

Horizontal futures

Reflecting on future through contemporary performances

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Summary

This thesis examines contemporary performances through a lens of queer futurity. The term 'queer futurity' originates primarily from José Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*, in which he argues that the present is not yet queer, in this way positioning queerness as an ideality that can only exist in the future. The lens consists of a selection of four concepts that keep recurring in Muñoz' discourse: temporality – potentiality – disidentification – rejecting heteronormative logics. Whereas Muñoz turned to queer cultural works from around the 1960's to discuss queer futurity, this thesis looks at contemporary performances that are not labelled as queer works: *8: Metamorphosis* by Nicole Beutler Projects (2019) & *Swan Lake The Game* by Club Guy and Roni (2020). The motive to look at performances that do not primarily identify as queer is related to the way the word 'queer' is used in this thesis: taken out of the realm of gender and sexuality and considering it as a rejection of clear-cut categories and binary modes of thinking. Deploying the lens of queer futurity in non-queer performances provides an opportunity to focus on those elements within the performance that reject the categorised, binary thinking of the present time and open up to other modes of existence. The lens of queer futurity highlights how these performances reject the here and now and offer invitations to reflect on the future.

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Introduction

Performances can stimulate us to think critically about the world we live in and its future. They have the potential to construct miniature worlds in which our minds can wander and offer us a different perspective on today's society and the direction in which society is heading. In this thesis I will elaborate on how contemporary performances can invite us to question or reflect on the future.

At a time when Queer, Black Lives Matter and climate movements are (re-)emerging in society, future-oriented questions about how we as people live together or what we can achieve together come to the fore. That is why I have chosen to write this thesis on a subject with 'future' as its theme: I am interested in how performances take their share in a movement towards another world; a world where we think differently about how we relate to each other and to the earth. Performances may not always actively stimulate people to take action, but they can encourage thinking about change, they can invite us to think outside the box or even challenge our binary, categorised thinking.

I would like to explore this topic of futurity by analysing performances through a lens of 'queer futurity'. In this thesis, the word queer is not limited to the domain of sexual orientation or gender. Queerness is about a rejection of binary thinking. Queerness includes that which is not part of the norm, more specifically 'the heteronormative norm'. The term 'queer futurity' originates primarily from José Muñoz's book *Cruising Utopia: The then and there of queer futurity*.¹ In this book, he criticises the now and argues that the present is not yet queer; thereby positioning queerness as an ideality that only exists in the future. Queer futurity is about the hope that in the future there will exist new ways of being and doing in the world.

In this thesis, the lens of queer futurity is formed by the selection of concepts that are related to this notion. The lens is a way of approaching performances that address the subject of the future, broad as this concept is, in a more tangible way. 'Tangible' in the sense that the lens provides a structural way of dramaturgically analysing performances. In this research, the lens will serve as a tool to analyse the case studies *8: Metamorphosis* (2019) by Nicole Beutler Projects and *Swan Lake The Game* (2020) by Club Guy and Roni, and explore where their invitation lies for the future.² The reason for analysing performances that are not explicitly labelled as queer works from the perspective of queer futurity, is that this theory is not solely about how categories of gender and sexuality can be broken down, but also about how a future without any form of binary thinking could be imagined. The

¹ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

² Performance by Nicole Beutler Projects, *Metamorphosis*, attended September 18, 2019, Stadsschouwburg Utrecht, Utrecht.

Online performance by Club Guy and Roni, *Swan Lake The Game*, attended December 6, 2020, www.nitehotel.nl

performances analysed in this thesis each in their own way reject rigid norms of the present, raise the themes of change, crisis, transformation and invite us to think about the future. The notion of queer futurity can make us re-evaluate the potential to think differently about the future than we do now, which makes it relevant to take a closer look at this theory at precisely this time: a time when questions about the future, and how we as humans could live together in this near future, are at the centre of attention. The central research question in this thesis is: *How can we use the lens of queer futurity to explore how performances dealing with crisis, transformation or change offer ways of reflecting on the future?*

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

In order to answer the aforementioned research question, a literature research in the field of queer futurity theory has been conducted, followed by a dramaturgical analysis of two contemporary performances: *8: Metamorphosis* by Nicole Beutler Projects and *Swan Lake The Game* by Club Guy and Roni.³

In the first chapter, the focus is on the characteristics of the lens of queer futurity. Through José Muñoz' book *Cruising Utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* and the volume *A critical inquiry into queer utopias*, edited by Angela Jones, the components valuable to this lens are researched.⁴ This chapter functions as the theoretical anchor of this thesis. The first sub-question that is addressed here is: *What does the lens of queer futurity consist of?*

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Muñoz brings queerness into the field of aesthetics and looks at works (poems, performances, autobiographical texts) from the past to discuss his view on queer futurity.⁵ In his introduction, he starts with stating that queerness is 'not yet here' and continues:

[...] Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. [...] Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility of another world.⁶

Muñoz approaches queer futurity from this temporal perspective. He criticises the now and argues that the present is not yet queer; that the present is still strongly heteronormative.⁷ He clarifies the fact that queerness is not here yet by positioning it on the horizon, a horizon with a certain potential. The full potential of queer identities cannot be realised in the here and now as there is not enough space for them in the present, and so the realisation of this potential lies in a movement towards the future, in the same way as one moves towards the horizon; always working towards it, but never fully reaching it. Therefore, queerness is connected to futurity, to that which is not yet here. Queer futurity rejects the normative

³ Performance by Nicole Beutler Projects, *Metamorphosis*, attended September 18, 2019, Stadsschouwburg Utrecht, Utrecht.

Online performance by Club Guy and Roni, *Swan Lake The Game*, attended December 6, 2020, www.nitehotel.nl

⁴ José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising utopia: The then and there of queer futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009).

Angela Jones, *A critical inquiry into queer utopias* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

⁵ Elizavet Pakis, "Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance," *Borderlands e-Journal* 10.2 (2011): 2.

⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 1.

⁷ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 22.

structure of the present. A normative structure refers to what “ought to be” and includes the norms, values and role expectations in the present time.⁸ Muñoz is specific in his conception of queer by placing queer in its own philosophical niche in the future. His book will serve as a guide in developing the queer futurity lens.

To consider queer as refusal or rejection of a normative mindset, is a view shared by Angela Jones in the introduction of *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*. I follow Angela Jones in her understanding of queer beyond the domain of sexual orientation or gender subversion. To her, queerness is: “a refusal; it is a dismissal of binaries, categorical, and essentialist modalities of thought and living.”⁹ In the introduction of this edited volume, Jones explores the notion of queer futurity: “[...] queer futurity is not so much about crafting prescriptions for a utopian society—in which everyone is happy, and life is ideal—but [about] making life more bearable in the present because in doing so we create the potential for a better future.”¹⁰ The way how Jones phrases it here reflects the idea of queer futurity as something we can act upon right now, in this very moment. What we do now has an impact on our future. Jones differs from Muñoz here: Whereas Muñoz rejects the here and now, positions queerness as an ideality in the future and looks at works in the past to discuss the potential of queer futurity, Jones emphasises more that everyday practices in the present can also identify that potential. Jones sees the present as an opportunity to see where the possibilities for a better future lie. Jones shares though Muñoz’ view that identifying the potential of utopian spaces can transform the future of individuals. *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* takes current debates on the future of queer individuals out of the merely theoretical domain and explores how queer futurity is being shaped by individual behaviour in everyday practices.¹¹ The acts of resistance examined in this volume include performances, BDSM practices, social movements and political campaigns, in which individuals attempt to create queer utopian spaces that suggest the potential for the future.¹² ‘Resistance’ here refers to the reaction against the heteronormative norm. This volume contributes to the determination of the components that will be part of this queer futurity lens.

In addition to Muñoz' and Jones' books on the future of queers in aesthetic works and everyday practices, Jill Dolan addresses specifically how the idea of utopia is reflected in performance in her book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*. Dolan’s book focusses on live theatre as a site for “finding hope”.¹³ She notes how small but profound moments within a performance and the emotional, social and visceral connection we can

⁸ Faculty Babson, “Social Structure,” accessed May 19, 2021, https://faculty.babson.edu/krollag/org_site/encyclop/soc_structure.html.

⁹ Angela Jones, “Introduction: Queer utopias, queer futurity, and potentiality in quotidian practice,” *A critical inquiry into queer utopias* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 12.

¹⁰ Jones, “Introduction,” 2.

¹¹ Jones, “Introduction,” 1.

