

# PRODUCING UTOPIA

Creatively Producing Non-binary Futurity in Queer Art Projects



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## Abstract

The central focus of this research is exploring how to hold space for non-binary narratives within the context of creative producing. To answer this question, the study uses the self-formulated queer methodology called Enby-on-Enby, which draws on field research and close reading and is based on Ulrika Dahl's *femme on femme*. The researcher is a creative producer involved in two distinct queer art projects, both of which include non-binary narratives: *More is More* and R3LN4CHT.

The first of the three chapters is focused on conceptualizing the idea of non-binary futurity within the context of performance art. Non-binary futurity is seen as an ideality that challenges normative gender fixity and embraces the future potential of gender fluidity. The second chapter then analyzes artworks from the two queer art projects, looking for aspects of the works with a utopian aesthetic. This chapter points to elements within the artworks that encourage viewers to reflect on the possibility of alternative embodiments and to imagine a world where gender fluidity is thriving. Finally, the third chapter delves into the producer's efforts to create the right conditions for social spaces that reinforce the utopian potential of the artworks and performances. The chapter understands that *More is More* and R3LN4CHT have different strategies, but both are based on boundary-pushing connectivity between artists, art, and the audience. However, one project tries to create a safer space for gender non-conforming individuals to participate in art and performance, while the other project seeks to create critical spaces where non-binary and heteronormative perspectives can rub against each other.

In conclusion, this thesis argues that framing non-binary futurity for the creative producer requires creating conditions that encourage viewers and creators to participate in thinking about alternative possibilities of gender embodiment and to consider the ideal of gender fluidity. By focusing on the non-binary in queer projects and focusing on the practice of the creative producer, the study expands the understanding of the role of the producer in creating inclusive storytelling for the non-binary story.

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## INTRODUCTION: ENBY ON ENBY RESEARCHING AND PRODUCING

This master's thesis focuses on practice-led research on my practice as a creative producer in queer art projects with a non-binary narrative. Practise-led research in the humanities “allows a researcher to incorporate their creative practice, creative methods and creative output into the research design and as a part of the research output.”<sup>1</sup> Hence, this research's creative practice, methods, and output arise from my doings as a creative producer.

Central in this thesis is my role within two queer art projects with a non-binary narrative. In January 2022, I started working on the art of the community project *More is More* and a talent development track with R3LN4CHT. During my research time, the project teams and I made the artistic and business plans, but we did not execute the projects at the time of writing this thesis. *More is More* is a project initiated by Rex Collins, an art of the community project for the gender-diverse community of Amsterdam.<sup>2</sup> The project produces events in which gender-diverse artists showcase work to gender-diverse and queer audiences. R3LN4CHT is the name of a new fluid and hybrid collective born from the artistic vision of Didi Kreike. R3LN4CHT connects night and queer culture into performance-driven happenings that aim to shake up/rebel against the audiences.<sup>3</sup> The projects are initiated by non-binary artists Rex and Didi and envisioned in co-creation with me, a non-binary creative producer. Both projects could be categorised as queer art projects but aim to include a non-binary narrative.

Within these projects, my interest as a creative producer, and consequently the interest of this research, was in exploring how by creative producing, one could hold space for the non-binary story. Holding space is a practice conceptualized by Aminata Cairo.<sup>4</sup> The practice involves the creation of

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<sup>1</sup> Edith Cowan University, “Practice-Based & Practice-Led Research,” Research Methodologies for the Creative Arts & Humanities, 2022, para. 1, url: <https://ecu.au.libguides.com/research-methodologies-creative-arts-humanitie>.

<sup>2</sup> The term “art of the community” is preferred over “community art” as the latter implies that the art is created by both professionals and non-professionals. This is evident in many definitions of community art, including Francois Matarasso's, which emphasizes the co-creation of art by professionals and non-professionals. However, this does not accurately describe the situation in *More is More*, as Rex and I view all participating artists as professionals. The project showcases the art of the community's artists. Nevertheless, like community art, *More is More* has both communal and artistic objective. Definition of Community art can be found in Matarasso, François. *A Restless Art How Participation Won, and Why It Matters*. p 51 Calouste Gulbenkian Foundaion, UK Branch, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> R3LN4CHT translates as rebel night and is also a word play on the Dutch offense term for homosexual man “relnicht”. The term specifically is about gay men that flaunt with their gayness or seek confrontation.

