). Thus, non-compliance has the potential to stimulate creativity as it allows a person to not be too attached to external reality – and therefore, normativity. Thus, non-compliance is the basis of creativity, as creativity can only be acquired when deliberate, non-compliant play can take place, that is, play in which the constraints and rules of reality are left behind.

Although I argue that Winnicott's ideas of transitional space, play and creativity are useful to analyze the ways in which BDSM can promote psychological healing, I counter the idea that compliance is uncreative. Instead, I argue for a critical tension between compliance and non-compliance by utilizing the psychoanalytic notion of containment. Containment occurs when there is a confined space-time in which one person can have their – possibly traumatic – memories and thoughts reflected back to them in a more bearable manner (Weille, 2002). In childhood, this happens between the child and the mother, when the child experiences insufferable emotions, transfers them to their mother, after which the mother reflects them back in such a way that they become bearable (Bion, 1962). I use the concept of containment in order to understand how Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose create a *contained* space-time together in which Bob Flanagan's memories are re-worked and thereby re-constructed.

I argue that it remains important to analyze the ways in which practices of consent and negotiation can be read as a way of containing the scene, therefore not allowing for non-compliance in a Winnicottian sense. The practicing of consent and negotiation is what separates BDSM practices from sexual violence, but the consequences of these strict rules can point at BDSM staying too close to the boundaries of the controlled space within which the interactions take place. Thus, although I have expanded in the first section on the ways in which Flanagan's practices can be read as non-compliant as he actively counters ableist norms by performing a submissive and kinky sexuality, I argue that the compliant part of BDSM – that is, the containment that comes with a BDSM-scene – allows for a working through of structural trauma and shame.

*Visiting Hours* comes to represent such a contained space-time in which many of the procedures that Flanagan has been through are repeated in performance, on video, in picture and in text. As Weille (2002) proposes, BDSM has the potential to "repeat" and "repair", in order to promote personal growth and development. Through the repetition of certain traumatic events, they can be re-worked in order to affect structural intrapsychic change. In a similar manner, Flanagan used BDSM to work through the memories from his early childhood in which he was in constant pain and often admitted in hospitals where he would have to subject himself to painful procedures in order to relieve some of his symptoms (Juno & Vale, 2000). In play, according to Winnicott, objects of external reality are reworked in service of the individual's intrapsychic world. The objects that Sheree Rose uses on Flanagan during play are reiterated in the poem "Why" which was written by Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan in 1997 and was part of *Visiting Hours*. The words to the poem were written on the walls of the exhibition space across multiple rooms. In this particular poem, Flanagan lists the reasons for his desire for BDSM practices:

> "Because of hammers, nails, clothespins, wood, padlocks, pullies, eyebolts, thumbtacks, staple-guns, sewing needles, wooden spoons, fishing tackle, chains, metal rulers, rubber tubing, spatulas, rope, twine, C-clamps, S-hooks, razor blades, scissors, tweezers, knives, pushpins, two-by-fours, Ping-Pong paddles, alligator clips, duct tape, broomsticks, barbecue skewers, bungie cords, sawhorses, soldering irons"

Many of the reasons in the poem "Why" can be read as stemming from Flanagan's struggles of living with Cystic Fibrosis. However, the very same reasons can also be read as stimulations for Flanagan's preference for BDSM practices, such as in the following lines: "Because it flies in the face of all that's normal – whatever that is – / Because I'm not normal" and "Because I was born into a world of suffering / Because surrender is sweet". In Flanagan's artwork and poetry, it thus becomes clear that BDSM becomes a transitional space in which he is able to remain attached to reality of his CF to some extent – for instance by using medical objects that were used on him in a hospital context for his CF – while at the same time re-working these objects in order to re-negotiate his agency through surrendering to his partner Sheree Rose who he engaged with in negotiation processes. Through this, Flanagan uses play to re-work his reality. The containment of the particular scenes that he negotiates with Rose becomes crucial in this process. Where he spent much of his life filled with "pain, discomfort and humiliation" (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 126) because of his CF, he feels that BDSM has the potential to make him feel in control of his pain. In an interview on BDSM, Bob Flanagan is asked "Do you feel like you're a guinea pig?", to which he answers "Oh no, because I'm in control of the situation. I invented this, so I'm more the mad scientist than the guinea pig" (Dick, 1997). The temporal fluidity that becomes part of Flanagan's BDSM practices resonates with Freeman's idea that SM moves "back and forth between some kind of horrific *then* in the past and some kind of redemptive *now* in the present" (Freeman, 2010, p. 143). Although it is important to stress that not all participants of BDSM have been through traumatic experiences, and that many BDSM participants use it as a pleasurable pass-time without using it to work through (sexual) trauma, I argue that it is important to also look at the ways in which BDSM can offer a space in which (structural) trauma can be worked through, or in which redemption can take place.

Weiss (2011) argues that in the simulation that takes place in BDSM, real, structural inequalities can be played with in a safe and pleasurable manner. These real, structural inequalities can also be named as structural traumas; the trauma (in)directly caused by systems of oppression such as racism, sexism and ableism. As Cvetkovich (2003) argues: "The normalization of sex and gender identities can be seen as a form of insidious trauma, which is effective precisely because it often leaves

no sign of a problem" (p. 43). As I argue in this section, BDSM offers a space in which this structural trauma can be played with and worked through, in a manner that is contained, safe and consensual. Precisely because agency and negotiation are crucial in BDSM, participants have the potential to play with their expressions of gender and sexuality in a way that would be difficult outside of the BDSM scene. Moreover, I argue that other processes of normalization – for instance, the normalization of able-bodiedness – can be worked through in BDSM as agency becomes a crucial factor in resisting ableist discourses. I have argued for this resisting in the first section of this chapter, and in this section, I am particularly interested in the idea of agency, control and containment in the re-working of structural trauma. Stoller (1991) argues that the imitation of humiliation that takes place in BDSM scenes is carefully constructed in such a way that it can never reproduce the effect of the actual humiliation. He theorizes that "the imitation of trauma, such as when being humiliated is enacted, is not traumatic" (p. 21). Thus, precisely because the person who has been through trauma can set the rules for the scene they re-gain a sense of agency that was not present during the infliction of trauma, as they had no control over the situation. In this way, containment can facilitate a re-working of the (structural) trauma.

The control that Flanagan and Stoller discuss is well exemplified in *The Ascension*. At different times during the exhibition, which lasted for a total of six weeks, Flanagan was lifted from his hospital bed by his feet (Flanagan, Rose & Rugoff, 1995, p. 66):

> "Dangling by his feet, his thin pale frame rose above the room like a ghostly jack-in-the-box, or a departing soul. It was an eerily lyrical image, intimating that the body's crude physicality and its poetry aren't mutually exclusive"

By being lifted, Flanagan's hospital robe and his blanket fell off of his body, leaving him hanging upside down naked. The scene before the ascension has a sense of passivity; Flanagan is lying in his bed in his hospital gown without moving, the oxygen tubes are preventing him from being able to move, as he is waiting for the audience to come to him and look at him. The moment of ascending, then, becomes a breakage of this stillness and allows Flanagan to get rid of his hospital gown, and get

out of his hospital bed. Although the ascension is being done *to* him as Sheree Rose lifts him up through means of ropes, he has orchestrated the scene. Thus, although Flanagan is again situated in a hospital bed as he was so often during his childhood and beyond (Juno & Vale, 2000), the containment of this specific scene – orchestrated by himself – within the museum allows for a re-definition of his agency in relation to the scene.

Figure 5: *The Ascension* (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 72)

*The Ascension* is part of the 24/7 dominant/submissive relationship between Sheree Rose and Bob Flanagan. In 1982, Rose and Flanagan designed and agreed to the following contract (taken from Dick, 1997):

> "Of my own free will, I, Bob Flanagan, grant you, Sheree Rose, full ownership and use of my mind and body. I will obey you at all times and seek your pleasure and well-being above all other considerations. I renounce my own pleasure, comfort or gratification, except insofar as you desire or permit them. I renounce all rights to privacy or concealment from you. I will answer truthfully to the best of my knowledge any and all questions you may ask. I understand and agree that any failure by me to comply fully with your desires

shall be regarded as sufficient cause for severe punishment. I otherwise unconditionally accept as your prerogative, anything you may choose to do with me, whether as punishment for your amusement, or whatever purpose, no matter how painful or humiliating to myself."

Figure 6: *The Ascension* (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 71)

The contract that Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose set up is a clear example of the construction of a contained space-time in which Flanagan completely surrenders to Rose. This contract blurs the boundaries between compliance and non-compliance, as two processes take place simultaneously: Flanagan complies fully with Rose's demands, while the contract itself is non-compliant with heteronormative gender and sexual expectations, nor with ableist tropes surrounding the sexuality of people with disabilities. Flanagan's masculinity surrenders to Rose's femininity – a concept resisting normative ideas about male superiority and female submission. Moreover, the setting up of the contract itself resists ideas about heteronormative sex as it

challenges ideas of sex as harmonious, soft and equal. Only through the process of explicit and enthusiastic consent, the setting up of such a contract is possible, which eventually allows for the realization of both Rose's and Flanagan's desires.

In this section, I have argued that Flanagan's *Visiting Hours* takes place between the past and present, as I read the exhibition as being centered on repetition and repair. I use the word repetition both to refer to the instruments and tools that are used on his body during BDSM play, as well as to the ways in which he becomes submissive and under the control of another person, as was the case during the extensive periods of hospitalization that Flanagan has been through as a cause of his CF.

Thus, in *Visiting Hours*, BDSM play becomes a powerful tool for Flanagan to work through the structural trauma that has come with living with his disability. In his acknowledging and working through his medical past, Flanagan constructs a different narrative of agency – through submission – in a contained scene in the present. In this way, *Visiting Hours* exposes a critically hopeful view on the future, as in different elements of the exhibition, Flanagan acknowledges and works through episodes of the past. In the next and final section, by working with the notion of ecstatic time (Muñoz, 2009), I argue that this working through of the past in the present can expose a particularly queer future.

**Ecstatic Time, or Feeling the Future Differently**

In the previous two sections, I have elaborated on several works of Bob Flanagan to speculate on the ways in which he uses BDSM and performance to work through structural trauma. Through employing the concepts of flaunting, (non-)compliance and containment while analyzing *Scaffold*, *Nailed* and *Visiting Hours*, I have argued for a viewing of Flanagan's art as a critically hopeful working through of histories of shame and humiliation. After having expanded on the past and present in Flanagan's work, I would like to conclude this chapter with a note on the ways in which (queer) futurities appear in Flanagan's work. Imaginaries of futurities can be traced in Flanagan's practices and artwork, which becomes, as I argue in this chapter, specifically important for people with functional diversity who are stereotyped not only as without agency – which has been elaborated upon before –, but also as without a future. As Alison Kafer (2013, p. 2/3) states:

> "A better future, in other words, is one that excludes disability and disabled bodies; indeed, it is the very absence of disability that signals this better future. The presence of disability, then, signals something else: a future that bears too many traces of the ills of the present to be desirable. In this framework, a future with disability is a future no one wants, and the figure of the disabled person, especially the disabled fetus or child, becomes the symbol of this undesired future"

People with disabilities – as well as other marginalized people, as I will come back to in the next chapter – are thus often constructed as without a future. Moreover, constructions of the future often exclude people with disabilities. To counter this narrative, in this section, I attempt to trace the ways in which Flanagan's practices allows for a different conception of temporality in relation to disability, as well as the ways in which his work points at a better future as already taking place.

Simula (2013) argues – by drawing from Muñoz (2009) – that BDSM scenes can be read as moments that "ask for, desire, and imagine another time and place, and in so doing perform a desire that is both utopian and queer" (p. 72). Ecstatic time becomes a sense of temporality in which intense pleasure is experienced. Muñoz (2009) argues that ecstatic time "is signaled at the moment one feels ecstasy, announced perhaps in a scream or grunt of pleasure, and more importantly during moments of contemplation when one looks back at a scene from one's past, present or future" (p. 32). I argue that both instances of ecstatic time can be traced in Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose's artwork, through their way of dealing with pleasure in relation to temporality through practices of BDSM. In this way, their work involves a stepping out of straight time as it encourages an imagination beyond the here-and-now.