¹² Jones, “Introduction,” 1-2.

¹³ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

experience in theatre can cause this hopeful feeling of what a better world might feel like.¹⁴ This feeling of hope could, according to Dolan, become a motivation for social change.

These three authors, each in their own way, indicate how art and activist practices can give a sense of hope for a different future. By writing about this topic, they bring this hopeful future to our attention and a little closer to us. With this thesis, I wish to contribute to the existing debate on utopia, hope and queer futurity by looking at contemporary performances through a lens of concepts related to thinking about the future, to see how these performances not only contain moments of hope, but also how they invite us to reflect on change and transformation.

Following the literature research, the performances *Swan Lake The Game* (Club Guy and Roni) and *8: Metamorphosis* (NBprojects) are analysed from the perspective of queer futurity. The lens functions as a tool to dramaturgically analyse these performances. The case studies do not explicitly frame their work as a 'queer performance', however, they both in their own way reject entrenched categorised thinking and reveal their relationship to the future. My second sub-question is: *How do the performances 8: Metamorphosis (NBprojects) and Swan Lake The Game (Club Guy and Roni) point towards the future and how can the lens of queer futurity help us to understand this?*

8: Metamorphosis is a work by Nicole Beutler projects (2019), and a coproduction with Operadagen Rotterdam and International Theater Amsterdam.¹⁵ I attended this performance in September 2019 and a registration of this performance supports this analysis. *Metamorphosis* is a dance performance as well as a contemporary opera “about embracing the changes that lie ahead.”¹⁶ The text in the programme also indicates that this performance portrays the topic of future: “The ice is melting, the climate is changing, the balance of power is starting to shift. The future holds great uncertainty.”¹⁷ A through line in this performance is the development from a point of order and structure towards the point of destruction and accompanying loss. The performance starts off with eight men in suits following a stiff and straight-lined choreography and it ends in a colourful, fluidly moving scene.

The second case study is *Swan Lake The Game*, a digital performance by Club Guy and Roni, Slagwerk Den Haag and Tomoko Mukaiyama Foundation.¹⁸ This performance consists of both an online (*Swan Lake The Game*) and an offline (*Swan Lake*) version, which are also integrated with each other. The online and offline audiences can together choose their own

¹⁴ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 5.

¹⁵ Performance by Nicole Beutler Projects, *Metamorphosis*, attended September 18, 2019, Stadsschouwburg Utrecht, Utrecht.

¹⁶ Nicole Beutler Projects, “8: Metamorphosis,” accessed January 8, 2021, http://www.nbprojects.nl/en/performances/8_metamorphosis.

¹⁷ Nicole Beutler Projects, “8: Metamorphosis.”

¹⁸ Online performance by Club Guy and Roni, *Swan Lake The Game*, attended December 6, 2020, www.nitehotel.nl.

ending to the remix of this ballet classic. The version that is analysed in this thesis is the online performance, which I attended in December 2020. The online performance consists of several solos or small performances, linked to each other by the voice of a narrator. From time to time, the spectator can choose a character, and this determines the course of the performance that you will see. A question the performance poses is: "How should we proceed now that the combined black swan of Covid-19 and the climate crisis has upended our fairy-tale democratic, liberal consumer's paradise?"¹⁹ The term 'black swan' is a metaphor that refers to an economic phenomenon that was impossible to predict in advance, but which has a significant effect on the system.²⁰ The meaning of this metaphor is the underlying theme of the narrative in Club Guy and Roni's *Swan Lake*, which is about crisis and making choices. In *Swan Lake* the crisis of the present-day world is made clear through one key question: would you choose to go forward or backward? Which implies that choosing the world as it is, is not an option. The question is about what other choices we would make than those in today's world, a world in crisis.

¹⁹ Club Guy and Roni, "Swan Lake," accessed January 8, 2021, <https://clubguyandroni.nl/en/voorstelling/swanlake/>.

²⁰ Club Guy and Roni, "Swan Lake."

The term originates from the historic expedition led by Willem de Vlamingh, who in 1696 became the first European to discover black swans on the Swan River near present-day Perth. Before then, the term black swan was used in Europe as an example of something that did not exist and therefore the discovery took on a proverbial meaning.

Chapter 1: Queer Futurity

In this chapter, I will design a lens of queer futurity. In *Cruising Utopia*, José Muñoz ties queerness to futurity as there is not enough space in the here and now for queer identities or other modes of existence and thus is the future the only possible domain for queerness. Queer futurity is about envisioning the potential of queerness in the future. Queer futurity is thus about hope; the hope that there is room for queerness on the horizon. In Muñoz's book, there are several concepts that keep recurring in his debate on queer futurity. I have selected four concepts to build up the lens: temporality – potentiality – disidentification – rejecting heteronormative logics. I draw on Muñoz for the theoretical analysis of these four concepts, but where relevant I broaden the debate through other authors. The lens will act as a tool to discuss two contemporary performances and will be projected onto them in chapter 2. The following sub-question is addressed in this chapter: *What does the lens of queer futurity consist of?*

1. Temporality

In the introduction of *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz follows the philosopher Heidegger in his approach to history as always referring to the future, as to Heidegger, historical existence in the past allows subjects to act with a mind toward 'future possibilities'.²¹ Muñoz argues that futurity follows thus history's dominant ordering principle.²² In a similar way, he sees queerness as a temporal arrangement "in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity."²³ A promising or enlightening moment from the past can be brought to life and used to think beyond the normative present and open up new ways of thinking about the future. In the article "Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance", Elisavet Pakis reviews *Cruising Utopia* and clarifies what this normative present entails that Muñoz is concerned about:

Muñoz is concerned to break away from the constraints of a pressing, totalizing, capitalist, heteronormative present, that stifles the political imagination and imposes itself as the only possibility and horizon. He wants to disrupt a deeply confining, deadening, lethal here and now, 'a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity'.²⁴

²¹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 16.

²² Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 16.

²³ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 16.

²⁴ Pakis, "Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance," 2.

Elisavet Pakis holds a PhD from the Centre for Gender and Women's Studies, and Theatre Studies at Lancaster University, UK. Her work deals with performance & performance studies, queer, feminist and postcolonial theory, borders, (un)belonging, memory, subjectivity.

Pakis continues that as a remedy, Muñoz suggests turning to these enlightening moments that one can glimpse in queer works of art as an aid to break through the boundaries of the normative present.²⁵ Queer works can give us a glimpse of another possible world.²⁶ In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz brings in examples of queer cultural works (poems, autobiographical texts, choreographies and performances) from New York around the social movements of the 1960's.

Throughout the book, Muñoz draws on philosopher Ernst Bloch's book *The Principle of Hope* and his analysis of hope, temporality and utopia.²⁷ Bloch makes a distinction between abstract and concrete utopias. Abstract utopias falter for Bloch because they are untethered from any historical consciousness, whereas concrete utopias are related to historically situated struggles.²⁸ Muñoz continues: "In our everyday life abstract utopias are akin to banal optimism. Concrete utopias can also be daydream like, but they are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many."²⁹ The core of Bloch's thinking is that people have a consciousness of a kind of 'being' that is not yet here, that is yet to come, and that this forms the basis of the human desire for utopia, hope and future.³⁰ In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz borrows Bloch's terms of the 'no-longer-conscious' and 'not-yet-here', to refer to the past and to the future. Pakis clarifies that "The 'no-longer-conscious' involves animating the past, conjuring a moment and trace from the past that holds illumination and promise, and using it affectively to reach beyond the imprisoning, deadening present, to imagine the 'not-yet-here', a future possibility and 'forward-dawning', utopian horizon."³¹ The no-longer-conscious thus entails the reviving of acts that are in our past, that had a sense of utopia, that are no longer consciously present in the here and now. Muñoz recalls cultural works (amongst others, queer work by Frank O'Hara, Andy Warhol, Elizabeth Bishop, the Judson Memorial Church Dance School, the New York School of Poetry), to discuss the future and queer futurity.

Turning to the past is to Muñoz an essential route to arrive at the future: "This maneuver, a turn to the past for the purpose of critiquing the present, is propelled by a desire for futurity."³² To Muñoz, queer futurity is essentially about desire, desire for a better world or freedom, but also, more specifically, for better relationships within the social sphere, which entails better sex and more pleasure.³³ The connection to desire is of importance here, as it gives us a better idea of the kind of emotional urge that lies behind queer futurity.

²⁵ Pakis, "Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance," 2.

²⁶ Pakis, "Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance," 2.