<sup>4</sup> Aminata Cairo, *Holding Space* (Amsterdam: Aminata Cairo Consultancy, 2021).

transformative social spaces in which othered stories are heard and given a chance to unfold. Cairo understands the work to transform (temporarily) what she calls the system of *the dominant and the other*.<sup>5</sup> The system is an anthropological understanding of what Gramsci understood as hegemony.<sup>6</sup> The system is about the power relation between stories, in which one story is heard, normalised and neutralised, so these stories are *the dominant*, while some stories are overlooked, unheard, and made into *the other*.<sup>7</sup>

Holding space for the non-binary narrative is (temporarily) transforming the power relation between *the dominant* gender story and *the other* gender stories. In the current power relation, non-binary stories and stories of gender diversity are unheard of and oppressed. The patriarchal story is dominant and perceived as neutral and protected.<sup>8</sup> To hold space for the non-binary story is to produce a space in which the othered position is transformed into a position of significance. The urgency of the practice of holding space is the call for the inclusion of gender diversity. Thus, this thesis explores how the creative producer can hold space for the non-binary story within the art projects of *More is More* and R3LN4CHT.

Despite the seemingly specificity of the question, it remains broad because there are many ways to hold space for the non-binary story. As a producer, my priority in holding space is to create non-binary storytelling that voices the potential because I feel fatigued by the day-to-day storytelling that merely explains non-binary identities. In today's society, non-binary and transgender individuals must explain and justify their reality. For instance, I had to explain new working environments always things about pronouns, the history of gender diversity, a history that started long before the term non-binary was used or explain the need for gender-neutral toilets. In many of these conversations, there is always a caution to understand my non-binary reality. Gender-diverse people need to tell stories that claim their reality. It is these kinds of conversations that make the fatigue. Therefore, in the art projects

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<sup>5</sup> Cairo, chap. Dominant and the Other.

<sup>6</sup> Cairo, Aminata, Lecture on Inclusive Pathway Training, (Amsterdam, 26 January 2023). Lecture was visited by author.

<sup>7</sup> Aminata Cairo, "There Is a Lot of Work to Be Done," in *Connecting Our Stories Inclusion Matters*, ed. Lectorate Inclusive Education (Den Haag: De Haagse Hogeschool, 2019), 5–6.

<sup>8</sup> I refer to the patriarchal story and not cis-gender stories because the dominant stories are those stories that protect the dynamic between the dominant and the other. That are those stories that are also conceptualized as hegemonic femininity and masculinity by Mimi Schippers. It are the stories that protect the patriarchal society. Schippers, M. Recovering the feminine other: masculinity, femininity, and gender hegemony. *Theor Soc* 36, 85–102 (2007). <https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1007/s11186-007-9022-4>

within my producing practise, I want to move beyond narratives in which I need to claim reality into narratives that evoke further thought on the potential of the non-binary story.

Within this research, I searched for this narrative of potentiality in the concept of non-binary futurity. I conceptualize non-binary futurity starting from José Esteban Muñoz's conception of queer futurity.<sup>9</sup> The story of queerness is, to Muñoz, not about identity but ideality. An ideality that rejects the here-and-now of heteronormativity and evokes dreaming about a queer utopia. He understands queerness as a utopian ideality that has the potential to illuminate other versions of this world and explains his view on queerness clearly within the opening of his book:

*Queerness is not yet here. 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 for another world —José Esteban Muñoz<sup>10</sup>*

In other words, *the dominant*, hetero-normative dictate the present. *The other*, queerness, lets us feel that another potential of the world is possible. Therefore, this thesis explores how to hold space for the non-binary story by producing a narrative of non-binary futurity.