In *Wall of Pain*, which was part of *Visiting Hours* (Juno & Vale, 2000), 750 photographs of Bob Flanagan are on display. The photographs are split up in different sets, each set displaying Flanagan's face on the moment Sheree exercised impact play on him. One roll of film consists only of photographs of Flanagan's face while Rose hits him with cat-o'-nine-tails, delivering a series of photos with different facial expressions taken exactly on the moment of impact.

Figure 7: *Wall of Pain* (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 2)

Rose, when discussing the artwork, recounts (Dick, 1997):

> "He had told me a fantasy he had of being hit with a lot of different implements and photographing that. So we set up this whole elaborate set-up with camera and bulb release. We had a backdrop and I had him in bondage. Sometimes I had the bulb in one hand and the whip in the other. Sometimes Bob had the bulb and each time he got hit that's when we snapped it. Overall I think we did 15 different implements-- 36 shots each"

I argue that *Wall of Pain* exemplifies what Muñoz refers to as moments of ecstatic time. The ecstasy that Flanagan experiences during the moments in which his partner hits him are captured in the photographs in his facial expressions. Although the spectator cannot see the moment of impact, they can see the effects of this impact on Flanagan's face. On some pictures, his facial expression is ecstatic, whereas others portray facial expressions such as agony, shock and surprise. When discussing the effect of this pain inflicted on him, Flanagan recounts (Juno & Vale, 2000, p. 86):

> "When I do these things (…), as scary as it might be to do them, it's done for some supreme kind of ecstasy or joy— something that will lead toward a positive emotion, not a negative or dark one. It's moving toward light rather than darkness"

Thus, although the spanking evokes fear and pain in Flanagan, he experiences mostly a sense of "ecstasy or joy". He says that the infliction of pain becomes something that "will lead toward a positive emotion". In relation to *Wall of Pain,* this experience of ecstasy or joy becomes particularly interesting. As the viewer can only perceive the effect of the impact play, but not the impact play itself, they are only confronted with the positive effect that the beating has on Flanagan, without forming their own opinion on what the beating means as such. In this way, Flanagan and Rose choose not to portray what is actually happening; but rather the ways in which what is happening is benefitting Flanagan by giving him pleasure and ecstasy. In this regard, they re-construct the discourse around BDSM and disability that works as marginalizing and pathologizing.

The sense of endurance that Flanagan has developed as a cause of extended periods of pain due to his CF, has also offered him a way of enduring the pain of SM (Juno & Vale, 2000). However, this type of pain leads toward something good, as it offers him the perspective of ecstasy. By documenting and consequently displaying these moments of ecstasy in which the future can be traced – the "screams or grunts of pleasure" – Flanagan and Rose transfer their "queer relational bliss" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25) to a larger audience. Muñoz argues that these ecstasies have "the ability to rewrite a larger map of everyday life" and can serve as "an invocation of a future collectivity, a queerness that registers as the illumination of a horizon of existence" (p. 25). As Muñoz argued, what is necessary for any sort of imagination beyond a here-and-now is collectivity and community; a utopia can only be imagined *together*. This is precisely what Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose's artwork instigates, and, moreover, this is precisely where the futuristic, hope-giving potential of non-normative sexual intimacy lies. As Flanagan and Rose take their sexual relationship into the public, they offer a new way of viewing gender, sexuality and disability.

The second moment in which ecstatic time can be traced are moments of contemplation when a person looks back at a scene from the past (Muñoz, 2009). I

argue that this contemplation is taking place in processes of marking, an important part of BDSM in which impact play leaves marks on the submissive person's body. These marks – whether permanent, such as with practices of piercing, or temporary, such as with practices of spanking or cutting – can fulfill a function of photographs, as they encourage the memorizing and remembering of a certain scene. Sheree Rose describes (Dick, 1997):

> "And every time he thinks about them he'll remember-- he'll look at bruises that I gave him. We'll talk about that and get very hot and all excited. There's a lot of memory involved with S&M"

When viewing the practice of marking together with *Wall of Pain*, it becomes apparent that in both, the past, present and future are bound up in an intricate and non-linear manner. In the practice of marking, past moments of ecstasy can become current moments of ecstasy and can promote excitement for future moments of ecstasy. In *Wall of Pain*, Flanagan's experience of "moving toward light" becomes apparent in his ecstatic facial expressions. In this way, the "queer relational bliss" of Flanagan and Rose's spanking practices become ecstasies themselves, in which Flanagan is able to transcend pain and enter a state of ecstasy.

Thinking Flanagan's work together with the notion of ecstatic time allows for a fruitful understanding of the ways in which not only the past and the present are represented in Flanagan's work, but also how an imaginary future is revealed. Flanagan himself constructs his survival pas childhood – and thus, his future –, as a result of his BDSM practices. He speculates that his BDSM practices kept him physically active, and through the ability to control his body past his CF, he gained a new will to live (Juno & Vale, 2000). Thus, the very imagination of a future was facilitated by the ecstasy that Flanagan experienced during BDSM scenes with Sheree Rose. In this way, the future is always already in the present during the BDSM scenes. Finally, the fact that Flanagan and Rose recorded, photographed and performed their practices highlights the collective nature of their work, which has "the ability to rewrite a larger map of everyday life" (Muñoz, 2009, p. 25). I argue that the powerful potential of their work extends far beyond their dominant/submissive dynamic and extends into the sphere of imagination as it allows for a re-think of

norms related to gender, sexuality and disability, stimulating hope, the affective modality that allows for the very imagination of a (queer) future.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has aimed to show the different ways in which Bob Flanagan's practices and artwork offer a space in which reality can be re-worked through engaging with the past and present by means of practices of submission and humiliation. More specifically, I have argued that containment and compliance are necessary in order to work through shame and structural trauma. By engaging with queer and crip theory, as well as psychoanalytic theory, I have argued in this chapter that Bob Flanagan's practices offer a space in which critical hope is practiced, precisely because Flanagan engages with the past and present through practices of flaunting, masochism, submitting, and marking. Finally, I have argued that this engagement with the past and present becomes necessary in order to construct a different, *queer* and *crip* narrative of the future.

Critical hope stimulates the imagination of and the hope for a different reality; through encouraging an alternative sexual ethics that emphasizes the important of negotiation and consent; processes that often remain unpracticed in contemporary society and thereby uphold systems of misogyny, racism, ableism and rape culture. The *critical* in critical hope is encouraged in Bob Flanagan's work as it plays with and modifies the oppressive reality of contemporary structures of domination by challenging ableism and other oppressive norms such as gender normativity. The acknowledgement of these oppressive structures is crucial in practicing critical hope, as it allows for a paying attention to the historical and contemporary processes of marginalization and exclusion – thus, to the "what is already there" – while fantasizing and working towards the "what is not yet there". Thus, as I have emphasized, Flanagan's work offers a critical analysis of the ways in which people with disabilities continue to be viewed as asexual, and how processes of pathologization and marginalization influence the ways in which disabled people can express themselves sexually. Practices of BDSM are employed by Flanagan in order to re-work this narrative and through this, he performs submission and humiliation on his own terms through processes of consent and negotiation.

Moreover, Flanagan's work exposes a different narrative of the future through its ecstatic element, which as I argue, can be critically hopeful beyond the bedroom. Expressions of sexual desire and the portrayal of certain sexual practices can enhance a political imagination that extends beyond the realm of the sexual, as well as beyond the realm of the now. This chapter has attempted to use Bob Flanagan's artwork as an example of this re-construction of imagination, and through this, has offered a new perspective on critical hope. I proposed critical hope as a framework through which social activism can be practiced, as it allows for imagination, creativity and playfulness, while it remains aware of the past and present. The imagination of a queer future becomes particularly clear in Flanagan's work as it has the potential to re-signify norms, bodies, sociality and sexual interactions. Through this, a community beyond the heteronormative framework based on coupling and kinship can be imagined, while the ways in which normative frameworks such as ableism and heteronormativity continue to oppress marginalized people remain emphasized.

In the next chapter, I will complicate critical hope further by engaging with temporal distortions in relation to queer sexuality in *Not Fabulous*. Whereas I largely focused on shame and humiliation in the theoretical framework and in the analysis of Flanagan's work, I am interested in other ways of "feeling" or "looking" backward that come forward in queer performance. I will do so by theorizing shame together with femininity, and by analyzing how the performance of desire and community can counter these damaging narratives that pathologize and marginalize queer femme sexuality.

# III. Not Fabulous: Femininity, Shame and Desire in Queer Performance

> *"Allowing a place for trauma within sexuality is consistent with efforts to keep sexuality queer, to maintain a place for shame and perversion within public discourses of sexuality rather than purging them of their messiness in order to make them acceptable"*
> *- Ann Cvetkovich (2003, p. 60)*

**Introduction: "*Not Fabulous:* A Peek into the Moments Before and After the Show"**

On the 19th of May, 2018, I went to see *Not Fabulous* at the Folkwang Universität der Künste (the Folkwang University of the Arts) in Essen, Germany, a dance and performance piece focused on portraying the moments before and after a dance performance. The piece left me breathless in its way of performing – what I read as – frustration, shame, femininity, desire, community and discomfort. I remember feeling unsure of how and what to feel: hopeful or hopeless, uncomfortable or at ease, intrusive or invited. In fact, I felt it all simultaneously. Soon after the end of the performance, I realized that the only way to process this performance – and this overflow of affect – would be to contextualize it within the framework of this thesis.

As *Not Fabulous* had a particular way of dealing with temporality in a distorted yet hopeful manner, it left me with a new perspective on critical hope in relation to desire, shame and femininity. Precisely through engaging with the "messiness" of shame and perversion that Cvetkovich addresses, I argue that this piece represents a critically hopeful way of engaging with temporality. Thus, in this third chapter, I engage with other perspectives on finding hope in "negative" affect – and in particular shame – by engaging with *Not Fabulous,* which was directed by Ottoline Calmeijer Meijburg as part of a collaboration between the dance department and the physical theatre department at the Folkwang University. The piece was performed and co-created by the three dancers Paula, Lucas and Igor. Lucas and Igor grew up in Brazil and Paula in Malaysia, and all three performers have been living in

Europe since two years. Paula, Lucas and Igor are queer, gender non-conforming femme people of color. The music in the performance – with exception of the songs that the performers themselves sung, which were covers of existing songs – was composed by Igor and the costumes were designed by Harrison Rodrigues. *Not Fabulous* was performed on the 18th, 19th and 26th of May at the Folkwang University, on the 25th of May at the Villa Concha Queer Performance Night in Cologne, and on the 11th of July at the Atelier Automatique at the Beyond Binary Festival in Bochum (Calmeijer Meijburg, 2018). I had the chance to interview the director, Ottoline Calmeijer Meijburg, after the performance, and she provided me with backstage material – pictures, text and video – as well as a taping of the performance. In this way, I was able to revisit the performance as well as to have some insights in how the performance came to be. The interview I conducted with Ottoline was a semi-structured qualitative interview of 39 minutes, on the 16th of June, 2018. I taped and transcribed the interview, after which I coded the answers according to the three themes of this chapter.

*Not Fabulous* is largely improvised, although there is a certain structure in the play. There are several stages the dances always go through, but what happens between those stages can be discovered anew every time the performance takes place, delivering a slightly different performance each time (Calmeijer Meijburg, 2018). The piece consists of four parts: The dancers commence with a contact-improvisation piece in which they lie, sit and stand intertwined on a small stage in the middle of the room. Their body parts connect, disconnect, are interwoven, touch and caress each other, push and pull each other. Afterwards, the dancers perform a vogue dance piece in a practiced and synchronized choreography. A disruption of this performance takes place when the dancers slowly take off their black dresses and their pink bathing suits. They are now merely wearing simple, black boxer shorts. This part revolves around the three performers shaking their bodies increasingly faster, and beating different body parts against the ground, on the stage and against each other. After this part, the final part of the performance follows, in which the three performers return to the stage where they started their performance. There, they stay close together without touching, sitting next to each other and staring the audience in the eye for an extended period of time.