²⁷ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995).

²⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 3.

²⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 3.

³⁰ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1995), 195-196.

³¹ Pakis, "Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance," 3.

³² Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 30.

³³ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 30.

In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz identifies how there is a heteronormative view of the way we think about time. This heteronormative conception of time is what Muñoz calls an autonaturalizing temporality, or straight time.³⁴ This is a time that is only self-evident and natural to some. Straight time can be seen as the time and rhythm in which the world, with its systems and institutions, is now operating. Straight time overlooks those who are not in that same rhythm. Straight time says, this is how it has always been, so this is how it is. Straight time is the time that can be anticipated from the present, on the basis of causality. Queer time is then precisely about breaking through causality. In Muñoz's approach, queerness is a rejection of the "straight time", the "here and now" and a call for the "then and there". He writes: "Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life. The only futurity promised is that of reproductive majoritarian heterosexuality".³⁵ Muñoz refers here to Lee Edelman's book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, where Edelman asserts that queer politics has become a victim of "reproductive futurism."³⁶ Reproductive futurism is about thinking about the future in the light of human reproduction. Hence, the future is linked to the idea of having children and caring for them. This suggests that our participation in politics is motivated by a desire to create better futures for our children. This idea is at odds with queer relationships where one cannot have children unless there is some kind of intervention and third party. For Edelman, this focus on children is part of the heteronormative logics.³⁷ Straight time follows the line of reproduction. Muñoz responds to Edelman's critique on the future being the domain of the child and therefore not of the queers by stating that "queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always in the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon."³⁸ Muñoz argues here that if queerness is to have any validity, it must be seen as something that can exist on the horizon, the future being the domain of queerness, pointing out how the idea of hope must not be abandoned.

Muñoz states that "queerness's time is a stepping out of the linearity of straight time".³⁹ Since he asserts that queerness is only visible on the horizon, I propose here that queer time can be seen as something perpendicular to straight time. This area is positioned horizontally to the vertical straight line on which the ideology of reproduction and orientation towards future generations stands. Straight time and verticality can be linked to each other if we take into account the line of reproduction, which can also be seen as something that runs vertically. This can be compared to a family tree where the descendants, on a vertical line, are listed below each other. Straight time can be imagined as an advancing linear path, while

³⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 22.

³⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 22.

³⁶ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

Lee Edelman, *No future: Queer theory and the death drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

³⁷ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

³⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 11.

³⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 25

queer time can be more visualised on the horizon, which is an area that has infinite width, height and depth. The boundaries of this area are not clearly defined. A horizon can never be reached and will therefore always be at a distance. Just as *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* explores quotidian ways in which individuals interrupt straight time, in the continuation of this thesis I will discuss how two contemporary performances take a turn left from straight time in their own way through this component of the lens.⁴⁰

In order to see what is opposed to straight time, I refer to the second chapter of *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, "It's about Time: Queer Utopias and Theater Performance", in which Stephen Farrier examines the idea of (queer) time in relation to performance. He notes the following:

[...] time is mapped across a life in such a way that it serves as a form of normativity that emphasizes productivity. In so doing, such normativity regulates through a number of apparatuses those who do not adhere to such temporal normativity. Temporalities service the normative if they are thought of in terms of the a priori good that a long, productive life brings. Such normative temporalities are built on deep-rooted generational and heritable familial metaphors. Queer temporalities are those that are out of alignment with the flow of "straight time," the time of reproductive futurism.⁴¹

Straight time is here equated with productivity, whereas the notion of queer temporality follows a different path and includes that which is not covered by this normative conception of productivity. According to Edelman, there is even a correlation between queer time and death, as for evolution, queers are not genetically fit to reproduce themselves.⁴² In addition, there was also the HIV/AIDS pandemic of the 1980's that queers had to contend with. In other words, Edelman states that queer time is about a time that does not move forward as a matter of course or is even finite.⁴³ However, there is more to it than just this dead-end connotation. As Jack Halberstam writes: "Queer uses of time and space develop, at least in part, in opposition to the institutions of family, heterosexuality, and reproduction.[...] queer time, even as it emerges from the AIDS crisis, is not only about compression and annihilation; it is also about the potentiality of a life unscripted by the conventions of family, inheritance, and child rearing."⁴⁴ Queer time is about a different perception of time and poses the question of how time could be dealt with differently if we look beyond the heteronormative conventions of time. Considering queerness as another way of time

⁴⁰ Jones, "Introduction," 11.

⁴¹ Stephen Farrier, "It's about time: Queer utopias and theater performance," *A critical inquiry into queer utopias* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 51.

⁴² Jones, "Introduction," 9.

⁴³ Lee Edelman, "The Future Is Kid Stuff," *No Future: Queer theory and the death drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 19.

⁴⁴ Jack Halberstam, "Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies" *In a queer time and place: Transgender bodies, subcultural lives* Vol. 3. (New York: NYU press, 2005), 1-2.

allocation, or, as Halberstam notes “queerness as an outcome of strange temporalities, imaginative life schedules, and eccentric economic practices”, is also a way of detaching queerness from sexual identity.⁴⁵ To reflect on queer time is therefore first and foremost about the potential that exist for a different way of organising life, and future, in terms of time.

2. Potentiality

In this lens, ‘potentiality’ is the next component, as it reflects how a work can show a glimpse of a better future. Potentiality is also closely linked to temporality as we can read when Muñoz refers to Giorgio Agamben when naming the distinction between potentiality and possibility:

Possibilities exist, or more nearly, they exist within a logical real, the possible, which is within the present and is linked to presence. Potentialities are different in that although they are present, they do not exist in present things. Thus, potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity.⁴⁶

This is also why the concept of potentiality is connected to queer futurity by Muñoz. It is not yet here, in the here and now, but it exists in the present as a call for the then and there. The fact that a potential can be seen in the now makes it an aspect that we can look for, as for example in performances. In relation to performances, Muñoz mentions: “Reading for potentiality is scouting for a “not here” or “not now” in the performance that suggests a futurity.”⁴⁷ An example mentioned by Muñoz, where a glimpse of potentiality becomes visible, is in visual artist Kevin McCarty's photographs. McCarty is an artist who makes images of illuminated stages in gay bars and rock clubs, and Muñoz uses his work to address the utopian performative charge of his images:

The theatricality of McCarty's images has much to do with the lighting, which seems to be generated from the stage itself, bottom-up instead of top-down light, giving the effect that the space is glowing with possibility. [...] The glow that McCarty's photos generate is that anticipatory illumination, that moment of possibility right before an amazing band or performance manifests itself on stage and transforms the world for the performance's duration and, for many of those in attendance, beyond. The best performances do not disappear but instead linger in our memory, haunt our present, and illuminate our future.⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Halberstam, “Queer Temporality and Postmodern Geographies,” 1.

⁴⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 99.

Giorgio Agamben, *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. and trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999).

⁴⁷ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 99.

⁴⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 104.

Muñoz tends to use the word 'possibility' when referring to existing moments in past actions or performances, or in this case photographs of performances, while he uses the word potentiality more to refer to what these moments do; what potential they show on the horizon. According to Muñoz, these images with this specific lighting allows one to see the past, the moment before an actual performance. This moment is charged with potential as it is the beginning of a transformation.⁴⁹

Muñoz's perspective on the relationship between performance and utopia is that he believes that the preoccupation with the liveliness and presentness of performance can cause us to become caught up in the here and now.⁵⁰ He aspires to a world, a future, in which minorities or queer people are more included than they are today. Muñoz stresses that his critique on the overarching here and now is not to make us look away at the everyday, but that the utopian can be an extra impulse that we can see in everyday life.⁵¹ This extra impulse or moment that distracts us from straight time, and where a mark of the future is brought to the quotidian for just a moment, is what Muñoz calls "an anticipatory illumination of a queer world".⁵² These moments can offer a sign of what the world might look like: "a sign of an actually existing queer reality, a kernel of political possibility within a stultifying heterosexual present."⁵³ Muñoz notes that queer manifestations or performances can show this glance of potential for a queer world.

In Jill Dolan's book *Utopia in Performance*, she names this form of impulse 'utopian performatives': "Utopian performatives describe small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what worlds might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense."⁵⁴ Dolan associates utopia with passionate spectatorship and discusses in her book the visceral and affective experience that performances can bring about. An argument she makes is that spectators of live performances can catch a glimpse, even if only for a moment, of what a better world might feel like. She envisions utopia: "As an index to the possible, to the 'what if' rather than a more restrictive, finite image of 'what should be', allows performance a hopeful cast, one that can experiment with the possibilities of the future in ways that shine back usefully on a present that's always, itself, in process."⁵⁵ Like Dolan, Muñoz also observes that thinking about utopias allows us to see other worlds and

⁴⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 104.