However, a different concept is added to the central question of this research, embedding the producer's method in the research design. The concept of framing from Mieke Bal is added as a practice-led concept to create a methodological lens for the producer to create a narrative of non-binary futurity.<sup>11</sup> Framing is part of the travelling concepts that Bal formulated. Travelling concepts are concepts that travel between disciplines, theories and the practices of cultural analysis analyses.<sup>12</sup> Framing is a concept she drew from her practice as a curator.<sup>13</sup> The curator's role in an exposition is to *frame* so they relink the artwork to new connections and, by doing so, open up a new understanding of the art.

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<sup>9</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2009).

<sup>10</sup> Muñoz, 1.

<sup>11</sup> Mieke Bal, "Framing," in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities : A Rough Guide*, ed. Mieke Bal and Sherry Marx-Macdonald, 2002, 133–73, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/uunl/reader.action?docID=4672197&ppg=150>.

<sup>12</sup> Mieke Bal, "Introduction," in *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities : A Rough Guide*, ed. Sherry Marx-Macdonald and Mieke Bal (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

<sup>13</sup> Bal, "Framing."

The practice of the creative producer has some similarities to the curators' fields; Creative producers develop from artistic and social urgency links between artists, stakeholders, and audiences.<sup>14</sup> Academic discourse has yet to clearly define the practice of creative producing within the performing arts field. However, my initial understanding of the creative producer is shaped by the syllabus of the master's program in creative production, by the head of that program and my experiences in the field. Based on these sources, I understand that a creative producer works in co-creation with artists to produce art that reflects the social, artistic vision and sense of urgency. From that vision, the producer creates relationships that contribute to the project's artistic and social goals. Thus, like the curator, the producer searches for a way to frame artworks to contribute to creating new understandings of the work.

Therefore, this research uses framing to embed practice into the research design, and so the main question central to this thesis is: ***How can framing non-binary futurity hold space for the non-binary story within the creative producing of queer performing art projects?*** This central question is answered in three chapters, followed by a concluding chapter. Chapter 1 is the theoretical framework and deepens the understanding of the concept of non-binary futurity in performance art. The chapter uses theories of transgender studies, like that of Jack Halberstam, that theorize the arrival of new gender terminology (like non-binary) to theories of the ideality of non-binariness.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the chapter looks at Jill Dolan and Muñoz to understand the activation of utopian dreaming through performance.<sup>16</sup>

The conception of non-binary futurity from Chapter 1 is used in Chapter 2 to analyze aspects of non-binary utopian aesthetics within the artworks and performance of the projects of *More is More* and *R3LN4CHT*. This chapter distinguishes what aspects of the artworks are important when framing non-binary futurity. Thus, the chapter identifies what aspects of the artwork are vital to framing non-binary utopian understandings of the artworks. In its conclusion, the chapter answers the sub-question; *What artistic aspects of the artworks & performances in More is More and R3LN4CHT activate non-binary utopian futurity?*

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<sup>14</sup> Formulation of the creative producer practice I learned on my bachelor's program production management and stage management in performing arts.

<sup>15</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability* (University of California Press, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* (Michigan: the University of Michigan Press, 2005), <https://doi.org/10.3998/mpub.119520>; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.



Chapter 3 analyses what producing strategies can activate the arts' utopian potential. Chapter 3 focuses on the producing strategy that makes the social space. In the understanding of Morida Siagian, the social space is made through social interactions and cultural processes.<sup>17</sup>The focus on the social space is made because Cairo's holding space is about transforming the social dynamics of the dominant and the other. Hence, the work is to make a transformative social space. Thus, producing the social space is of interest when answering the main question. Chapter 3 aims to answer the following: *What strategies are envisioned to create non-binary utopian spaces?*

Although I am confident that the three main chapters provide sufficient substance to conclude the central question, I have included an interlude chapter before the main body to situate my motivation as a producer. While most of this thesis focuses on how to produce non-binary futurity, the interlude chapter explores the reasons behind my *why* to produce non-binary futurity. Hence, the interlude contributes to comprehending the social and artistic urgency that has guided my practice and, consequently, this research.