Figure 8: Part I (Klaus Borkens, 2018)

Figure 9: Still from part II (Amelie von Godin, 2018)

As becomes clear in *Not Fabulous*, the performers' bodies become crucial in conveying affect as well as in performing their subjectivity. I follow Jones' (1998) definition of performance art as:

> "[placing] the body/self within the realm of the aesthetic *as a political domain* (articulated through the aestheticization of the particularized body/self, itself

embedded in the social) and so unveils the hidden body that secured the authority of modernism" (p. 13-14, emphasis in original)

Figure 10: Part III (Klaus Borkens, 2018)

Figure 11: Still from Part IV (Amelie von Godin, 2018)

Thus, in performance art – also referred to as body art (Jones, 1998) – aesthetics and politics come through means of the body in a particular way, and, through this, performance art has the potential to provide space for those bodies that are excluded from narratives of progress. In relation to *Not Fabulous* as a performance piece I am particularly interested in the ways in which femininity, shame, community, isolation

and desire come together in the bodies of the performers as well as the interaction between their bodies and between their bodies and the audience. The immediacy of performance art can evoke multiple and conflicting affects. Moreover, as I argue in this chapter, it has the potential to encourage a working-through of negative affect and through this, to transform not only the performers but also the audience. As Maite Escudero-Alías (2016) states, queer performance has an important role in "the reconfiguration and depathologization of melancholia and shame" (p. 65). I want to investigate this reconfiguration and depathologization that Escudero-Alías mentions in *Not Fabulous* by examining its way of breaking isolation and creating community, as well as its working-through of shame by means of desire. After first having elaborated on negative affect in relation to temporality and critical hope in chapter one, I have used chapter two to expand on these ideas in relation to containment and (non-)compliance in kinky sexual practices. So far, I have been particularly interested in the ways in which queer sexual interactions offer a platform to work through negative affects of the past – in particular shame – and how this working through becomes a way of practicing critical hope. In this chapter, I want to take a further look at queer performance as a medium for expressing desire. I am particularly interested in the ways in which femininity, shame, desire and community come together in *Not Fabulous*. I consider the concept of critical hope as strongly represented in the performance, as the dancers work through shame and despair together through desiring together, desiring each other and desiring a different world.

Although I have interviewed Ottoline and I have shared an informal conversation with the performers after the performance, I carry out an own reading of the piece. As Jones (1998) argues, performance art disrupts "structures of conventional art history and criticism" as it "insists on the intersubjectivity of all artistic production and reception" (p. 5). Thus, performance blurs boundaries such as reading versus understanding, intention versus effect, and aims versus experience. In this way, although I do use backstage and explanatory material, I perform a theoretical and affective reading *next to* this material, rather than *with* this material, in order to finally draw conclusions that might not intersect with the director's and performers' experience.

There are multiple research questions that I aim to answer in this chapter. Firstly, I look at *Not Fabulous* as an escape out of the white and cis-gendered

institution of the art institute. I will answer the question "How does *Not Fabulous* perform community and counter isolation?". In this part, I engage with the history of voguing to demonstrate the ways in which this tradition offered a non-normative space for trans and queer femme people of color to re-configure families and express themselves in a space where they were free of discrimination and harassment. Moreover, I analyze the performance-within-a-performance as a critical note on the safety of trans and queer femininities.

In the second part, I firstly theorize the connection between shame and femininity, after which I analyze femmephobia and racism as producing this shameful experience of queer/trans femininity. By considering the part of the shaking, I look at the ways in which the performers perform shame and frustration, and how the shaking and beating – on the floor and on each other – becomes a type of flaunting of their shame. Finally, I argue that the performers are able to disarticulate the process of shaming by returning their gaze to the audience.

The third and final part will focus on the ways in which desire is at play in *Not Fabulous*. I am particularly interested in the ways in which the undesirability of queer and trans femmes is created, after which I will show how *Not Fabulous* resists this discourse by the ways in which the performers publicly perform desire for each other. Finally, I conclude this chapter by arguing that *Not Fabulous* creates an alternative public imaginary through this public display of desire, as well as through encouraging a sense of community between each other and with the audience.

The working-through of shame in *Not Fabulous* becomes the red thread of my analysis. I therefore elaborate further on my argument that in order to become hopeful for a future, we need to pay careful attention to the ways in which the desire and sexuality of marginalized people – such as disabled people and women and femmes of color – continues to remain challenged, pathologized and criminalized. Moreover, I offer expressions of their desire and sexuality as a fruitful platform for becoming hopeful, as shame and sexuality are closely tied together, and, moreover, shame has the potential to show us what continues to bother us, and what is still missing.

**(Un)Safe Spaces**

In this section, I am interested in the idea of a safe space in relation to the making of queer of color communities. Firstly, I am particularly invested in understanding the

ways in which *Not Fabulous* became a space of escape for the dancers, in which they are able to express themselves differently and where they are able to find community and battle isolation. Thereafter, I will engage with the voguing dance piece of the performance as a performance within a performance, relating this to the idea of voguing as a safe space by looking at the history of the dance practice. I will finally make an argument for the problematics of understanding *Not Fabulous* as a safe space, as well as queer performance more generally for queer and trans femme people, by engaging with the question of what performance means for the performers – and femme transgender persons in general – who live a life of misrecognition and discrimination outside of the performance.

Ottoline's daily life, as well as that of the dancers, takes place in the Folkwang University in Essen-Werden, a small town next to Essen, a relatively big city in the Ruhrgebiet in the west of Germany. The performers and the director come together in their collective need to create a queer space within the institution of the Folkwang University. The dancers, in their daily life of 12-hour days of dance classes, are continuously forced to play the role of the "male" dancer as in each class two groups are created on the basis of gender. The lack of queer and feminist awareness both within the art institution as well as outside of it in the town, create a sense of isolation, alienation and "not being seen" (Calmeijer Meijburg, 2018) among the performers and the director. As Ottoline states:

> "[*Not Fabulous*] started out as a desire for myself and for the others to create a queer space in which (…) we could experiment artistically, and to live out or let out sides of ourselves that don't have so much space in our daily life"

I explore *Not Fabulous* as a way of countering this sense of isolation and "not being seen", by engaging with the history of voguing – in relation to the middle part of the performance –, as well as with queer affect theories of Sara Ahmed (2004) and Ann Cvetkovich (2003) in relation to the performance as a whole.

The daily life of Ottoline and Igor, Paula and Lucas is situated in an institution that reproduces norms of heterosexuality, cis-genderedness and whiteness. Coming together within this institution as trans femme people of color, thus, allows for a contact that is not only resistant but can also be pleasurable. Ahmed, in *Queer*

*Feelings* (2004), argues that the contact between queer people generates pleasure possibilities, as their contact has been historically forbidden, inhibited or persecuted. In this way, this kind of contact has been – and continues to be – constructed as "not meant to be" within a heteronormative society. Thus, queer pleasures that arise when queer bodies gather in spaces – such as clubs, bars, and parks – offer a chance to claim back the straight public space.

Historically, voguing serves as an important example of this. Voguing originates in drag ball culture and its roots can be traced back to masquerade balls of the late 19th century (Maciejowska, 2017). In the 20th century in Harlem, New York, the drag balls would involve drag queen contests and many of the visitors of the balls were people of color – many of them queer men, trans women and drag queens. From the very beginning, balls were invaded by the police and used to persecute queer and trans people. Among the dancers engaging with vogue, the biggest groups were Afro-American and Latin-American homosexual men. However, many dancers were trans women and non-binary or gender non-conforming femmes. Due to heavy racism, drag ball culture became fragmented and "black queens were expected to 'whiten up' their faces if they wanted to have a chance of winning the contests" (p. 1) in the early 1960s. Consequently, the black queens started to host their own black balls from 1962 onwards. From the 1970s onwards, black drag queens would come together to create so-called "houses", in which black drag queens formed families that look after one another. Together, the members of the family would prepare for the ball. The houses became alternative families for those who had been abandoned or forced to leave their family homes because of their sexuality and/or their gender presentation. As Mazzone and Peressini (2013) state, "the Houses represented an idea of kinship in the sense of ability to build a scheme of alliances based on the need for exchange and mutual support among individuals" (p. 110).

The voguing in *Not Fabulous* thus becomes reminiscent of times in which it was necessary to create separate safe spaces for trans and queer people of color. However, it also highlights the persistent necessity of these spaces as trans and queer people of color continue to have the most vulnerable position within the queer movement. This becomes apparent in the experience of Lucas, Paula and Igor at the Folkwang University, where they are systematically classified as "men", expected to dance the "male" role, and continuously discouraged to express their femininity in the

town more generally as they receive harassment, violence and discrimination as a consequence of their femme appearance (Calmeijer Meijburg, 2018). Voguing thus becomes a space outside of the white hetero-patriarchy that places queer and trans people of color at the margins. The voguing dance style offers the performers a chance to engage with femininity in their dancing, and, moreover, *Not Fabulous* as a whole has the potential to allow the performers to explore their racialized and feminized identities in a critical manner, rather than having to set their subjectivity aside in their dance classes. Ottoline describes *Not Fabulous* as a safe space, as both the performers and herself often remain feeling unrecognized and misunderstood:

> "There are just so many sides of me that are not seen here, and what does that mean for the relationships I have?"

In this way, *Not Fabulous* becomes a way of self-presentation orchestrated by the director and the performers themselves: by displaying their femme queer identities, and therefore, engaging with a more complete and fuller version of themselves as compared to what they are able to present themselves as in the rest of the institution. Moreover, the vogue-style dancing of Paula, Lucas and Igor becomes a way of performing their gender expression by emphasizing feminine movements, an opportunity that remains hard to pursue within the classical institution of the dance academy. In the voguing piece, the three performers each play a different role, as Ottoline explains:

> "There was the more innocent religious girl, that Paula does, and ehm, Igor is really more this mechanical robotic Lady Gaga inspired creature, and Lucas is a mixture of a Silly Sally that keeps falling down, and just, yeah, I don't know, lets her hair go free basically, and that was definitely inspired by voguing and these family structures"

Through the vogue dancing and the adoption of their characters, the performers access past voguing spaces and the family structures within the balls. Due to structures of racism, homophobia and classism, many of the dancers engaged in voguing were excluded from mainstream society and faced harassment, marginalization and

discrimination (Mazzone & Peressini, 2013). Furthermore, the late 1980s and early 1990s were a particularly problematic time for the queer community, as the HIV/AIDS crisis came to rise and started structuring "queer activism, public policy, homophobic tactics, and personal and community experiences" (Trench, 2014, p. xviii). The AIDS-epidemic hit many of the drag queens that were part of the houses and the voguing community. In this way, voguing became a way not only to escape mainstream society in the houses, but also to build community among like-minded people who were going through similar oppressions and medical struggles. Finally, voguing became a way to mimic and overturn "uptown standards of beauty, primarily those promoted by the popular magazine 'Vogue'" (Mazzone & Peressini, 2013, p. 109) – which is the reason why the dance form is named after the fashion magazine.

Thus, many of the participants in the voguing dance scene were people that were suffering from structural trauma due to racism and homophobia. In trauma theory, racism has been theorized as a specific form of insidious trauma. As Craps (2013) argues, the psychological effects of racism and colonialism can be seen as trauma that "can result insidiously from cumulative micro-aggressions: each one is too small to be taken as a traumatic stressor, but all together can create an intense traumatic impact" (p. 26). As Cvetkovich (2003) argues, taking a depathologizing perspective allows for understanding queer traumatic feelings "not as a medical problem in search of a cure but as felt experiences that can be mobilized in a range of directions, including the construction of cultures and publics" (p. 47). In this case, the isolation and marginalization that queer and trans people of color experienced led to an entire subculture that allowed for alternative ways of relating outside of traditional family structures. In *Not Fabulous,* the choice to engage with voguing also emphasizes how systems of oppression and domination continue to marginalize trans and queer people of color. When asked about her choice to include voguing in the dance piece, Ottoline expanded on her frustration with the appropriation of voguing of

white cis-gender women[6]. Her inclusion of voguing in *Not Fabulous* was therefore an attempt at bringing voguing back into a queer (of color) space. Voguing operates in two ways in *Not Fabulous*. As Mazzone and Peressini (2013, p. 108) argue, "voguing is a dance that takes into account the subjectivity of the individual as well as the culture of the minority it represents". Thus, vogue dancing does not only allow for Lucas, Igor and Paula to express their subjectivity differently by engaging with non-conventional and feminine styles of dancing, but also becomes representative of the need of a community for queer and trans people of color.