⁵⁰ Sara Warner, "Review of *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*," in *Modern Drama* 54, no. 2 (2011): 256.

⁵¹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 22.

⁵² Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 49.

⁵³ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 49.

⁵⁴ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 5.

⁵⁵ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 13.

realities and that these conjured realities tell us that the 'here and now' is simply not enough.⁵⁶

3. Disidentification

Disidentification is a strategy for questioning categories and clichés. It is a way of claiming one's own position. This is mainly about the clichés surrounding minoritarian groups. The term disidentification refers to the way minorities negotiate their identity in a majoritarian world that excludes those who do not conform to the normative idea. By using well-known signs and symbols for a majoritarian audience, but then playing with them, contesting them, slightly modifying them or only approximating them, disidentification is put into practice. In Muñoz's words, disidentification is an aesthetic practice that "focusses on the way in which dominant signs and symbols, often ones that are toxic to minoritarian subjects, can be reimagined through an engaged and animated mode of performance or spectatorship. Disidentification can be a world-making project in which the limits of the here and now are traversed and transgressed."⁵⁷ The limits of the here and now refer to the limits for minorities in the here and now. The one who performs the disidentification, the disidentificatory subject, "tactically and simultaneously works on, with, and against, a cultural form."⁵⁸ By reworking the cultural codes of the mainstream, one is questioning the mainstream whereby entrenched thoughts on standards can be uncovered. In Muñoz' book *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics*, he explains:

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its working to account for, include, and empower minority identity and identification.⁵⁹

Muñoz addresses the dynamics of 'disidentification' through an example in a performance. Dominant signs and symbols are being reimagined here in the form of gestures. The gestures are performed by Kevin Aviance, the disidentificatory subject, who is an icon (drag queen, club/dance musician, fashion designer) in New York City's club world. In 'A Body: Approaching Aviance' in *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz writes: "One particular Aviance gesture worth noting is the way in which his ankles fold or crack as he walks, or rather stomps, the runway. This gesture permits him to be quicker and more determined in his steps than most

⁵⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 171.

⁵⁷ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 169.

⁵⁸ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 12.

⁵⁹ Muñoz, *Disidentifications*, 31.

high-heeled walkers.”⁶⁰ Muñoz continues by noting that: “The move - walking with heels in such an unorthodox fashion - constitutes a disidentification with these traditions of gay male performances of female embodiment. Aviance’s refusal to wear wigs is a further example of this disidentificatory dynamic.”⁶¹ Muñoz describes gestures as precise and specific physical acts and is not so much concerned with what queer gestures might mean, but rather what such gestures perform.⁶² Instead of focusing on queer identity, his attention is more on queer performativity and what these gestures can ‘do’. Gestures have the power to evoke something, to break behavioural codes or rigid categorisations (male/female), and thus also to incite reflection on certain heteronormative views, or precisely what deviates from them, such as Aviance’s walk.

Aviance, who is the disidentificatory subject, does not rebel against anything but tactically takes up a position of his own that could be recognised as a gay male performance, through only approximating femininity.⁶³ The gesture hints at the walk of gay male performers in feminine heels, but by slightly adjusting the way he walks and leaving out other aesthetic references, Aviance rejects the normative idea of the cliché image of gay male performance, which leads to disidentification. Through the way Muñoz writes about Aviance’s avoidance of the gay male, my inference is that disidentification is about rejection. In this particular example, it is about rejecting the idea of conforming to a category and fitting into the box labelled ‘gay man’. Not only between straight and gay, but also within the gay scene itself, there are normative views on what a gay male is. The cliché can equally be addressed within a minoritarian group.

Muñoz notes: “Queer theory has made one lesson explicitly clear: the set of behaviours and codes of conduct that we refer to as feminine or masculine are not slaves to the biological. Women, straight and gay, perform and live masculinity in the same way as many a biological man inhabits femininity.”⁶⁴ With regard to Aviance’s performance, Muñoz writes that Aviance’s biological maleness is visually present whilst performing the feminine gestures: “[...] he wears no wig, and he does not tuck (conceal or hide the male genital bulge while in drag). Indeed, in his performance we see a unique cohabitation of traditional female and male traits.”⁶⁵ The presence of both male and female characteristics thus breaks the gender logic in his performance. Breaking this logic and making his own adaptation to work tactically and simultaneously on, with and against, a cultural form, is a form of disidentification. Such a concrete example of Aviance also reveals what Muñoz is referring to, among other things, when he speaks of a different future, one in which clichés or labels of gender or sexuality are broken.

⁶⁰ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 75.

⁶¹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 75.

⁶² Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 67.

⁶³ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 76.

⁶⁴ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 76.

⁶⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 76.

4. Rejecting heteronormative logics

In *A critical inquiry into queer utopias*, Jones introduces Lee Edelman's book *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*. In *No Future*, Lee Edelman is critical on queer people's political aims.⁶⁶ He asserts that queer activists and individuals have adopted a homonormative political position, which in its turn reproduces heteronormativity.⁶⁷ Jones quotes Lisa Duggan's words in *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy*, in which she notes that the gay and lesbian politics has succumbed to homonormativity: "It is a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising the possibility of a demobilized [...], depoliticized gay culture".⁶⁸ Homonormativity is thus about the creation of a norm within the gay scene or amongst queer activists that meets heteronormative goals, which Edelman is critical of since the goals are conformed to a heteronormative idea of the world. An example that Jones gives of this is the legalisation of gay marriage: "gay and lesbian politics has been reduced to the struggle for marriage and custody rights, which are heteronormative goals. Gay and lesbian politics has become an occlusive regime that marginalizes queers not seeking political recognition, namely legal marriage."⁶⁹ What is described here is that marriage is a heteronormative goal and by fighting in queer politics for this goal, and the equality in it, a heteronormative idea is chased and put first. In this way, a homonormative idea is formed within the queer community, namely the importance of marriage. The same can be said of the idea of reproductive futurism, which was discussed in the 'temporality' component. Jones notes that according to Edelman, queer politics has fallen victim to reproductive futurism.⁷⁰ Whereupon she continues that this suggests that these political campaigns are driven by the desire to make our world a better place for future generations.⁷¹ An example Jones gives of these kind of campaigns is: "If you want marriage equality, focus on how the legal protections afforded by a legally legitimized marriage will protect children."⁷² To Edelman, this focus on children and this way of strategic thinking within queer politics undermines the queer identity because it conforms to heterosexual norms.⁷³ The call for a queer subject should be about disrupting stable categories, including the binary constructions of gender and sexuality: However, in Jones her words: "Edelman posits that in calling for a queer future—particularly the assimilationist homonormative gay rights projects of the modern period—we attempt to

⁶⁶ Lee Edelman, *No future: Queer theory and the death drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

⁶⁷ Jones, "Introduction," 4.

⁶⁸ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attack on Democracy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 5.

⁶⁹ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

⁷⁰ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

⁷¹ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

⁷² Jones, "Introduction," 5.

⁷³ Jones, "Introduction," 5.

create stability. Originally, the power of queer theory was that it fostered instability. Edelman insists that queers should embrace negativity and instability.”⁷⁴

Muñoz adopts another perspective and argues in *Cruising Utopia* that queers have nothing but a future. For Muñoz, queer futurity is about breaking open these heteronormative structures. He also questions the contemporary mainstream gay and lesbian politics, whose political goals are, amongst other things, gay rights, same-sex marriage and gays in the military. To him these goals are trapped within the limiting normative time and present.⁷⁵ In other words, these are heteronormative goals. To Muñoz, queer politics are in need of a dose of utopianism as thinking about utopia can let us imagine a space beyond heteronormativity: “It permits us to conceptualize new worlds and realities that are not irrevocably constrained by the HIV/AIDS pandemic and institutionalized state homophobia. More important, utopia offers us a critique of the present, of what is, by casting a picture of what can and perhaps will be.”⁷⁶ Jones attempts to escape the trap of the word utopia, because of the naïve connotations (in which everyone is happy, and life is ideal), and suggests using the Foucauldian term ‘heterotopias’, to which she adds the word queer:

“Drawing from the work of Michel Foucault, I argue that queer heterotopias are places where individuals can challenge the heteronormative regime [...] in “Of Other Spaces,” Foucault (1986) noted that in everyday life escaping repression requires the creation of heterotopic spaces, where individuals can celebrate their difference. Unlike utopias, heterotopic spaces can be created in reality [...] They are sites where actors, whether academics or activists, engage in what we might call a radical *politics of subversion*, where individuals attempt to dislocate the normative configurations of sex, gender, and sexuality through daily exploration and experimentation with crafting a queer identity.”⁷⁷

The ‘attempt to dislocate the normative configurations’ aligns with this part of the lens; but rather than a rejection, the word dislocation is a more open way of addressing heteronormative configurations. Dislocation is about re-evaluating, repositioning the rigid categorical thinking, while rejection dismisses it. Dislocation can also be linked in a sense to Muñoz’s term disidentification as it is about making adaptations or dislocating heteronormative ideas and disrupting the logics behind them. As earlier mentioned, Muñoz notes that the utopian can be an impulse that we can see in everyday life. According to him, “This impulse is to be glimpsed as something that is extra to the everyday transaction of

⁷⁴ Jones, “Introduction,” 8-9.