## **METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

The research was conducted using a queer methodology. Queer methodologies are hard to define as it is within the ontology of queerness to be hard to grasp. Queerness rejects any form of fixedness and rejects singularity.<sup>18</sup> Thus, it would be anti-queer to give a precise definition. As Catherine Nash and Kath Browne point out, queer researchers keep the term queer unclear and unfit to keep its being non-normative.<sup>19</sup> However, Ulrika Dahl points out that queer methodologies are a non-normative structure of research that tries to understand queer life from a queer perspective.<sup>20</sup>

Within that research on understanding queer life, the queer theorist is not separated from its subject. Instead, the queer theorist can, within queer cultural research, be a producer of queer culture. As Halberstam writes;

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<sup>17</sup> Morida Siagian, "The Social Space in the Making of Identity (Case: Pekan Labuhan, Medan, Indonesia)," *IOP Conference Series: Earth and Environmental Science* 126, no. 1 (2018): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1088/1755-1315/126/1/012211>.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine J. Nash and Kath Browne, *Queer Methods and Methodologies, Queer Methods and Methodologies*, 2016, 7–9, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315603223>.

<sup>19</sup> Nash and Browne, 7.

<sup>20</sup> Ulrika Dahl, "Femme on Femme," in *Queer Methods and Methodologies*, ed. Kath Browne and Catherine J. Nash (London: Ashgate, 2010), 6+7, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315603223-10>.

The academic might be the archivist, a coarchivist, a full-fledged participant in the subcultural scene that the scholar writes about. But only rarely does the queer theorist stand wholly apart from the subculture, examining it with an expert's gaze.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, a queer person can be a producer and a researcher and combine these positions within queer methodological frameworks to make valuable contributions to knowledge production for their community and academia.<sup>22</sup> This merge of producer and researcher is the vital component of this thesis. I engage as both researcher and producer and create a mixed methodology for understanding my practice embedded in queer life. Like Halberstam and Dahl, I aim to understand the community and cultural production I am part of.<sup>23</sup>

Within my methodology, I combine multiple methods of different methodological strands to create a queer, mixed methodology. Through (auto)ethnographic engagement methods, participation in community events and politics and close reading of artworks, I aim to understand non-binary storytelling in art. The (auto)ethnographic engagements involve work sessions with Rex or Didi and other meetings with funders, artists and partners. During my research, I visited multiple events connected to the gender-diverse community of Amsterdam and Rotterdam. These were performances, panels, talks and also parties. Finally, close reading was used to analyse the artworks and performances of the artists I engaged.

My research methodology is similar to Ulrika Dahl's methodology *Femme-on-femme*.<sup>24</sup> *Femme-on-femme* is also a mixed methodology, and Dahl used the following methods: "archival research, ethnographic engagements, participation in community events and politics".<sup>25</sup> The latter method differs from my research, where Dahl uses archival research, archiving femme-lesbian culture by taking photos and conducting interviews. Although my research suits a method of archiving, the period was too short for archival work. The research period was limited to pre-producing only two queer projects with a non-binary narrative. Instead of archiving, this research did close readings of artworks and performances. However, *Femme on Femme* is similar to mine methodology in using mixed methods.

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<sup>21</sup> Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place* (New York: New York University Press, 2005), 163, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203036266>.

<sup>22</sup> Dahl, "Femme on Femme," 7.

<sup>23</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*; Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*; Dahl, "Femme on Femme."

<sup>24</sup> Dahl, "Femme on Femme."

<sup>25</sup> Dahl, 18.

The collaborative element is the prior similarity between Dahl's methodology and mine. Within Dahl's research, she works as a co-creator of a photography book, and she and the other co-creators work collaboratively to produce and research the community by producing that book. Dahl reflects on the community aspect of this methodology:

Femme-on-femme is, I would argue not simply about existing within and reflecting communities, it is also a methodology committed to making community. It is about seeing research as part of, not outside of, social movements, and seeing the research process itself as something that works towards the formulation of community in its (researchers') execution.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, the Femme-on-femme research is about making community culture while reflecting on it. I see a significant overlap with my research aims, as while in the field, I was a co-creator of two projects that are part of queer and gender-diverse communities. As a collaborator, I was active in making cultural productions while also researching these productions.