After having expanded on the history of voguing and on the ways in which *Not Fabulous* offers a chance to re-visit the dance practice and its community structures as a safe space for trans and queer femme people of color, I want to place a critical note on performance as an escape from normative society or a safe space. Although I read the voguing in the performance as a way of accessing past communities for queer and trans people of color, I want to engage with the ways in which the voguing becomes a performance *within* a performance, and how this exposes the problematics of inhabiting a transfeminine body outside of a performative context.

Firstly, the rehearsals and creation of *Not Fabulous* took place in such a specifically contained space-time, that these fleeting moments also confronted the performers with the ways in which their daily environment outside of the creation of and performance in the piece does not allow for the expression of their different subjectivities. Ottoline explains:

> "And it was also just very painful, for all three of them. Then you spend two evenings a week just going wild with your friends in dresses, with make-up and wigs (…) and then the next morning, you're like OK, now I stand on the

[6] Famous and much critiqued examples of this appropriation by cis-gender white women are Madonna's hit 'Vogue' from 1990, as well as the documentary film 'Paris is Burning' from 1991, which was directed by Jennie Livingston, a white cis-gender lesbian woman who was in turn critiqued for not providing her participants and the subjects of her documentary with sufficient funding after the enormous success of the film (Ursprung, 2012).

> left with the men, and then men they jump like this. And all this, this sensitivity or also the softness that was in your body the night before, is pushed out of the room again"

Thus, the safety of the performance and rehearsal space stands in striking contrast with the space outside of that performance, in which the performers are continuously discouraged to express their feminine subjectivities. This contrast is mirrored within the performance itself. In many ways, Ottoline explains, the performance follows the logics of a performance night. As she intended to show it, the three performers get ready for the performance, they execute it, and afterwards are left with just each other and their own bodies. In this way, this choice leads to a performance within a performance. I read the positioning of the voguing in the middle of the performance as a way of making the idea of a performance as a means of escaping more evident. At the same time, it also exposes the fleeting aspect of performance, as the following part is a literal undressing of performativity: the dancers take off their clothing and are left exposed. Moreover, in that particular part, they engage in a more violent and erratic way of dancing, that comes across as even more disorganized after the controlled, synchronized and choreographed voguing piece. I argue that through this, the voguing performance also aims to show the transient adoration that comes with presenting femme queerness on stage.

**Working Through Femme Shame: Returning the Gaze**

In this section, I am invested in understand the ways in which shame and femininity work together in *Not Fabulous*, and specifically in the final two parts of the performance – that of the shaking, as well as that of the confrontational gaze toward the audience. I am interested in exploring some of the ways in which this shame and frustration relate to inhabiting a transfeminine body, and how this relation is constructed through systems of femmephobia and racism. I will then investigate how this shame is expressed within the context of the performance. I will particularly focus on the ways in which the performers firstly flaunt their shame in the beating and shaking part, and afterwards, on how they render the power of shame inert by returning the gaze to the audience in the very final part of the performance.

Igor, Lucas and Paula are three femme queer people of color. Expressing their femininity is extremely difficult in their daily environment, often confronting them with a feeling of shame – both when they do express femininity and get punished for it, as well as when they hide their femininity and feel unable to express themselves. Ottoline explains that although the rehearsals elicited a shared sense of joy among the performers and herself, they also confronted the group with the less hopeful side of queer femininity:

> "We also had a week in which we took time to grief, and to confront ourselves with shame (…) the 'not fabulous' side of (…) queerness, and of queer femininity, and especially for them coming from countries in which it is definitely still a whole other story of coming out as queer"

Lucas', Paula's and Igor's experience of shame with regards to their queer femininity can be contextualized well by engaging with the concept of (dis)comfort as proposed by Sara Ahmed (2004). Lucas, Igor and Paula transcend the gender binary through being trans and femme, causing what Ahmed refers to as "disorientation", a kind of queer strangeness, as they do not adhere to traditional gender norms that belong to bodies that were assigned male at birth. Ahmed argues that these moments of disorientation happen when bodies like those of the Paula, Lucas and Igor encounter heteronormative bodies, or even merely reside in heteronormative (and cis-gendered) spaces. Ahmed argues that the word comfort "suggests well-being and satisfaction, but it also suggests an ease and easiness" (p. 147). In a heteronormative society, then, some bodies are *allowed* and *able* to feel more comfortable than others. In these processes, some bodies also become more noticeable than others, as spaces do not extend their body as easily as others. Moreover, heteronormativity itself can become comforting, as it allows certain people to feel recognized, understood and represented, whereas others feel as if they are living in someone else's world (Ahmed, 2004). Furthermore, the very display of queerness in gender expression, queer affection and queer desire can deliver a kind of uncomfortability, restricting queers in the ways in which they can use, move and display their body, thereby carrying the "burden of concealment" (p. 149). As I have elaborated upon before, heteronormativity is closely tied together with other normativities. That is, to approximate the ideal of

heteronormativity also involves adhering to other norms; such as being white, cis-gendered, able-bodied, and middle- or upper class. The closer you come to this ideal of heteronormativity, the more spaces become comfortable (Ahmed, 2004).

Thus, inhabiting a transfeminine body of color becomes an uncomfortable experience as this subjectivity is far removed from the ideal of heteronormativity. In this way, these subjectivities are not only rendered shameful, but are also expected to conceal their gender and desires. This becomes particularly apparent in the ways in which the dancers express their gender in- and outside of the rehearsal and performance space, as I elaborated on in the first section. When I discussed this with the dancers themselves after the performance, they shared that they would always change their outfits before entering the world outside of that particular space, as they knew they would surely be harassed for expressing their queer femininity. It remains crucially important to understand the structures that construct this particularly marginalized experience by addressing the ways in which heteronormative society *as well as* queer theory and queer spaces are inclined to reproduce femmephobia and have a tendency to adore and prioritize masculinity. I follow Hoskin's (2017) definition of femmephobia, who claims that femmephobia "operates to dichotomize and normatively police bodies whose use of femininity blurs boundaries of sex, gender and sexuality and to shame bodies that make use of feminine signifiers" (p. 99). The performers' experience of femmephobia in the present at their dance school and in their navigating the city can be traced in a long history of the exclusion of feminine-of-center people (and specifically trans women and non-binary femmes) in feminist and queer movements, as well as in the world more generally. Although black trans women started the Stonewall riots, trans people of color – and specifically trans feminine people of color – continue to be marginalized and left behind by the mainstream LGBTQ movement, and their specific oppression remains under-addressed and misunderstood (Serano, 2013). The social, cultural and economic consequences for people who were designated male at birth and engage in gender non-conformity are far more severe than those for people who were designated female at birth. These consequences can be found in many different realms. Rhea Ashley Hoskin (2017) summarized some of the negative consequences of navigating a queer/trans femme identity in a comprehensive literature review. She found that different researchers have suggested that from childhood onwards, feminine boys are

punished for their gender expression, whereas masculine girls are rewarded. This consequently leads feminine boys to experience feelings of isolation and discrimination. Femmephobia persists into adulthood as the policing in femininity in people assigned male at birth becomes an acceptable (and encouraged) practice, leading to violent systems of transmisogyny and homophobia directed towards femme queer and trans people (Hoskin, 2017).

The particular oppression that is femmephobia is not addressed enough as "feminine devaluation continues to inform social oppression but has remained unidentified" (Hoskin, 2017, p. 98). Not only has femmephobia not been sufficiently addressed in queer studies, but, as Fraiman (2003) notes, femmephobia is also reinforced within queer theory. Queer theorists often lean towards reproducing the binary between femininity/reproduction/normativity and masculinity/sexuality/queer resistance. It does so in different ways, one of which being the unconscious tendency of queer theory to "position women, gender femininity and feminism as normative ´other´ to its antinormative project (…) with the result that its own gender codings may be quite conventional" (p. 129). Thus, often, queer and trans femmes become equated with heteronormativity and their gender expression is not seen as political or subversive. Queer spaces in this way perpetuate systemic inequality by prioritizing and favoring some queers over others. As Ahmed (2004, p. 151) notes, "queer spaces may extend some bodies more than others – for example, some queer spaces might extend the mobility of white, middle-class bodies". I would argue that femininity is another identity marker that leads to marginalization and discrimination, as western queer spaces tend to prioritize masculine-of-center folks, and feminine queer people continue to be viewed as weak, apolitical and submissive, invoking a sense of shame among femme queer and trans people (Serano, 2013).

As discussed above, not only masculine queerness is prioritized and favored, but this masculine queerness also comes with whiteness. Omise´eke (2015) argues that it is important to understand how femmes of color have a fundamentally different experience of femme-ness than white femmes. Racism and femmephobia intersect in such a way that it becomes crucial to understand the experience of women and femmes of color as one that is both gendered *and* racialized. Omise'eke argues that "femme-inism would certainly be able to elucidate a more nuanced, supple understanding of the femininity it wants to deconstruct, and to focus more clearly on

how femme-inity (like its straight counterpart) is always already racialized" (p. 144). Thus, it remains important to understand how racism and femmephobia work together to create a particular kind of shaming put on trans and queer femme people of color.

In this section, I therefore want to explore the ways in which the performativity of femme in *Not Fabulous* allows for a working through and projecting back of shame, as well as the ways in which Lucas', Igor's and Paula's performance of femme challenges ideas on what it means to be feminine. I follow Arteaga´s (2013, p. 43) definition of femme who states that femme:

> "is not simply a regurgitation of age-old gender norms, but a revision of them and a reclamation of a subject position historically used to denigrate and shame those stigmatized individuals associated with the body, especially when it is for one's own viewing pleasure"

Thus, queer femmes express heteronormative femininity differently, and thereby re-claim the power that comes with defining their own gender expression rather than being forced into a specific expression. They are policed particularly *because* they define their own gender expression. Hoskin (2017) claims that these acts of violence "can be understood, in part, as a revolt against unsanctioned forms of femininity – femininity on and by bodies that do not uphold a patriarchal model of womanhood" (p. 101). Because femininity and whiteness are historically thought together, as well as femininity and cis-women (Hoskin, 2017), the performers are challenging multiple ideas about femininity by inhabiting a transfeminine brown body. With regards to *Not Fabulous,* I am particularly interested in two things; firstly, I am invested in exploring how the performers flaunt their shame and re-construct their femininity throughout the performance and specifically in the shaking part. Secondly, I am interested in the ways in which the performers render the politics of shame inert by returning the gaze to the audience.

The part that I am focusing on is that of the shaking and beating, as well as that of the gazing in the end, which both follow the voguing choreography. After the voguing piece, Igor, Paula and Lucas come together, crawl under the stage, and put on their wigs of long, thick hair – each dancer wearing a different color. There is a long

moment of silence while the dancers start shaking their whole bodies – sometimes with the entirety of their body, sometimes only with certain body parts – after which loud, repetitive techno music starts and the dancers start to beat their own bodies against the floor, the stage and each other repetitively and increasingly faster and harder. Different body parts smash the floor at different times; their legs, their heads, their arms, their shoulders and their backs. As the shaking and beating continues, marks start appearing on the dancers' bodies in the places where their bodies hit the floor. As they continue to shake, they include their heads in the shaking generating a particular sound of the hair of the wigs moving through the air. The intensity of the shaking is at times so high that the dancers temporarily float in the air as they jump up and down from a horizontal position. As the shaking intensifies, the performers' wigs slide off.