⁷⁵ Pakis, “Locating hope and futurity in the anticipatory illumination of queer performance,” 2.

⁷⁶ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 35.

⁷⁷ Jones, “Introduction,” 3.

Angela Jones, “Queer Heterotopias: Homonormativity and the Future of Queerness.” *Interalia: A Journal of Queer Studies* 4 (2009), 1–20.

heteronormative capitalism."⁷⁸ Impulses, dislocations and adaptations are all ways of destabilising the heteronormative.

The lens formed by the concepts temporality, potentiality, disidentification and rejecting heteronormative logics sheds light on the notion of queer futurity through different angles. The components of the lens each discuss a rejection of the normality of today's world. Queer futurity is about the rejection of a present, of straight time, of rigid categorised thinking, of heteronormative logics, and involves identifying potential for new ways of being and doing. The composition of the lens is a way to give shape to the overarching, broader concept of queer futurity, to analyse more precisely where a work (even those not so explicitly labelled queer) rejects the present and where a message of change or hope can be glimpsed.

⁷⁸ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 22.

Chapter 2: Metamorphosis and Swan Lake

Whereas Muñoz turned to queer cultural works from around the 1960's to discuss queer futurity, this second chapter uses the lens designed in the previous chapter to look at contemporary performances that are not explicitly labelled as queer. The case studies analysed are *8: Metamorphosis* and *Swan Lake The Game*. The theory of queer futurity offers a way of thinking that supports the discussion of how an idea of change or a possible different future is reflected in these works, while at the same time questioning the present. Queer futurity rejects a stagnant and rigidly categorised thinking in the present. The queer futurity lens outlined in the previous chapter consists of the following components: temporality, potentiality, disidentification, rejecting heteronormative logics. These different components will structure the analysis of the performances below. The sub-question in this chapter is: *How do the performances Metamorphosis (NB projects) and Swan Lake The Game (Club Guy and Roni) point towards the future and how can the lens of queer futurity help us understand this?*

2.1 Analysis of Metamorphosis

I will begin by situating and briefly describing the course of the performance. The performance takes place on the stage of the large theatre auditorium in Stadsschouwburg Utrecht. The audience is also seated on this stage, on a tribune. The stage is dimly lit. The seating area of the auditorium itself is closed off by the theatre curtains. Right in front of the audience, a drummer, with his back to us, plays in an improvisational, arrhythmic, free-style way. At a certain point, the live sound is being accompanied by electronic music. The music sounds ominous. From the moment the entire audience has entered the stage and is seated, the performers enter one by one, also facing away from the tribune. They then slowly turn towards the spectators and a grid from above, with horizontal beams of light on it, moves downwards and stops just above the heads. The grid locks the audience and the performers inside the same space. The grid then goes up again with flickering lights. The space lights up a bit more and seven men are now clearly visible, standing in a row in front of the audience.

In short, the performance can be divided in three different parts: 1) The performers walk linear choreographic patterns and sing Henry Purcell's *Cold Song*; 2) The performers enter a raging state and a metamorphosis takes place, not only in terms of appearance, but also from being in control to letting go; and 3) The performers enter a new mystical realm.

In the course of the performance, eight men in business suits transform to eight queer, colourful, mystical beings. 'Queer' in the sense that the beings they have become seem to be a rejection of the conventional image of the men in suits from before. In addition to the appearances, there is also a transformation in space from an atmosphere of 'being in control' to its destruction and release. A scene with a coherent, contained group (first part),

changes step by step (in the second part) into a scene where individuality reigns (the third part). These three parts will be discussed in more detail in light of the different components of the queer futurity lens.

Temporality

The men, who are all dressed in business suits with blazer and tie, start off by making choreographic patterns on the floor. Together they form straight lines, circles, they leap to the ground, slide, kneel, sit, lie on the floor, and so on. The men and the movements they perform are uniform and flow seamlessly into each other. The person at one end of the line starts by initiating the movement and the others follow, following the same rhythm. To focus briefly on one movement: the men all bend over to one side, just to that tipping point of not falling over, and then all together walk away to form a new line. They then fit back into the same line again, which displays this idea of a structure to which these men must belong. Even though the performers are all separate individuals, with different heights, skin colours, hair styles, postures, they form a uniform group by all wearing tailored suits and walking the same choreographic patterns at the same pace. They are dictated by the rhythm of the drummer, who is still playing.

If we look at this succession of movement patterns from the viewpoint of Muñoz's analysis of straight time, we can recognize a similar straightness; one can more or less predict what is going to happen, there is a clear logic and causality to these movements and patterns. The uniformity and rhythm of the movements also correspond to straight time in terms of Muñoz's notion of autonaturalizing temporality. This is the heteronormative conception of time in which the world, with its systems and institutions, now functions and which is only natural to some. The men are part of a system. The uniform movement and suits evoke associations with men in the business world, where they are part of one normative corporate environment with its own rules to play by and less room for individuality. At a certain point the performers start mumbling, whilst standing grouped together, as if they are talking on the phone with someone. This reinforces this impression of businessmen, performing their daily stream of calls and closing deals.

In this first part of the performance, the uniformity of this group of men and the belonging to a system is reflected through the costumes and the group choreography with its clear and structured patterns. In the second and third part of the performance, a manoeuvre is made in a different direction, disturbing the earlier pattern; the men start to fall out of rhythm and the performance begins to disrupt the linearity of before.

In the second part, a shift in the movement patterns takes place when the men deviate from the straight lines. The men bend to their knees in one vertical line, with one man slightly out of line, who then corrects himself. This is a very literal representation of "not fitting in".

More moments like this follow, for example one of the men who, during a pattern they make, is not taken along by the group and remains lying on the ground. Another example is when the group first stands arm in arm with each other and then suddenly stop supporting each other, causing everyone to fall over. These moments disrupt the earlier unified group. Whilst the men start singing tones of the *Cold Song* by Henry Purcell, standing spread out in space, staring at the audience and changing their posture one by one, the light turns from a cold light to a warmer light. One of the men begins to have a sort of twitches, another one follows, they stand out and detach themselves in this way from the group. They are gradually breaking out of the uniform, rhythmic system of before. In this second part in the performance, the emphasis starts to shift more towards the individual, because of the movement or sound they make that differs from the rest of the group. They each take their moment to break free, while the rest of the group sings on together, freeing themselves from having to conform to a group, to a norm. One by one, they drop out of the flow of the straight time from before.

As they continue to sing together, the drummer, who has in the meantime joined the group, suddenly takes off his blazer, walks back to his drum kit, bangs on it loudly and disrupts the somewhat unanimous peacefulness of the preceding scene. The other men walk tremblingly to the side of the stage. The drum solo that follows and the flashing of lights create a chaos. The men then start moving wildly, uncontrollably, ecstatically across the stage. The lights come down flashing white and red light. The men shout and shake around the drum kit, their movements following the dominant sounds of the drum. Then, exhausted, they come to rest, start singing together and take apart the drum kit. Once again, there is a friendly, cohesive atmosphere in the room. They also begin to take off their suits slowly and move through space gracefully. One by one they start to transform into mystical creatures. At first you see only shadows of figures that are different from the men in suits, but little by little, you see bright coloured fabrics, dresses, capes, masks, wigs, flowers and plants attached to them. The men are individually morphing into different characters. In this second part of the performance, the metamorphosis itself takes place, where the men undergo a transformation in a relatively short time.