The methodology of this research I named Enby-on-enby research. Enby is the acronym for a non-binary person used within the queer community. Like Femme-on-femme by Dahl, my Enby-on-enby research is a collaborative queer methodology in which I am a co-creator in the cultural production the research aims to understand. One could understand this as practice-led research where creative producing creates the research and influences it throughout. However, it works two ways, with both practice and research influencing each other continuously. By doing so, both the practice and research understand the queer and, more specifically, the non-binary and gender-diverse community.

## **POSITION & URGENCY**

This master's thesis contributes to the following academic discourses: queer futurity, the non-binary gender and creative producing. This thesis contributes to the discourse on queer futurity by building on it and exploring non-binary futurity. Non-binary Futurity is presented here as part of queer futurity. Queer futurity is the rejection of heteronormative futures. The binary distinction of gender enforces the heteronormative, and so, non-binary futurity is part of queer futurity. However, a story of queerness from a cis-gay-male narrative differs from a non-binary narrative. Although both can contribute to the project of queer futures, one needs to understand their specifics. Where Muñoz's book mainly included the narrative of drag queens and black and of colour gay cis-men artists, the research within this

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<sup>26</sup> Dahl, 19.

thesis narrates gender non-conforming and non-binary stories within artistic practices from Amsterdam and Rotterdam.<sup>27</sup> This thesis aims to contribute to the project of queer futurity by adding a non-binary narrative to the utopian project of queer futures.

By examining the utopian artistic output of the non-binary community, this thesis addresses the under-researched topic of the non-binary gender spectrum. Various scholars, such as Munro, have noted the dearth of research on this subject, particularly within academic circles.<sup>28</sup> Additionally, studies exploring gender diversity, including Halberstam's work, have argued that the emergence of new gender terminology, including the term "non-binary," reflects a significant shift in understanding the trans\* subject<sup>29</sup>. This shift emphasizes the agency of the gender-diverse community in defining and articulating their own story.<sup>30</sup> Given the importance of this shift, it is crucial to study it and focus on the narratives produced by the gender-diverse community. Thus, this thesis contributes to the discourse on non-binary gender by examining the artistic creations of this community.

Alongside a lack of research on the non-binary gender spectrum, I view the creative producer field in performing arts as understudied. My viewpoint is made because there is not a clear key text on the role of the creative producer in performing arts. As far as my research went, I could find Susan Lyle McCauley's dissertation on the creative producer in community-based multimedia projects. That text includes some insights into what the creative producer in the performing arts could be.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, some relevant articles, like that of Brett Ashley Crawford, explore individuals that merge the role of artists and producers. Nevertheless, the most notable documentation of the creative producer in the performing arts field seems to be made outside of academia. For instance, Laura Lloyd's article in a theatre magazine aimed to demystify the term creative producer.<sup>32</sup> Hence, there is limited academic text on the creative producer in performing arts, while there are master programs, and I see more and more producers naming themselves creative producers. Thus, there is an urgent need to grasp this role in academia to understand the changing position of the producer.

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<sup>27</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*.

<sup>28</sup> Surya Monro, "Non-Binary and Genderqueer: An Overview of the Field," *International Journal of Transgenderism* 20, no. 2–3 (2019): 126–31, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15532739.2018.1538841>.

<sup>29</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 10.

<sup>30</sup> Halberstam, 10+11.

<sup>31</sup> Susan Lyle Mccauley, "The Dynamics of Creative Collaboration : The Role of the Creative Producer in Community-Based , Multimedia Production" (RMIT University, 2008).

<sup>32</sup> Laura Lloyd, "The Creative Producer," *Total Theatre Magazine* (print archive), 2008, <http://totaltheatre.org.uk/archive/features/creative-producer>.

In conclusion, this thesis position itself between queer theory, trans studies and the field of arts and society. Within the intersection of those fields, I aim to understand artistic production from the gender-diverse community. This research's urgency and relevance lay in its contributions to the urgent but under-researched subject of the non-binary gender and the creative producer in performing arts.

## INTERLUDE: NON-BINARY DREAMING IN BERLIN

This MA thesis's central question invites an understanding of how non-binary futurity is produced in queer performing art projects. However, in my creative producing classes, I learned that understanding the why is necessary to comprehend the how of production. The why encompasses the cause and urgency behind the production. Therefore, this interlude serves as a preface to the main body of the thesis by stating the story that is my cause for producing non-binary futurity in queer performing art projects.