Figure 12: Still from part III (Amelie von Godin, 2018)

The dancers learned the technique of shaking in a workshop as part of their dance education. They were introduced to the movement by being asked to imagine to have sex with the walls, with the floors, with each other. Ottoline explains that the dancers were introduced to the shaking as a way of letting out sexual energy in a different way and of experiencing the body in a different manner. In the performance itself, the movements become increasingly reminiscent of eroticism or explicit

sexuality; such as the moment in which one of the dancers lies on the table and lifts themselves up by their hands, while making a penetration-like movement toward the table. Towards the end of the piece, the dancers start coming closer together; their body parts attached to each other while they continue the process of shaking and beating. This sometimes results in a beating on top of each other, which intensifies the feeling of eroticism that their movements invoke.

The shaking starts to slow down towards the end of the performance, a process that goes together with the dancers finding each other back on the stage. They remain close together, softly shaking their bodies, as their movements minimize until they come to a full stop. The performers slowly direct their gazes to the audience, as they come to a seated position, next to each other on the sage. The wigs, the dresses and the bathing suits are spread on the floor around the stage. What is left, are the performers, who are wearing nothing but their simple black boxer shorts, making eye contact with every single person in the audience. The length of this particular part of the performance depends on the response of the audience in each performance, as the director ends the show when the first person starts clapping. In this way, the audience itself determines when the eye-contact is broken.

In order to analyze the ways in which the performers of *Not Fabulous* work through shame, I follow Cameron's (2016) argument that "when the body is deliberately centered and exposed, the politics of shame surrounding concealment and 'obscenity' are rendered inert" (p. 220). Similar to Flanagan's artwork, *Not Fabulous* thus plays with the body in relation to shame by deliberately centering and exposing the body. Particularly in the shaking, this centering and exposing becomes apparent. As queer femmes of color, Lucas, Paula and Igor are expected to not participate in publicly displaying their sexuality or desires. As Rodríguez argues: "Feminized racial subjects have acutely suffered the tyranny of collectivities that demand sacrificing pleasure to serve communal respectability and the common good" (p. 336). Thus, anything that becomes pleasurable for women and femmes of color is obliterated for the purpose of social respectability. Rodríguez furthermore argues that these subjectivities have historically been and continue to be "disciplined through public shame and censure" (p. 336).

I want to return to Cameron's idea that the politics of shame can be rendered inert through centering and exposing the body, by looking at the ways in which *Not*

*Fabulous* does so. Firstly, I argue that the bodily practices of the performance, and in particular the shaking and the beating, leave the dancers in a vulnerable state, which becomes particularly visible in the final part due to the bodily effects of that particular part of the performance. Secondly, I argue that the performers are disarticulating shame by literally showing the audience what shame has done to them, and consequently confronting the audience with these effects by staring them into the eye after the shaking.

Although they perform shame in the performance – by repetitively shaking and beating their body on to the ground, stage and each other – they break this channel of shame by returning their gaze to the audience in the end. Moreover, the effects of the shaking become visible through different means on their body. In this way, as I read it, the performers bring shame from the private in the public, and use it as a means to connect to each other as well as to the audience.

Figure 13: Still from part IV (Amelie von Godin, 2018)

Queer femmes of color are expected to hide their femme queer identity from the public. In this way, the process of shaming them for their gender and sexual expression can be read as similar to what I have discussed in chapter 2 with regards to Bob Flanagan. Cvetkovich (2003, p. 64) states that:

> "Femmes reframe a conception of the violation of bodily boundaries as traumatic by suggesting that opening the body and, by extension, the self to

> the experience of being vulnerable is both welcome and difficult, and hence profoundly transformative"

The vulnerability of the performers is enhanced since stripping themselves from their outfits involves also removing markers of femininity off of their body. Their wigs – that they put on at the beginning of the shaking part – fall off as a result of the intense movements, and their dresses and bathing suits are lying on the floor around them. I understand this stripping away of feminine markers as a challenging of the understanding of only some people as feminine/women. Cameron (2016) explains that shame can arise from misrecognition, that is, shame becomes experienced when the person feels that they are perceived in a manner that does not coincide with their own image of themselves. I argue that by closing the performance in this particular way, the performers direct the shame back to the audience. Although they are naked, without their femme attire – that is, their wigs, their dresses, their bathing suits, their lipstick – they challenge the audience to re-think what it means and looks like to be femme, what a feminine body comes to mean.

Shame is characterized by "asymmetric transference; it involves an objectifying gaze that cannot be returned with equal force" (Munt in Cameron, 2016, p. 219). Through staring back at the audience during the last minutes of the performance, the three performers return the gaze that the audience has put on them. The consequences of the repetitive shaking and beating can be read on their bodies: the sweat is dripping down from their faces, their chests are breathing heavily and quickly, their legs are shaking, and the bruises on their body are becoming increasingly visible. In this way, the audience is forced to be confronted with the effects of their aggressive movements. I argue that in this way, the performers are breaking the channel of shame, by changing the way in which shame is constructed. Although they embrace the shame in the shaking part, they use it differently, as they sit with it afterwards and reflect it back to the audience. In this way, they bring their shame into the public sphere and take it out of their private experiences, which allows the performers to connect not only to each other but also to the audience. Moreover, it returns to the point I made earlier about femininity in relation to performativity and the (un)safety of queer and trans femme people of color. In the final part, the performers are left with nothing but their own bodies, as their attributes are spread

around them on the floor. Their staring into the eyes of the audience does not only challenge the unidirectional nature of shame, but also forces the audience to think about the moment *after* the performance; how do we perceive these bodies now? Can we still read them as feminine? And if so, are we going to protect them and make sure they are respected in their femme identity?

**Re-Constructing Desirability and Community**

In this section, I conclude this analysis of *Not Fabulous* by firstly engaging with the construction of femme queers as undesirable, after which I trace hope in the countering of this undesirability through engaging with the symbolism of desire and community that is portrayed in the performance. Femmephobia both in- and outside of the queer community produce femme people as undesirable subjects (Hoskin, 2017). Ottoline emphasizes that "[femininities have the experience of] not feeling desired, also not within queer communities, of not feeling beautiful, of not finding people who, you know, who want to fuck them basically". Taywaditep (2001) and Miller (2015) found that lesbians as well as gay men prefer masculinity in terms of romantic and sexual attraction. In this way, femme trans and queer people – and in specific trans women of color – are continuously viewed as undesirable, and are subject to hostile attitudes in the queer community.

I read *Not Fabulous* as resisting the oppressive frameworks of femmephobia, transmisogyny and racism that construct the three performers as undesirable, by actively supporting and desiring each other within the space of the performance. The performance starts with a collective desiring that extends beyond the "you-and-me" but turns into an "us", in which the three bodies merge, fuse and separate again. The improvisation leaves the dancers in a continuous state of touching and support. Their movements are always intertwined with each other; they do not leave each other's bodies untouched for a second. Moreover, their movements are *enabled* because they touch and support each other. A dancer almost falls off the stage – and would if it were not for their dance partner to hold on to their foot. This collective desiring becomes increasingly concrete through the exchanging of lipstick by means of kissing. As part of the contact improvisation piece, the performers interchangeably apply lipstick to each other, and this part closes with Igor lying on the stage on their back, bending backwards and almost falling off, while Lucas lies on top of them and

rubs their lips against Igor, moving from side to side with their face. The moment in which Lucas is applying lipstick to Igor's mouth by means of their own mouth lasts unusually long. In this way, a moment is created that can almost be felt as voyeuristic to the audience as it becomes increasingly intimate. Paula is sitting next to the performers, holding their hand up high above them as if they were making a sign of blessing them. Through the shadows on the wall, it appears as if Paula is doing this not one time, but three times, thereby creating the illusion of an entire community showing support for this moment of public intimacy.

Figure 14: Still from part I (Amelie von Godin, 2018)

I read this performance of intimacy and collective desiring as a request and demand for recognition. By recognizing each other's bodies as desirable in an almost uncomfortably long moment, the audience is confronted with ideas on desirability in relation to gender, race and sexuality. When discussing the kissing, Ottoline states:

> "It was important for me for people to see this extremely tender moment of affection and desire, by male assigned people standing there in these beautiful black dresses. I don't know, for me, as a queer person that has been subjected to quite a lot of queer art in the last years, still for me this image was new

> somehow (…) the first rehearsal I was like, I need this to be seen, and also for myself, I cannot get enough of it"

Thus, Ottoline's quote makes apparent the need for representation of the mutual attraction and desiring of queer and trans femininities. She also explains that the performers experienced a particular freedom to desire and be desired outside of the normative constraints of society within the context of *Not Fabulous*. The normative constraints of heteronormative society discourage contact between certain people. As Ahmed (2004, p. 165) states:

> "Pleasures are about the contact between bodies that are already shaped by past histories of contact. Some forms of contact don't have the same effect as others. Queer pleasures put bodies into contact that have been kept apart by the scripts of compulsory heterosexuality (…) queer pleasures in the enjoyment of forbidden or barred contact engender the possibilities of different kinds if impressions"

Thus, the pleasure that is on public display in *Not Fabulous* is inherently political, due to its active resisting of heteronormative culture that discourages trans femme people of color to be desired and to desire (each other). In this way, spaces can be taken back through enjoyment, "an enjoyment that is returned by being witnessed by others" (Ahmed, p. 165). Thus, precisely because the performers desire and support each other publicly, explicitly and extensively, they are able to transform the imagination of the audience as well. In order to understand the importance of public displays of desire, I want to follow Rodríguez' (2011, p. 332) idea that queer theory should concern itself with:

> "The role of queer social bonds, community futures, and the relevance of sex at this precise historical moment, a moment where the demands of neoliberalism emphasize individual exchange and benefit absent of an analysis of differentiated social relationships to power"

*Not Fabulous* becomes a prime example of the relevance of bringing up desire in the public sphere. The continuing violence against trans women of color requires a thorough and careful analysis of the systems that encourage these violences (Serano, 2013). The differentiated social relationships to power that Rodríguez discuss are apparent when taking into account Lucas', Igor's and Paula's subjectivities as trans femmes of color within a cis-gendered, heteronormative and white art institution. Their portrayal of tenderness, support, caring and desire counters the oppressive reality they are situated in, and therefore encourages the consideration of queer social bonds and community futures as strong counter-resistances to the violences that trans and queer femmes of color continue to be subjected to.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have investigated the ways in which *Not Fabulous*, a queer performance piece, works through shame by means of exposure, returning the gaze, and desire. Due to the performers' identity positions, they are intersectionally oppressed on a political, economic and social level. This oppression also leads to their subjectivities as being read as less desirable both in- and outside of the queer community. It remains particularly important to pay attention to the ways in which these subjectivities continue to be shamed for their erotic desires, as well as to how this shaming can be resisted and subverted. I considered *Not Fabulous* as an admirable example of this subversion and resisting of shame, by considering the ways in which they use their public display of frustration, desire and community in order to play with and eventually return the gaze of shaming.

*Not Fabulous* shows queer desiring as a way of transcending human separation and isolation by portraying bodies that fuse and merge in between moments of shame and frustration. In this way, I argue that sexuality and the expressing and practicing of desire becomes a way of not only working through negative affects and oppressive circumstances in the past and present, but that sexuality and desire also offer a way of accessing the residues and the future potential of positive affect through making it public.

In the final chapter, I will engage with *Not Fabulous* as well as Bob Flanagan's artwork in order to trace their different re-configurations of queer temporality. I do so in order to draw theoretical conclusions on the ways in which

critically hopeful imaginaries of the future are exemplified in these particular performance pieces, and how they both stimulate a different political and social imagination of the not-yet-here.

# IV. Critical Hope as a Queer Reconfiguration of the Past, Present and Future

> *"The sexual practices and fantasies of our perverse imaginations create a place and time of elsewhere, a utopian nexus of critique and potentiality, available to anyone, where sex and recognition touch and cum together"*
> *- Juana María Rodríguez (2011, p. 339)*

**Introduction: Looking Backward, Looking Forward**

Queer and kinky erotic expressions and sexual encounters offer a particularly productive space of theorizing alternative temporalities in relation to pleasure and desire. Critical hope is mirrored in Rodríguez' idea of the utopian nexus of critique and potentiality, as it insists on both an acknowledgement of past and present oppressive circumstances, as well as an impulse to work with these circumstances in a manner that allows for altering them in order to create a different future.