As for the dramaturgical arc of the performance, the performers start as a uniform group with movements that follow each other in a logical sequence. The linearity, in the sense of uniformity of the group and causality of the choreography, is then disrupted when the men gradually follow their own path. As mentioned in the first chapter, straight time is about causality, whereas queer time is precisely about breaking through causality. The men leave behind the structured, predictable choreography of the first part and abandon the order. They undergo a transformation and let go of the structure and sequence of events. The dramaturgical arc from part 1 to 2 in *Metamorphosis*, from order to loss of order, from predictable choreographic sequences to individual transformations, can thus be labelled as non-causal or queer in terms of temporality.

Potentiality

In the last part of the performance, the curtain at the back of the stage goes up, with smoke coming out from underneath. Gradually, the seating area of the auditorium area appears. Through the fog we can distinguish the bright light of a lamp. In the middle of this new space a tree with white blossom becomes visible. The men wearing plants, twigs and flowers and the presence of a tree in the auditorium all of a sudden connect with the topic of climate that was mentioned in the text in the programme. The men merge with a nature that is reviving. We can associate blossoming trees with new life or a new beginning as nature is beginning a new cycle. Something in bloom is also a matter of resilience and hope; the hope that after death or winter, something will grow again. The way the yellow light shines brightly in the eyes of the audience is reminiscent of the sun or a holy ray of light coming down from heaven. A beam of light in the theatre has the potential to make something more holy because it accentuates an object or a person. For example, the light shining on this tree makes one look for more significance in that tree because of the emphasis on it. The light on the blossom gives the tree a glow. The space around the tree is filled with mist, making the seats of the auditorium only vaguely visible. This presentation of the tree and light could be interpreted as a very literal way of how Muñoz would describe a glance of potential or when a mark of the future is brought to the quotidian and could be interpreted as a moment that is scouted for, as cited in chapter 1 with reference to Muñoz: “Reading for potentiality is scouting for a “not here” or “not now” in the performance that suggests a futurity.”⁷⁹ The space with the blossoming tree, illuminated by a light source on the opposite side of the room, on the horizon, is what I scout here as a glimpse of a futurity. The glow generates a moment of possibility, the possibility of a new beginning.

In this third part of the performance, the performers move from the area where the linear choreographic patterns took place to the other side of the space, towards the theatre auditorium, towards a foggy horizon. The newly transformed men into mystical creatures approach and enter this new realm of fog, warm sunlight and a blossoming tree, leaving the audience behind on the stage with the destroyed drum kit. They move towards a new world lying at the horizon.⁸⁰ The two different spaces, the misty space the creatures move towards and the destroyed space they leave behind, contradict each other. Since I have described this realm that lies ahead as a new life on the horizon, I suggest that we see the devastated area they leave behind as a past: a past with straight patterns, a past of a homogenous group, a past where transformation took place and a past where the newly born creatures leave the men they were behind. The world that is created on the other side, however, is not so easy to interpret or categorise with respect to the linear world from before. A tree in an auditorium, the figures into which the men have transformed and the fog that hovers in the space raises the question of what kind of world they are disappearing into and causes this new world to be not as clearly defined as the systematic choreography from before. What is

⁷⁹ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 99.

⁸⁰ See attachment 1.

clear, however, is that through the fog, something beautiful is glowing on the horizon, namely the blossoming tree that is illuminated there under a ray of light.

I then scout, using Muñoz's choice of words, the creatures themselves as a potential of what kind of people we could be in that new beginning. The colourful outfits that do not belong to the normative categories of men's or women's clothing point towards a more flexible and fluid way of thinking. In a text by Una Bauer, "The Movement of Embodied Thought The Representational Game of the Stage Zero of Signification in Jérôme Bel", she discusses this moment of potentiality through the bodies of the performers in a performance by Jérôme Bel:

By not defining the particularities of their presence on stage, their particular personal identity and subjectivity, but a sketch of 'some' identities that they have, they are enabled to exist in a state of *potentiality* – they *could be something* because they are nothing specific, they are not an embodiment of a particular idea or identity. Their identity is located in that could be moment. And this *could be* moment does not exist in some unidentifiable space but in a precise context of a dance/theatre performance. [...] It proposes an answer to the question of how to stage potentiality.⁸¹

In *Metamorphosis*, the figures that emerge as a result of the transformation in appearances and movement (from businessmen to paradisiacal figures) are not clearly identifiable, and therein lies, analogously to Bauer, a degree of potentiality. The figures have no clear identity: they look like people, partly like animals with eccentric colours, which leads me to characterise them as 'creatures' rather than people; they are clearly hybrid figures. The way the different aspects of the performance contribute to the process of change - the space being reversed, the transformed characters with their reversed behaviour, and the foggy, empty seated auditorium on the other side with rays of sunlight on a blossoming tree - mark this idea of a new beginning, a planetary shift to a non-quotidian world.

Disidentification

I will return for a moment to the beginning of the third part. The men crawl across the stage in an animalistic way, with graceful, flexible movements, completely different from the linear choreographic patterns of before. They reject the homogenous structure and transform into diverse individuals who express themselves freely in their own way.

Muñoz addresses the dynamics of disidentification by examining Kevin Aviance's appearance and gestures in his performance that question categories and clichés. In *Metamorphosis*,

⁸¹ Una Bauer, "The Movement of Embodied Thought The Representational Game of the Stage Zero of Signification in Jérôme Bel," *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts* 13.1 (2008): 37.

similar questions are raised regarding the changes in costumes and movements. The eight men transform from men in suits into the colourful creatures and start to move more fluidly and flexibly than the choreography in the first part. In terms of costume, the suits are exchanged for dresses, wigs, scarves and other colourful draperies. This could be interpreted as 'feminine', but by omitting other aesthetic references to the feminine, a different kind of being emerges. They adapt their way of performing to become these mystical beings, through the animalistic movements such as crawling on the floor and the plants and flowers attached to their costumes. The men perform more creature-like features, confusing the logic of the categories and overturning the relationship between human-organism or human-fauna. The code of 'man' changes to something which is more difficult to code. The men do not become feminine but become hybrid figures that we cannot immediately identify. Breaking this logic through their appearances and gestures and each making their own adaptation into a creature-like being, in order to rework the code of a normative idea of a man, is a form of disidentification.

As became clear in the analysis above, the loss of order and the transformation of the performers in *Metamorphosis* opens another realm in the third part of the performance, a realm that is not strictly identified, but that points to a future, a space with potential. It is a space where rigid norms are abandoned. This is shown through the rejection of structure, systems and uniformity during the course of the performance, which passes into more flexible and fluid movements and appearances. A tree blossoms in the place where the audience normally sits, while they themselves are left behind in the place of destruction, the place where there was a system, creating a literal distance between them and the world in bloom. To bridge that distance, something has to change. From this I deduce that an invitation to reflect on a different future involves letting go of systems we hold on to in the present. We ourselves first need to enter a more flexible, open-minded mode of thinking, to become more queer ourselves, as a precondition for working towards that future. The men wearing plants and twigs on their bodies and moving towards a flowering tree on the horizon, are aspects that could lead to an interpretation of the kind of future that *Metamorphosis* points towards. They give a glimpse of a union or harmony between man and nature. An invitation to reflect on the future then lies in the following question, a question of hope: What if we would let go of systems and re-unite with nature?

Queer futurity, as Muñoz argues, is about how we can revisit moments from the past that can help us imagine a different future in a present where there are issues that are still not accepted. These moments from the past concern mainly moments in which there was a glimpse of another possible future, which are then recalled in the now. It is about re-evaluating the direction we are heading in if we continue to adhere to the norms of the present. The above components in *Metamorphosis* - the dramaturgical arc of the performance, the way it presents an image of potentiality and the characters who transform into non-categorisable, hybrid creatures - reflect in the performance a call for change,

whereby a system needs to be destroyed and left behind in order to reach a different mode of existence.

2.2 Analysis of *Swan Lake The Game*

Swan Lake by Club Guy and Roni (2020) is a performance inspired by the classic fairytale, but a contemporary version of its own. In this performance, the relationship between the past and future and the question 'What choices do we make in times of crisis?' is central to the piece.⁸² The performance was presented in an online and in an offline version. The version that is discussed here is the online performance, *Swan Lake The Game*. The visitors of the online version gather in a virtual environment located in the NITE hotel. This is an online platform that emerged during Covid-19 to access online performances.⁸³ Upon entering the NITE hotel, an introduction and instructional video by Guy Weizman is shown. Together with Roni Haver, he is the founder and choreographer of Club Guy and Roni, an international dance company based in Groningen. In this video, he tells the audience how this is a performance game about choices in times of crisis and that each participant will make their own edit of this performance through their individual perspectives that will be reflected through the choices in the game. The last choice the viewers are asked to make will influence the outcome of the live performance in the theatre, which is taking place simultaneously, by counting the votes of both offline and online audiences.