*In Augustus 2021, I found myself in dire need of a holiday. The reason? I had absorbed myself in work, doing a full-time study and working as a freelance producer. Unfortunately, by delving myself into work, I had denied myself the pleasures of queer joy, and by the end of August, I was utterly exhausted.*

*I was exhausted of the constant barrage of questions at work about pronoun usage, of comments, that the Dutch they/them pronouns sound ugly, of the curious glances in the male/female restrooms, and the all-too-frequent remarks about how "nice" it was to be able to be gender non-conforming in this day and age had worn me down. However, my story is not one of pain but of transformative experience. It is a tale of non-binary bliss, a journey that gave me hope for my non-binary future.*

*I went to Berlin, and there were more queer spaces open in Berlin than in the Netherlands due to the pandemic restrictions. On my fifth day in Berlin, I woke up and found myself chatting on Grindr with a non-binary friend from Amsterdam. They invited me to a party in the suburbs, so I took the metro and the tram. In the tram, I already recognized people going to the party in glittery, leather, and bold-coloured outfits.*

*Upon entering the party, I was immediately struck by the sheer diversity of the partygoers. Cis-gay men were not the majority here - instead, I found myself surrounded by gender-benders, rule-breakers, and other humans who defied the gender binary in various ways. Humans that would be asked by "cishets", what are you? However, at this party, nobody would ask these questions. Nobody cares about what someone has in their pants because it is not their business. What mattered was your energy, your joy, and your willingness to dance.*

*Onstage, a gender-bending performer named Lilith (figure 1) stole the show. With a painted face that featured a moustache blending into a contour that enhanced their cheekbones and a provocative outfit that included both exposed breasts and a strap-on dildo, Lilith commented on the stage. Lilith and their fellow "Quing" and "Kings" danced and lip-synced their way through songs ranging from Latin American songs to tracks from Dorian Electra. Masculinity and femininity were constantly in flux, and the energy was electric. Their rebellion against societal norms seemed effortless and joyful, and above all, hopeful.*

*I felt even more connected than at other queer parties. I felt free, sexy, desired, and loved for who I was, not just for what I was. And as fate would have it, I found myself drawn to my friend's friend from Amsterdam, and we shared a kiss. After that kiss, I became ecstatic, not just because of the kiss or the drugs in my body, but because everything about that moment felt right. The performers, the crowd, and the kiss came together perfectly.*

*As we danced the night away, I could not help but feel we were part of our little society, thriving in our queer and/or gender non-conforming and non-binary identities. And even though the outside world stemmed far away existed, for just a moment, it felt the potential to recreate the world in our way. That world would be inclusive of Lilith's fluidity and inclusive of desire and love for the non-binary story.*



**Figure 1: Lilith the Quing, *unnamed* (Instagram:@liliththequing, 18-03-2022)**

Lilith's performance and the over-all party experience lifted me from the present. The experience showed "that indeed something is missing".<sup>33</sup> However, that did not cause sadness or disappointment but rather hope that another version of this world is possible. The story tells a transformative

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<sup>33</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 13.

experience from the exhaustion of *the dominant* into feeling hope for the potential of the future. At the party, I glimpsed into utopia.

It awoke my internal flame for activism and contributed to the why of my practice. A practice in which I search for the potential of the non-binary story. Through the performance, I had a utopian experience that showed me what is missing. It showed me that an alternative was possible. Hence, I believe art has a utopian potential and can be a rebelling against the gender binary by letting us glimpse into a non-binary utopia.



## CHAPTER 1: NON-BINARY FUTURITY IN THEORY: CONCEPTUALISING NON-BINARY FUTURITY IN PERFORMANCE.

The interlude presents an auto-ethnographic take on non-binary futurity and creates a basis for understanding the concept. From the interlude, one can understand that the moment of futurity creates feelings of hope for a world with non-binariness—that futurity glimpse towards the utopian potential. My experience shows similarities to the analysis of utopia in performances by Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz. They understand utopia is an idealistic potentiality. The idealism of utopia is that it shows what is missing in the world.<sup>34</sup> Dolan talks about the “what if” and Muñoz about the “then and their”.<sup>35</sup> Utopia is not a static articulated idea to them but a constantly evolving ideality. The ever-evolving utopia can be illuminated in an experience like that of the interlude.