In Chapter II and III, I have looked at the ways in which shame, desire and performance came together in such a way that they expose the necessity of understanding the role of the past and present in queer expressions of desire. Moreover, I argue that the conceptions of futurity can be understood as critically hopeful in Bob Flanagan's artwork as well as in *Not Fabulous*. In this chapter, I am particularly interested in the ways in which both case studies reproduce critically hopeful ways of engaging with the future by further looking at the ways in which temporality is re-constructed.

In order to draw theoretical conclusions on the basis of the case studies of chapter 2 and 3, I therefore elaborate on critical hope and queer temporality in relation to Bob Flanagan's work and *Not Fabulous* in this final chapter. Although I work with queer theory and theories on critical hope, I continuously concretize this theory by drawing from specific elements of the two case studies that I have discussed in this thesis. First, I will argue for the necessity of practicing critical hope, by analyzing it in relation to naïve hope. I do so by elaborating on the ways in which critical hope

involves a critical awareness of the past and the present. Then, in order to show the ways in which my chosen case studies reproduce these critically hopeful ways of imagining, I divide this chapter in two parts. Firstly, I engage with the critical awareness of the past that critical hope encourages, by going back to Bob Flanagan's practices and *Not Fabulous* in order to show that they engage with and re-work the past and present in their performances. Secondly, I take the "looking-forward" elements of both case studies in order to work with the imaginative, creative and playful aspect of critical hope, in order to argue for the potential of critically hopeful expressions of sexuality to encourage a radical imagination and change public culture. The conclusion of this chapter works with both aspects of critical hope – and specifically focuses on the ways in which these aspects are always already intertwined – in order to show the ways in which *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's art practices re-construct temporality both in a queer *and* in a critically hopeful manner, as the past, present and future are always already present in each other.

**Critical Hope as an Intervention in Heteronormative Temporality**

In this thesis, I focus on critical hope as it allows for a substantial, layered and complex critique of the ways in which marginalized groups are constructed as hopeless by encouraging the understanding of the role of systemic oppression. Moreover, I argue that critical hope allows for an understanding of how these groups expose the need for understanding the past and present, as well as for imagining the future differently.

Critical hope can be contrasted with naïve hope, a form of hoping that lacks a foundation of any political struggle (Grain & Lund, 2016) and is often used to serve heteronormativity. As I have discussed in the theoretical framework, heteronormative notions of temporality frame the future in such a way that it is linear, progressive and centered on the idea of reproduction and the nuclear family. Regarding the future in a heteronormative way, thus, includes a specific path that involves that idea of adulthood that maintains these particular ideas on kinship and reproduction. In this way, imaginations of the future are limited to a restrictive paradigm, and, moreover, do not leave room for understanding different pathways. Additionally, naïve hope – which I consider as a heteronormative construction of temporality and the future – works to reproduce the status quo as it advocates for the neoliberalist idea that hard

work necessarily leads to success in the future, regardless of your identity (Bozalek et al., 2014; Grain & Lund, 2016). Naïve hope thus lacks a critical awareness of the past and how this continues to influence the present. As mentioned before, homonormative conceptions of the future – that follow heteronormativity – conceptualize the future as one that will "magically" get better (Goltz, 2012). In this way, these conceptions of futurity fail to account for the ways in which the past persists in the present for queers.

I argue that it is necessary to theorize a different modality of hoping for queers that stands outside of hetero- and homonormative conceptions of temporality and reproductive futurity, which I propose is critical hope. This hope is critical precisely because it emphasizes the critical engagement with the past and present rather than a mere focus on the future, and thereby breaks the much-theorized link in queer studies between hope and futurity that often neglects subjectivities that do not belong to this progressive narrative, namely those subjectivities that fail to conform to homonormative ideas and ideals.

I argue that queer notions of resistance and politics that I have traced in *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's artwork are similar to the underlying assumptions of critical hope – namely, a critical awareness of the past, as well as an understanding of the current geopolitical circumstances and the ways in which these continue to marginalize and oppress certain subjectivities. According to Hall (2014), the radicality of queer hope entails, at least in part, "being critically aware of and accountable to the historical, economic, social and political contexts in which one lives" (p. 213). Through this, critical conceptions of futurity are crucial to queer studies. As Hall (2014, p. 204) argues:

> "Such queer critical conceptions of the futurity are vital and have usefully demonstrated the pitfalls of temporalities that assume and reproduce white, class privileged conceptions of queerness and homonationalist complicity with neoliberal global capitalism in their failure to consider how even marginalized identities and resistance movements can be incorporated into the very systems of power they wish to critique"

Thus, critical hope – as queer hope - aims to emphasize the ways in which certain minoritized identities continue to be persecuted, oppressed and marginalized, influencing their chances for a happy, healthy and financially secure future.

Grain and Lund (2016) identify critical hope both as a standpoint and a way of acting, as "an act of ethical and political responsibility that has the potential to recover a lost sense of connectedness, relationality and solidarity with others" (p. 510). They argue that there is a necessary tension between criticality and hope, and that this tension creates a space of productivity for activism, as it requires a commitment to ideals of justice, reflexivity and solidarity. In this way, critical hope works on an idealistic, as well as on a practical level. As critical hope requires us to think and imagine beyond what is currently here, it becomes a tool for understanding and consequently critiquing oppressive circumstances in reality, while at the same time – on an idealistic level - fantasizing about, and – on an activist level – working towards, a different reality. Through this, critical hope allows us to be imaginative, creative and playful, as it continuously places itself between the what-is-here and the what-is-not-yet-here. Critical hope, therefore, also has the potential to re-signify norms, bodies, sociality and sexual interactions. It does so through the radical imagination that underlies this specific modality of hoping. As critical hope is necessarily dependent on imagining a (different) future, a radical imagination is essential for its nurturing. Khasnabish (2016) defines the radical imagination as the "collective, dialogic capacity to envision how the world might be otherwise that sparks between people in the context of generative, critical encounters" (p. 1). The radical imagination is an activity done in togetherness and can only exist in these collective, critical encounters, and, moreover requires a comprehensive awareness of both the past and the present. Thus, these critical encounters that nurture the radical imagination and critical hope, allow for a re-imagining and re-signifying of how the world – and therefore norms, bodies, sexuality – could be different. It is in this way that the idealistic modality and the activist modality of critical hope come together; as what can be imagined differently is, through this, also practiced differently during these critical encounters. In this way, these critical encounters can be read as moments that point towards a different future.

I take critical hope firstly as an intervention in linear notions of temporality, as it emphasizes that the future does not simply get better, an idea propagated by hetero-

and homonormative conceptualizations of temporality and futurity. However, the criticality of critical hope *also* leaves space for a radical imagination of a different reality, as precisely through its emphasis on understanding oppression, it also aims at altering those conditions and ultimately has the potential to re-signify norms. Understanding critical hope as a queer way of imagining, then, leaves space for both critique and hoe. In the next section, I engage with critical hope's emphasis on a critical awareness of the past in relation to *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's work, thus emphasizing critical hope's critical aspect.

**Tracing a Critical Awareness of the Past and Present**

In this thesis, I argue that "backward" emotions should be constructed as critically hopeful rather than hopeless, as this allows for new opportunities for constructing a queer futurity through an awareness of the past and present. Rand (2012) argues that "the more powerful the affect, the more transformative potentiality it may be able to produce" (p. 79). This makes shame a particularly transformative emotion, as it holds an enormous depth and power by being so closely tied with one's self-image. Shame holds a powerful potentiality as it allows for certain shamed bodies, identities and practices to come together in their shamefulness, thereby resisting normativity collectively. Simultaneously, shame can be seen as an affect that has the potential to point us towards what was wrong in the past, as well as to the ways in which this continues to influence the present circumstances for queer lives. In fact, it is precisely through shame that queers (as well as other minoritized people, such as poor people, disabled people, and racialized people) become confronted with the ways in which their identities have been historically constructed as "deviant" (Love, 2007).

Thus, I argue that shame allows for a particularly critical engagement with the ongoing oppression of queer folks in the present, as well as the ways this oppression is a continuation from the past. I will carry out this analysis by deconstructing the binary between shame and pride, and analyzing the ways in which this binary is constructed to benefit certain communities and not others, as well as to support heteronormative and homonormative notions of (linear) temporality. Moreover, I will take different aspects of the work of Bob Flanagan, as well as different parts of *Not Fabulous*, in order to argue for the necessity of the working-through of shame within a critically hopeful paradigm.

Heather Love (2007) calls for a refusal to replace despair with hope, but for a becoming aware of the despair and the conditions and effects of it. In this way, despair can be used to understand the ways in which histories of oppression continue to influence us, if we refuse to simply move beyond shame to get to pride. As Love states: "Rather than disavowing the history of marginalization and abjection, I suggest we embrace it, exploring the ways it continues to structure queer experience in the present" (p. 29). In this way, "looking back" has the potential of not only showing us from where we came, but also in which ways past damage(s) continue to influence the present (Love, 2007).

According to Love, this criticism has two significant functions. Firstly, it exposes conditions and processes of inequality, exclusion and marginalization. Secondly, it has the potential to point at alternative imaginations and pathways to the future. These alternative imaginations and trajectories, according to Love, are contingent on the primary function of criticism, namely the exposing of oppressive conditions. Hope, in this way, can only be found in a practice that has a critical engagement and awareness of the past, as well as the ways in which the past continues to be reproduced in the present. Homophobia is not merely a historical construct, but continues to play a crucial role in queer lives, requiring us to open ourselves "to social and psychic realities we would rather forget" (p. 29). I argue that investigating queer desire as a site of shame allows for a fruitful analysis of queer temporality and the importance of the past in the present. This critical engagement with the past is mirrored in the concept of critical hope, which I have elaborated upon before. Shame therefore is *critically* hopeful in the sense that it challenges the *naïvely* hopeful idea that the queer simply has to move beyond shame in order to get to pride, and instead encourages a thinking through shame as a pointing towards *something else;* the different future that becomes possible through engaging critically with the past *and* the present. In this way, critical hope stimulates an ambivalent attitude towards shame; as it can both reify oppressive circumstances, as well as expose them by encouraging citizen rights and systemic change. It is precisely on this intersection of critique and potentiality that shame constructs its relation to the past, present and future. Shame plays an important role both in Bob Flanagan's artwork as well as in *Not Fabulous*. Moreover, both case studies portray a certain embracing of histories of marginalization and abjection.

As Erickson (2013) argues, disabled people are supposed to keep their body and their sexuality private, while, simultaneously, they are often put in situations in which their privacy is compromised due to certain assistance needs. The binary of public/private, in this way, is upheld through systems of oppression that discourage people with disabilities from exposing themselves sexually, and encourage them to feel ashamed of their sexual desires in such a way that they want to keep them hidden and private. Bob Flanagan re-claims ableist stereotypes of a disabled person as weak and vulnerable by choosing to be submissive to his partner Sheree Rose, and making this submission public, thereby countering the idea that people with disabilities need to keep their sexual desires private. Moreover, he subjects himself to painful procedures such as cutting and piercing, often with similar tools or even the same tools that were used on him during periods of hospitalization due to his CF. Although his childhood and adolescence were extremely difficult to navigate, Flanagan opens himself precisely to those difficult social and psychic realities by re-enacting them, except this time on his own terms. Shame and pride co-exist in his work; it is precisely through flaunting his shame that he confronts the audience, thereby subverting the unidirectional flow of shame that is put on people with disabilities that express sexual desire. By displaying himself in a vulnerable manner – that is, engaging with extreme erotic acts such as self-mutilation – he plays with shame rather than transcending it. Moreover, the very act of performing kinky sexuality subverts different structures of shaming. People with disabilities who have kinky sexual preferences have to endure two different types of shame that intersect: that of having a disability, as well as that of having a preference for the BDSM lifestyle. Damaging sexual stigmas regarding both social groups are particularly salient for people whose identities intersect across both groups (Reynolds, 2007). Within this framework, it becomes particularly important to note how Bob Flanagan uses (performance) art to present a different image of the (kinky) sexuality of people who identify as disabled, and how, in this way, he works through his shame by means of public performance.