In *Swan Lake The Game*, the spectators are in control of the course of the performance, through the options for different scenes they get along the way. As this performance can be viewed and experienced in different ways, the analysis below will not focus on the course of the scenes, rather the queer futurity lens will be used to discuss different components within the performance. In terms of the dramaturgical line, as discussed in *Metamorphosis*, it is not so linear in *Swan Lake The Game*, precisely because of the game structure with choice options creating a different path for each visit. It could even be argued that, due to this virtual game environment where you have more choices than in a theatre itself, the dramaturgical arc of *Swan Lake* is more queer than in *Metamorphosis*.

I will start again by briefly introducing the beginning of the performance. The participants find themselves in a virtual environment, a white room, where each is visually represented by a purple firefly. The viewer is then offered the option to choose a swan, like an avatar option. After this, the spectator is being directed to another virtual environment, a deserted terrain, where the first scene is played by video.

Temporality and potentiality

In the performance, a narrator's voice guides us through the different scenes. At a certain point he starts sharing with us that 'The black swan' is an economic term for an event that cannot be predicted, but nevertheless has great influence; an unexpected event that has a major economic effect. Examples of events the narrator mentions are, amongst other things,

⁸² Club Guy and Roni, "Swan Lake."

⁸³ NITE HOTEL, <https://www.nitehotel.nl>.

9/11 and the climate crisis. In the performance's online programme also, the following question is asked: "How should we proceed now that the combined black swan of Covid-19 and the climate crisis has upended our fairy-tale democratic, liberal consumer's paradise?"⁸⁴ This question was a first move to make us think about the future. But then, a text in the performance itself, spoken again by the narrator, emphasises the question of how we ourselves look at the future by giving us two options: "Will you be going forward or back?" If we were to choose the option of 'going forward', he describes what would have to happen in the following way:

We'll have to revalue the things around us. We have the opportunity to cause a revolution by redefining what is truly meaningful. Innovation and technology can help us develop sustainable qualities. Going forwards isn't about going faster, making things cheaper or getting more out of things. But it's about asking the right questions and coming up with creative solutions. It's the only way to innovate ourselves out of these problems. We will have to cause a revolution in how we live together and in the way we treat each other and our planet. Let's tell each other new stories and redesign our world. Not whenever it suits us best, but now. Let's be boundless, curious and radical. Even though we don't know where it will take us or whether we will be in time.

And, if we were to choose to 'go back':

Forget that you've always learned to advance forwards. Going back sounds negative, especially when you're young. That's logical. Because up until now, advancing forward has brought us a lot. Every generation before us has grown up in greater prosperity than the generation before them. Up until now, until this very moment. Cause now we have collectively reached the limits of growth, prosperity and globalism. We will be less prosperous than our parents. Our planet has been overcharged and can no longer cope with our progression and innovations. So, we have to go back. Going back doesn't mean going back to patriarchy or going back to the old distributions of power. Going back doesn't mean going back in time. Going back means going back to a smaller, less complicated system with clear rules and role divisions. A place where we can feel safe and at home. Where the effects of our choices are directly visible around us. Where we can learn to live with boundaries and rules again. We can go back to a local economy, to a local society. We can go back to a world that ends at the garden fence. Would you rather head forwards, towards the unknown? Or would you prefer to go back to the certainty of how it once was. Which choice will you make?

The texts above thus points in two directions. Going back, to a less complicated system with a local economy and a local society, is not simply a matter of returning to the past. Rather, it is about how we can put the past to use; how we can use knowledge from the past now and ask ourselves what we have learned from the past that will help us to have a better future. This text on going backwards relates to Muñoz' way of saying (about queerness) how an

⁸⁴ Club Guy and Roni, "Swan Lake."

ideality can be distilled from the past and how this can be used to imagine a future.⁸⁵ The past can be read in the present and give us a glimpse of queer futurity. As mentioned in chapter 1, turning to the past is to Muñoz an essential route to arrive at the future. The option of going back in *Swan Lake* is not necessarily about how we can use the past to imagine what a 'queer' future might look like, but it does prompt us to think about what factors (e.g. simplicity and localism) in the past were more ideal that would work for our future. If one were to choose the retrospective option with a less complicated system and a local economy and society, this choice would be made in the forward direction, in the future. Even if one chooses the option of going back, that way of life is carried into the future. That of the past is made adaptable to the world of today, creating a new version or form of the past, which would thus become the future.

The potentiality-component of the lens, on the other hand, can be used to look at the 'going forward' option. From the way the narrator describes this option we can derive that it is about working towards a different world, to look for potentials that do not exist yet in present (or past) things. This makes the effect of this option also more positioned in the horizon. A value in this forward option is to redesign a world in which we re-evaluate how we can live together and treat each other. This value is indicative of how there is a problem of exclusion in our society today, as the words ('we have to cause a revolution in how we live together and in the way we treat each other') imply that everyone is not yet treated equally. By raising this question, this text in this performance is asking: What if we lived together differently? This is similar to what Dolan says about when performances open up to the 'what if' rather than a more restrictive idea of 'what it should be'. A performance then brings forward hopeful possibilities of the future in a way that is useful for the present.

The above texts also correspond to the idea of queerness in that they question categorical thinking: Going forward is not presented as the opposite of going backward (which would be dualistic); they are both presented as possibilities, and within both possibilities there are elements that could be judged both positively and negatively. At the same time, the options also create friction and through that friction, room for reflection is created. The text makes you question which position you take in. In terms of temporality, both directions together form an example of queer time or 'queering straight time': whether you go forward or backward, it is not a clear-cut issue. Going forward is not necessarily about improvement, going backward is not by definition about decline; progress is not made in a linear way.

Disidentification

To see how this idea of disidentification is reflected in *Swan Lake*, I will zoom in on the performers themselves. Several times in the game you are invited to watch a solo by one of the performers by clicking on a name and profile picture of a fictional character of choice in

⁸⁵ Muñoz, *Cruising utopia*, 1.

the virtual environment. In a first solo, the character Angela stands in a puddle of water. She first appears semi-nude with skin-coloured underwear and towards the end of her solo she is being dressed in a white tutu by two men, both also wearing a white tutu and with their torsos exposed. Her bare breasts, loose red braids and tattoos contrast with the white classic tutu she is wearing and immediately inform the spectator that this is not the classic fairy tale that will be performed. Her movements are inspired by movements from classical ballet, but they are larger, more angular and less controlled or contained than the precise ballet steps. The image of the classical *Swan Lake* is also disrupted by the nudity, the tattoos and the sound of a synthesiser accompanying the solo. The 'classic' category is breached by the creation of a contemporary version of its own. There is a more provocative atmosphere, due to the more daring clothing and movements that deviate from the classical image of *Swan Lake*. Another character Igor, a naked man standing in a pool of water, also has a white tutu on and beatbox and electronic sounds (a modern version of the ballet music *Swan Lake* composed by Pjotr Iljitsj Tsjaikovski) can be heard in the background. Both Igor's and Angela's appearances deviate from the classical *Swan Lake* ballet dancers. Their white tutus, and the title of the performance, allude to the classical ballet, but their appearances differ from it. In Angela's case, the rawness of her character causes that disruption, and in Igor's case the most apparent feature is that he is a male dancer in a female costume. In terms of their movements, they resemble classical ballet movements to some extent, but some of their gestures differ from the precise ballet postures. The arms move more angularly, the movements more abruptly and their gaze in the lens is provocative. To give an example: Angela begins by making large circular gestures with her arms and legs, but where in ballet this is a movement that would have strict rules about how far back to bend and how high the leg can go, the movements here are more exaggerated.⁸⁶

With these gestures, contained in the body parts and gazes of Angela and Igor, they create their own version. The other performers who are part of this performance pursue the same trend in appearance and movement as the two aforementioned characters. For example, another solo is one danced by the character Harold, a black man in a white tutu. Layer by layer, he is being dressed up by surrounding performers in a diva outfit, with earrings, a black dress, a white blazer, a fan and high boots. The solo turns into a drag queen scene in which the dancer performs vogue movements.

As for the gestures and appearances of the aforementioned examples, it is important to mention that it is not necessarily their representation that is of importance here, but what those costumes and appearances 'do' or 'perform': namely, breaking down rooted categories. This relates to Muñoz's discussion of disidentification in the practice of Kevin Aviance and his refusal to wear wigs and adaptation of gay male performances of female embodiment, which is a form of disidentification. In these examples of the characters above, the rejection of categories surfaces several times through their appearances and movement.

⁸⁶ See attachment 2.

Seeing male dancers (of colour) in a white female ballet tutu, the nudity and tattoos, the transformed and exaggerated ballet movements, is a break with the codes of the classical ballet, and similar to Aviance, this break is not replaced by a new (recognisable) code or character. The variety of deviating choices that are made, results in the fact that no clear-cut category or label can be applied to the performers or the form of execution. We can therefore consider this a case of queer disidentification.

When this queer disidentification is placed in relation to the text about the option of going forward, it can also provide insight into how the performance itself considers futurity. In the forward option, it is stated that we should 'redesign' and 're-evaluate' our world. The performers, who look and move differently from the norm of the classical ballet, naturally accompany the thoughts behind this story. An image of the future that thus emerges through the performance is one in which there is room to deviate from clear-cut categories.

Rejecting heteronormative logics

As mentioned in the first chapter, according to Muñoz, thinking about utopia can lead us to imagine a space beyond heteronormativity. Thinking about what a space would look like outside the heteronormative present space we live in, can help us redesign and re-conceptualise new kinds of worlds. By asking us which option (forward or backward) we would choose, *Swan Lake* encourages us to rethink what the world could be like. In particular, the words 'redesigning' and 'telling new stories', in the option of going forward, encourage thinking beyond normative structures. It stimulates us to think in a utopian way and takes us away from the straight time idea of causality and predictability. By giving these two options, neither of them being that everything stays as it is, *Swan Lake* is critiquing the present. They reject the time of today and cast two pictures of what the world could be like: What if...?

Rejecting the here and now implies a rejection of the logic in the here and now, such as the logic of how we live together. The forward-going text in *Swan Lake* mentions to re-evaluate this value. This text is not specifically about re-evaluating *heteronormative* conceptions or relationships, but about how we could live and engage with each other in a different way, which implies an openness to change and deviation from established structures. The structures I refer to here are those of relationships, families and sexuality. In the present there is still a certain norm in how we live together, we cannot deny for example that a man and woman living together is a heteronormative construct. The text invites us to re-imagine the world, to reconsider current norms and to re-evaluate the logic of our way of living together.

At the end of one of the versions of *Swan Lake The Game*, there is a scene with a crying man with a crown on his head, sitting in a white room filled up with toys and other objects. He

cries out: "I didn't do anything. It's not my problem. This is my opinion. The world is mine again, mine, mine, mine. I'm the daddy. I want internet". He imitates an angry, spoiled, stamping child. A connotation that comes to mind is the Western, white, privileged man sitting in the midst of all his plastic mess. The number of plastic toys he is surrounded by, which is also too much to play with, then points to the abundance of choices we have today and the speed with which we are used to getting the things we want. A human being is planted in the mess (and perhaps plastic waste) we have created together. This scene ties in with the text about the two directions, and what would happen if we continued with the present world, towards a future where the number of choices is endless, and where the commercial world continues to develop at the same pace. The theme in this last part of the performance therefore seems to point to the pace of the world we live in today. More specifically, it is about the speed at which we consume and become dissatisfied more quickly. Instead of queering or rejecting a normative situation, this scene emphasises and caricatures the present through the contemporary white man, the plastic mess he finds himself in, the dissatisfaction and the constant desire for more and better. The present is shown in a confrontational way, which in turn can be a reason to reject it.

By looking at the performance through the notion of queer futurity, it was possible to identify how this performance distances itself from a normative image of classical ballet and breaks open categorical thinking by working with different adaptations. By asking an audience whether they would choose the option of going forward or backward, the performance hints at their criticism of the present and invites them actively to think about change and to choose a different direction for the future. The options indicate the need to leave the present behind in order to move on, which relates to the notion of queer futurity. Queer futurity addresses that which is not accepted in the present and thereby points out that the way we are going is not the only way, thus opening up potential. The performance proposes, through the question of going forward or backward, to reimagine the future in the broadest sense. In particular, the introduction of the term 'black swan' and the examples of the Covid-19 and climate crisis at the beginning of the performance made the notion of future in the performance widely interpretable. However, the queer elements in the performance make the theme of the future more apparent by reinforcing the idea of 'change', which is necessary when one wants to move towards a different future, regardless of what crisis it may be.

Conclusion

Queer futurity is about the potential of thinking differently about the future than we do now. Queer futurity, as Muñoz posits in *Cruising Utopia*, is about revisiting moments from the past which contained a glimpse of potential of a different future, to re-imagine the future in a present that is still strongly heteronormative. The moments Muñoz revisited were mainly queer aesthetic works. In this thesis, the choice was made to look at performances that are not labelled as queer and the aim was to look at how the notion of queer futurity could be a way of analysing performances that address a certain form of change towards a different future. The motive to look at performances that do not necessarily identify as queer is related to the way the word 'queer' is used in this thesis: taken out of the realm of sexuality and considering it as a rejection of clear-cut categories and binary modes of thinking. To discuss non-queer performances through the notion of queer futurity, has provided an opportunity to focus on those elements within the performance that deviate from contemporary established categories and norms, and which invite us to think about possible other directions that could be taken. To shape this theory in a way that performances could be discussed structurally, a lens was created with different terms related to queer futurity. The central research question in this thesis was: *How can we use the lens of queer futurity to explore how performances dealing with crisis, transformation or change offer ways of reflecting on the future?*

In *Cruising Utopia*, José Muñoz rejects the normative present and argues that queerness is not-yet-here, with which he implies that we are still living in a heteronormative society. This idea of rejection returns in each of the components of the lens that was created in chapter 1: temporality, potentiality, disidentification and rejection of heteronormative logics. The lens assisted in analysing in the second chapter how performances reject the now and address issues on change or transformation towards a different future. The lens formed its own way of carrying out a dramaturgical analysis. I chose these four concepts as a starting point because they each had a different angle on the overarching concept of queer futurity. With these concepts, I was able to accurately analyse different points of the performances, which allowed me to discuss both the arc and concrete moments within them. However, during this research I came across many other concepts in the literature of Muñoz and Jones, among others, which could also be of value to this lens and to a more detailed dramaturgical analysis. In addition to the temporal aspect, for example, a spatial aspect could also be relevant to the lens. For further research, I would recommend expanding the range of terms associated with queer futurity to enable a wider selection of components to be chosen when analysing a performance that involves a form of rejection of the present or reflects on the future.

By projecting a lens of queer futurity onto the performances, the analyses revealed reflections on the future in relation to queerness. From the analyses, it can be concluded

that in both *Metamorphosis* and *Swan Lake* a rejection of the present took place, which led to future-oriented questions. The men in suits, the linear choreography, the system and the audience in *Metamorphosis* were left behind and a move was made towards a new realm on the other side of the space, a place of hope where growth and more fluid creatures fit in. *Swan Lake* dismisses the present by asking the spectator to choose a direction to move away from it and breaks the codes of the classical ballet with the characters that appear in the solos. The deviation or rejection of a specific category and precisely the movement towards an individual manifestation leads to elements in these performances being labelled queer in this thesis.

The two performances invite us to think in a more queer way and to be open to other forms of existence. By breaking codes of categories and deviating from systems, they portray a rejection of a here and now and of rigid structures, which in turn says something about the future having to take a different direction from the one it is currently heading towards. That is what queer futurity is about, it is about identifying and interrupting that structure. These interruptions are reflected in *Metamorphosis* and in *Swan Lake* in the form of transformations and adaptations, which show the potential of alternative existences. Even if queerness remains on the horizon, the potential for a different future is something that can be touched upon in contemporary performances. The notion of queer futurity helps us identify the issues that are not accepted in the present and points out that the path we follow is not the only one. Making people aware of an issue or starting a conversation is a strength of performances: they can disrupt normative conventions to make us reflect on or doubt a norm, which then leads us to re-evaluate our views on it. Even though performances may not always actively prompt us to act, they can make us reconsider a topic such as the future and inspire us to enter into dialogue with the people around us.

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Attachment 1

8: Metamorphosis – Nicole Beutler Projects



Attachment 2

Swan Lake – Club Guy and Roni