In *Not Fabulous,* shame takes up a specific role that needs to be contextualized within theories of shame in relation to pride and western/non-western identity. The binary of shame/pride is one that is socially constructed, and therefore does not necessarily hold true in the reality of queer lives. As Love (2007) argues, "we can turn shame into pride, but we cannot do so once and for all: shame lives on in

pride, and pride can easily turn back into shame" (p. 28). Thus, shame can never simply be overcome, or left behind in the past. Moreover, the idea that shame is a "backward" emotion and pride a futuristic one, fails to account for the potential that shame holds. Specifically considering the ways in which shame and queerness have historically been tied up together, it remains important to continue to critically reflect on and remember the past in order to see the ways in which shame continues to be a fundamental characteristic of queerness in the present. The queer narratives of progress can be considered as notions of naïve hope, which does not acknowledge current social and political circumstances; following a heteronormative temporality of increased pride and openness that fails to acknowledge how certain queer communities – such as disabled people, trans people and people of color – continue to fall out of this narrative.

Through working with *Not Fabulous*, I want to look at the ways in which the idea of queer progress and pride is an inherently white idea. As discussed previously, communities of color are often denied a future altogether due to processes of discrimination and marginalization. In this way, it does not simply get better for queer and trans people of color, that continue to face the highest levels of violence among all queer and trans people[7]. Thus, it becomes important to investigate the questions; for whom do we imagine the future, and who gets to be proud? According to Dina Georgis (2013), the binary of tradition/family and modernity/queerness does not hold true for Arab queer subjects, and, moreover, works to reproduce western pride and gay rights discourses that position the queer subject as needing to overcome shame. Georgis argues that Arab queer communities, contrary to western queer communities, invent themselves "*through* and not *against* shame" (p. 234-235, emphasis in

[7] The National Coalition of Anti-Violence Program found in 2016 that while only 38 percent of the U.S. population identifies as people of color, 60 percent of survivors of anti-LGBTQ and anti-HIV hate crimes identified as people of color. Moreover, whereas 3.5 percent of the U.S. population is undocumented, 17 percent of survivors is (Wade, 2016). These statistics mirror other studies, such as one done by the Center for American Progress in 2011, that showed that LGBTQ people of color are nearly 4 times as likely to experience physical violence compared to white queer people, and that transgender people of color are four times as likely to experience police violence than white transgender people (Women of Color Network, n.d.).

original). Thus, Arab queer communities, according to Georgis, refuse to resist choosing between tradition and family – which, according to her, are the primary "sites of sexual shaming" (p. 235) – and modern queer life. In this sense, shame is not simply overcome, moved beyond or resisted, but rather becomes part of queer life. On the contrary, in western sexual politics, the major goals of the gay movement were – and continue to be – liberation, gay rights and social recognition (Georgis, 2013). In this narrative, queer pride provides the ability to live one's life shamelessly. In the shadow of this queer pride is the "proverbial closet of shame, which has stood as the symbol of a life with no future" (p. 240). In this sense, the experience of shame becomes a feeling of backwardness, whereas the experience of pride is recognized as a progressive, hopeful affect. This idea of progression, then, becomes linked to whiteness within the context of the western world.

Moreover, the narrative of pride that permeates queer politics and social life fails to prepare queers for the difficulties and struggles that are often part of the process of coming out. Georgis proposes that "pride in one's identity might feel like an obligatory requirement for queer belonging" (p. 241). This seeming necessity obscures other strategies for queer becoming that do not directly relate to the right to come out and the right to demand legal changes (Georgis, 2013). Thus, along the lines of Love's argument, Georgis argues that the epistemology of queer pride has informed – and continues to inform – the ways in which queer history and identity is constructed and narrated. She argues that this epistemology is a product of the logics of neoliberalism, in which consumer and domestic private rights are prioritized over citizen rights and systemic change – a practice through which social acceptance and pride become mutually constitutive, most notably in the form of pride parades. In this way, "western queer pride (…) tends to privilege victory over the defeat of suffering and social humiliation" (p. 241). Consequentially, with an increase in tolerance and acceptance towards people who experience same-sex desire, feelings such as shame and self-hatred become shameful affects themselves (Love, 2007). As Georgis (2013, p. 241) argues:

> "The pressure to be shameless might foreclose, or at the very least discourage, the possibilities of a more careful process of coming to terms with the challenges, and in some contexts the dangers, that one might face as a queer

person. Feeling proud, in other words, does not abate shame and arguably keeps it alive, especially if we are not able to live up to its demands"

Thus, the normative discourse of pride fails to account for the difficulties that are involved with living a queer, non-normative life, specifically for a person of color within the western world.

*Not Fabulous* clearly exposes this complexity with regards to the false binary between shame and pride. As I have elaborated upon in Chapter 3, the performers engage with a performance-within-a-performance in the voguing dance piece. This construction of performativity highlights the continued necessity of safe spaces for trans and queer people of color, while at the same time placing a critical note on the unsafety that persists beyond the performance for trans femmes of color. As Georgis notes, within the western world, the pressure to be shameless discourages the understanding of oppression that continues to affect certain queers rather than others. Lucas, Paula and Igor cannot perform their femininity outside of the context of *Not Fabulous,* as they are reproached not only within their dance school for transgressing gender roles, but also in the town where they live, where they continue to face harassment and violence when they wear feminine attire or lipstick in public transport or on the street (Calmeijer Meijburg, 2018). Thus, understanding and working-through shame becomes essential in order to comprehend the systems in place that continue to subjugate trans femmes of color.

Therefore, as I have argued in this thesis by working with Bob Flanagan and *Not Fabulous,* shame needs to be worked through rather than resisted, as it allows for a critical awareness of the ways in which oppressive circumstances of the past persists in the present, and how these cannot simply be overcome. Moreover, as I argue, working through shame allows for a more complex analysis of cultural and geopolitical specificity, as it highlights the ways in which the narrative of pride is part of a neoliberal politics of the West that works to reproduce homonormativity. This argument becomes particularly important when looking at *Not Fabulous*, as all three performers come from non-western countries in which they were reproached for their femininity and their queer identity, and, also in their daily life in the West, continue to be persecuted for their femme expression. However, also in Bob Flanagan's work, shame is a necessary and useful affect to work with, as ableism continues to affect the

ways in which disabled people are shamed for their desire and desirability. In the next section, I want to engage with the imaginative side of critical hope in order to trace the ways in which both Bob Flanagan's artwork and *Not Fabulous* encourage a change in the public imagination by means of creativity and playfulness.

**Stimulating the Radical Imagination**

Precisely because certain subjectivities – those that are furthest away from the ideal of heteronormativity that I have discussed – are excluded from narratives of hope and futurity, it becomes important to construct a hopeful and imaginative narrative for those subjectivities in order to counter systemic and intersectional oppression. As Noss (2012, p. 132) argues:

> "Maintaining a critique of heteronormative futurity does not require that we prohibit movements toward creative futures of diverse and incomplete configurations (…) keeping a space for futurity – insisting on imaginative potential of utopian proportion – is perhaps most important for those subjects furthest from the presently universal white, hetero, upper-class adult man"

Imagination – of a utopian proportion – thus has an important political potential that needs to be paid attention to. I have discussed in the first section of this chapter that critical hope brings together both critique and potentiality, and that its practicing lies on the nexus of these two. Therefore, as I have discussed the importance of a critical looking back in relation to *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's work, I am invested in the utopian, imaginative and hopeful in this section in relation to the case studies that I have chosen. With this division, I do not mean to imply that criticality and hopefulness are separate entities; nor that we can feel and practice one without the other. Instead, I argue that they are always already intertwined in each other, just as the past, present and future can never be completely discerned. However, in order to highlight different aspects of the case studies in relation to critical hope, I deem it important to, in this section, pay attention to the glimpses of hope that are present in both Flanagan's work and *Not Fabulous*.

In Flanagan's work, such as in *Nailed, Scaffold*, and *Wall of Pain,* as well as in his experiences with his BDSM-practices more generally, it becomes clear that he

enters an ecstatic space when he engages in BDSM. I have elaborated on this space in Chapter II by explaining the ways in which BDSM can invoke an experience of "ecstatic time", as it was introduced by José Esteban Muñoz in 2009. In this experience of temporality, a person leaves their own self and thereby ruptures the linearity of straight time, making a "request to stand out of time together, to resist the stultifying temporality and time that is not ours, that is saturated with violence both visceral and emotional, a time that is not queerness" (p. 187). Muñoz argues that knowing ecstasy means having a sense of a temporal unity that includes the past, the future and the present. This temporally adjusted idea of ecstasy, according to him, can offer the potentiality of entering this queer temporality, a temporality that moves away from notions and experiences of straight time. Thus, practicing BDSM becomes a space for Bob Flanagan to escape straight time, to step out of the normative boundaries that demarcate what his disabled body comes to mean and in which ways it should and should not behave. BDSM becomes a means to access different temporalities as the here-and-now is escaped through means of ecstasy and moments of intense pleasure.

By accessing different modes of temporality, Flanagan counters the idea that the future can only exist without people with disabilities, as well as the idea that people with disabilities have no future, narratives exposed and problematized by Alison Kafer (2013). The queer relational bliss that Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose transfer through means of their performance art and photography do not only offer them a different access to temporality and futurity, but also allow their audiences to view the future differently and more hopeful. In the documentary *Sick: The Life and Death of Bob Flanagan* (Dick, 1997), Flanagan is contacted by a teenage girl named Sara, through the *Make a Wish Foundation* in Ontario, Canada. She is also living with CF and has a bad prognosis. Her wish is to meet Flanagan before she passes away, and the wish is granted through the foundation. In an interview with the director, she answers to the question of what she will be when she is 25 years old (taken from Dick, 1997):

> "25? I mean, that's a long time! To me, I couldn't think that far. But now, especially seeing everything that Bob and Sheree have done, I can"

Through Sara, it becomes clear that Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose's public display of their ecstasy offers an alternative narrative of the future for people who are diagnosed with CF and often have a bad prognosis for their life expectancy. In this way, their relationship and their choice to portray and perform their BDSM practices publicly, can affect people's notion of futurity quite literally, as they create a hopeful space for other people with CF through showing how BDSM has offered a way for Flanagan to not only deal with his pain and gain agency and control over his body, but also to outlive his life expectancy by 40 years (Juno & Vale, 2000).

Finally, the public aspect of Flanagan's and Rose's performance holds a particular political potential. BDSM's breaking of heteronormative norms – and specifically, public displays thereof – allows for a different imagination, and is therefore politically charged. BDSM allows for a critical promise of fantasy (Butler, 2004), as it makes the "elsewhere" embodied through concretizing fantasies into a carefully negotiated sexual interaction; allowing us to imagine others and ourselves differently during a BDSM scene. Alternative intimacies (Bauer, 2014) thus can offer a hopeful space that extends beyond the bedroom, specifically for people who have minoritized identities. Sexual practices that have historically been and continue to be stigmatized and persecuted hold an important potential as they make it possible to imagine the "changed possibilities of identity, intelligibility, publics, culture, and sex" (Berlant & Warner, 1998, p. 548).

Thus, Bob Flanagan's public performance and exposure of kinky sexual practices thus allow for a different imagination for other people with disabilities. I want to read *Not Fabulous* as a similar attempt at changing the public imagination. I read *Not Fabulous* as a "collective affective formation" (Cvetkovich, 2003, p. 43). Cvetkovich defines a collective affective formation as an affective formation that breaks through "the presumptively privatized nature of affective experience" (p. 43). By collectivizing both their shame as well as their desire, the dancers bring into the public what they are supposed to keep private. In this way, the audience becomes confronted with affects that are usually asked to stay hidden, which in turn compels the audience to re-think their own presumptions on femininity and desire. This making-public of both negative and hopeful affect, I argue, has a particular potential to change the public imagination with regards to hope and desire. The performers challenge what it means to be desirable, what it means to be feminine, and what it

means to support each other. In order to further explore the hopeful potentiality of this particular queer performance, I want to work with the following quote by Escudero-Alías (2016, p. 66):

> "As a theoretical weapon, queer performativity can be converted into a discursive strategy to alter the meaning not only of gender, but also of terms like trauma, melancholia or even shame, which lie at the core of most queer feelings in terms of a low self-esteem, indignity, humiliation, alienation etc. The ultimate task would be to shatter their conventional meanings so that a new semantic and conceptual dynamics may arise"

Thus, performance holds a particular potentiality with regards to the transformation of certain negative affect that come with certain marginalized identities. The ways in which Lucas, Paula and Igor challenge ideas on femininity – by continuously changing their outfits and thereby resisting normative ideas on what a woman or a feminine person looks like – and portray the working-through of shame through the beating and the confrontational gaze with the audience allow for a different way of conceptualizing both femininity and shame, as well as the relationship between the two. This transformation is enabled by amplifying and highlighting their personal experience as queer femmes of color.

The meanings of queer feelings such as low self-esteem and alienation are challenged in *Not Fabulous* through employing desire and community as a remedy against structures of oppression. I argue that *Not Fabulous* portrays a kind of intimacy and eroticism that extends the meaning of sex and sexuality, and that has the potential to change the public culture of sexuality and desire. I understand sexuality in their work in the broadest sense; as a kind of desiring that extends beyond physical acts that are commonly understood as sexual, but that includes (soft and hard) touching, kissing, caressing, gazing and supporting.

The display of this eroticism and desire becomes inherently political as Lucas, Paula and Igor are consistently thought as being situated "outside the real and imagined spheres of radical sexual sociality" (Rodríguez, 2011, p. 335). The performers of *Not Fabulous* bring their feelings of desiring and supporting each other to the audience, and even to the director herself. As Ottoline explains:

> "I also experienced this affect of desiring them, or falling in love with them, like everybody leaves this room with such a warmth (…) for me sometimes in the beginning it was really like a crush feeling I would have, during a run through or a rehearsal, because they don't hold back, and (…) this desire, it seeps through every movement you know"

Thus, the performers' intense, immediate and urgent movements carry different kinds of desiring in them. Moreover, this desire is transferred to the audience. As Berlant & Warner (1998, p. 558) argue, queer sexual culture has a particular political potential:

> "We have developed relations and narratives that are only recognized as intimate in queer culture: girlfriends, gal pals, fuckbuddies, tricks. Queer culture has learned not only how to sexualize these and other relations, but also to use them as a context for witnessing intense and personal affect while elaborating a public world of belonging and transformation. Making a queer world has required the development of kinds of intimacy that bear no necessary relation to domestic space, to kinship, to the couple form, to property, or to the nation"

Thus, queer cultural creates particular intimacies that stand outside of heteronormative conceptions of intimacy and sexuality. The sexuality and desire that is portrayed in *Not Fabulous* thus encourages an imagination of this public world of belonging and transformation by making their desire for each other public, as well as extending it to the audience.

**Conclusion**

Understanding the past, present and future as always already intertwined, as well as criticality and hope as mutually constitutive, allows for a queer understanding of temporality and critical hope. I have argued that desire, shame and critical hope come together in a queerness that concerns itself not only with the future, but also with the present and the past. As the past persists into the present for queers, this chapter has attempted to construct a new vision on desire as a historic endeavor, through

theorizing shame as a temporal affect that brings the past into the present. Moreover, I have argued that desire can also become a fruitful platform to think futurity differently.

By paying attention to the ways in which *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's work look backward *and* forward, I have argued that both works offer a new perspective on critical hope, which in turn offers a new perspective on ideas on temporality and futurity for subjectivities that fall outside of hetero- and homonormativity. The narrative of gay pride works alienating for communities that lie outside of this progressive narrative. For queers, then, the past becomes projected as backward and bad, whereas the future comes to embody modernity and progress. Thus, the contemporary queer is encouraged by homonormative notions of temporality to move away from the past and toward the future. However, I have argued that critical hope allows for a way of theorizing temporality in such a way that the past, present and future are always already intertwined with each other. I have elaborated on shame as a productive critical affect. Shame offers a potential for a contemporary critique of social and political circumstances for queers, as it highlights the ways in which shame continues to be put on queer subjectivities. Moreover, I have argued that shame offers a re-consideration of the progressive narrative of pride, which fails to include subjectivities that cannot afford to assume the future in which every queer is allowed to proud and open, namely queer people of color and disabled people. As critical hope requires a critical engagement with the past as well as the present, it offers a new modality of hoping for those queers that cannot simply leave the past behind, as well as for those who remain shameful. The arguments that I have formed in the sections above were traced in *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's artwork, in order to show the complex ways in which these case studies show a working-through of shame.

Particularly because sex and eroticism can remind us of what is still missing – due to the shame we experience because of those desires – as well as what we are working towards – due to the desire for another reality that sex, sexuality and desire can invoke – it holds a particular relation to temporality and critical hope. Both *Not Fabulous* and Bob Flanagan's artwork expose the need to understand the past, present and future as next to each other and as influencing each other continuously. In this way, the future can only be imagined if we first understand the ways in which the past

and present continue to influence our very conceptualizations of any possible future. Making these temporal re-constructions public, then, allows for a change in the public imagination in relation to desire and sexuality for those subjectivities that continue to be intersectionally oppressed in such a way that they are denied a (sexual) future altogether.

# Conclusion: Remaining Hopeful

> *"Heteronormative culture makes queers think that both the past and the future do not belong to them. All we are allowed to imagine is barely surviving the present"*
> *- José Esteban Muñoz (2009, p. 112)*

In this thesis, I have investigated both the role of the past and the future in relation to expressions of queer and kinky desire and sexuality, as well as the relation of the past, present and future to each other in these expressions. Precisely as Muñoz points out, heteronormativity discourages an awareness of the past and hope for the future for queer subjectivities. Therefore, I have argued for the importance of understanding and constructing queer re-configurations of temporality in order to imagine the future in a critically hopeful way. This thesis was an attempt at a taking back of temporality of those subjectivities whose awareness of the past, as well as realizations of the future are erased.

To live in the past, present and future simultaneously is a common experience for people on the margins. Being unable to keep up with heteronormative temporality, "feeling backward", experiencing loss, melancholia and shame are all part of living a queer life. However, queer lives also point at what else could be possible. By forming different social bonds, creating alternative communities and building alliances, queer communities expose a hopeful imagination of what the world could also look like. This becomes a particularly important process in a world where these imaginations are rendered difficult to practice.

Therefore, in this thesis, I have re-considered what facilitates the imagination of and the hope for a different reality. Systematic inequality in the form of the heteropatriarchy, white supremacy and racism, classism, ableism, homophobia and transphobia can make this different reality difficult to imagine, specifically for subjectivities that have an intersectionally oppressed identity. As these different but intertwined systems define what becomes normal, certain identities, practices and communities are targeted as "deviant" or "hopeless". However, in this thesis, I trace

the hopefulness that can exist despite these circumstances within certain queer and kinky practices.

To remain hopeful in a society that discourages imaginations of a different future is an inherently political act. The literal imagining of any future at all is discouraged for subjectivities that continue to be persecuted, violated and murdered, and subjected to state and interpersonal violences.[8] Disabled people, queer and trans people and people of color are continuously depicted as without a future, and a future often remains imagined as without them. Because of these systems of oppression that are in place, it is important that imaginations – and cultural and aesthetic products that include or construct these imaginations – perform a comprehensive analysis of the ways in which the past and present cannot be simply transcended. Countering linearity, progression and naïve hope, these imaginations therefore need to construct an intersectional analysis of the ways in which systems such as transmisogyny, queerphobia, ableism, femmephobia and racism continue to determine the social and sexual realities of certain subjectivities.

Through working with Not Fabulous and Bob Flanagan's artwork, I have emphasized their different ways of reminding us of the stickiness of the past. Precisely by paying attention to those subjectivities that are furthest away from the heteronormative ideal of the white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle/upper-class ideal, I aimed at exposing the ways in which focusing on their re-constructions of temporality and hope can offer a radically new perspective. As many of the binaries and progressive narratives are defied by those subjectivities, they are able to highlight – and offer remedies to – the systems of oppression that keep the most marginalized subjectivities in the margins. As I have argued in this thesis, in order for critical hope to be critical, it is thus crucially important that it highlights the ways in which historical and contemporary structures of exclusion and marginalization continue to influence the ways in which certain individuals and

[8] The most alarming example of this is that due to systemic intersecting oppressions such as transmisogyny and racism, the average life-expectancy for a transgender woman of color in the United States is currently 31 (Allen, 2018).

groups of individuals are able and allowed to express themselves sexually as well as socially.

I particularly focused on the ways in which the performers worked through shame by analyzing how they performed desire and community in their artwork. I have engaged with temporality, shame and desire precisely because I believe they are intimately bound together; shame reminds us of what used to be – and what continues to persist – whereas our desire can point us to what is still missing or what lacks. Moreover, for marginalized subjectivities, desire and shame are intimately bound together as they have been – and continue to be – shamed and persecuted for displaying and expressing sexual desire. Addressing desire and desirability, then, remains of fundamental importance, as intersectional oppression constructs certain subjectivities as undeserving of desire and as unable to express desire. Moreover, neoliberal capitalism isolates marginalized subjectivities from each other in such a way that they are restricted from forming networks of support and community among each other. Therefore, using performance to counter these oppressive systems, becomes a powerful tool not only in creating community among performers and artists, but also between the performers and the audience. In this way, both Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose, as well as Paula, Igor and Lucas, construct a narrative of community and desire built from their sexuality and desire which remains continuously shamed and marginalized. This allows for a critically hopeful practice to take place

As critical hope leaves space for desperation and hope, frustration and excitement, sadness and joy, I have focused on the ways in which queer sexuality has the potential to not only work through past – and present – oppression by addressing the affect of shame, but also to engage with negative affect in such a way that it can become pleasurable or ecstatic by means of community and desire. In this way, I engaged with the fluidity of the past, present and future, as well as of loss, shame and hope. Through addressing the ways in which the performers of Not Fabulous and Bob Flanagan and Sheree Rose make their conceptions of community and desire public, I have argued that they have the potential to change the public imagination with their artwork. These performances point at an imagining, a hoping, that might be not-yet-conscious, but that have the potential to transform oppressive conditions. In this way, critical hope seeps out of the aesthetic objects, as they encourage a collective

imagination of a different reality. In this way, I have argued that sexuality and the expressing and practicing of desire becomes a way of not only working through negative affects and oppressive circumstances in the past and present, but that sexuality and desire also offer a way of accessing the residues and the future potential of positive affect.

In order to further explore the potential of understanding critical hope as a queer re-configuration of temporality, I suggest further research on the ways in which cultural and aesthetic objects stimulate imaginations of the future that include an awareness of the past and present. Specifically, because current understandings of queer temporality in relation to hope and futurity lack a critical awareness of the past, as well as tend to neglect the role of desire and desirability in their re-configurations of temporality and futurity, I believe this is a topic that needs to be further explored within the realm of queer studies.

Practicing critical hope for a different future is not necessarily an optimistic act, nor can the criticality of critical hope be mistaken for pessimism. It is precisely when we start to understand critique and hope as mutually co-constitutive that we can begin to comprehend how the past, present and future play an intertwined and non-linear role in our understandings of – different – queer futurities. By working through the "messy feelings" that come with inhabiting an – intersectionally – marginalized and desiring/desirable body, the performers of this thesis expose the need for a complex and layered view on the role of negative affect in the awareness of historical and contemporary oppressive circumstances. This awareness in turn has the potential to create an understanding of the future that positions itself somewhere between radical hope and critical attentiveness, which I consider as the only way to start imagining and working towards a queer future.

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