In this chapter, I want to theorize how performance can illuminate non-binary futurities. The chapter starts with a short part that positions the potential for resistance in thinking about a queer utopia. That part begins with Muñoz and Dolan and briefly adds ideas from theories of queer temporalities such as those of Elizabeth Freeman.<sup>36</sup> The second part of the chapter explores what the non-binary utopian ideal is. That exploration is embedded in transgender studies and starts with reviewing the literature on the arrival of new gender terminology in the past decade. Finally, the third part reviews the performance theories of Muñoz and Dolan on how performance construct moment that illuminate utopia. In this chapter's three parts answers, what is the concept of non-binary futurity in queer performance?

## RESISTING STRAIGHT TIME

To both Muñoz and Dolan, the potential of utopia in performance is the interruption of the present. In terms of queer futurity, this is the interruption of what Halberstam has coined straight time.<sup>37</sup> Straight time is a linear idea of time that creates ideas and feelings to heteronormative time constructions, dictating when to marry, have children, work part-time, etcetera. This heteronormative conception of time follows a system of what Elizabeth Freeman has named chrononormativity<sup>38</sup>. Chrononormativity

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<sup>34</sup> Muñoz, 13.

<sup>35</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, 13; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 1.

<sup>36</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*; Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*; Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity, Female Masculinity* (Duke: Duke University Press, 1998), <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781478002703/HTML>.

<sup>38</sup> Freeman, *Time Binds*, 3.

describes the normalisation of time into dominant subjections of productivity and efficiency.<sup>39</sup>

Institutional forces produce norms that make us as productive as possible—employing straight-time productivity for gender reproduction and patriarchal power. Thus, the here and now dictated by straight time is an institutional force that uses productivity and efficiency to uphold the patriarchy and its gender binary.

## NON-BINARINESS AN IDEALITY

Non-binary futurity starts from the bases of Muñoz's queer futurity as idealistic potential. Muñoz understood an ideal as something that can "mobilize us, push us forward".<sup>40</sup> Within this part, I explore what ideal emerges from the non-binary story. What does the story mobilize us for? What is the glimpse on the horizon of non-binariness?

The identity term non-binary gained much attention over the last two decades.<sup>41</sup> For instance, from a personal experience, it was only in 2016 that I became familiar with the term, and from 2019 I began to use it as a term descriptive of my gendered feelings and expressions. However, in the 1990s, gender non-conforming identities were a non-category in the discourse, and gender non-conforming people were seen as disrupted or as expanding members of the male or female categories. However, the arrival of new terminology, which began in the 1980s with the term genderqueer, has, according to Monro, resulted in gender non-conforming identities becoming a category in the last decade.<sup>42</sup>

Therefore, the arrival of the identarian term non-binary is part of a more considerable discursive change regarding the perception of gender non-conforming people. Halberstam argues that we are in a paradigm shift in understanding gender and sexual variance. The shift is driven by the "production, circulation, and usage" of "a vernacular language for non-normative gender and sexual expression" that challenges the traditional understanding of trans\* subjects.<sup>43, 44</sup> As Halberstam stated about the new paradigm, "people collaborate to name their understandings of contrary embodiment."<sup>45</sup> However, the medical and psychiatric sphere dominated the old paradigm, which dictated language

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<sup>39</sup> Freeman, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 97.

<sup>41</sup> Monro, "Non-Binary and Genderqueer: An Overview of the Field," 127.

<sup>42</sup> Monro, 127.

<sup>43</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 10.

<sup>44</sup> Within this thesis, trans\* is used as a more inclusive concept for transgender. For Halberstam, the concept of trans\* opens the term to being about transing not only within the category of gender but also surrounding unfolding categories. Yet also to like queer to keep the term vague and not to move away from the dominant singular understanding of trans\* subjects.<sup>44</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 11.

and knowledge about the transgender subject. Hence, the paradigm shift is a power shift in understanding gender and sexual variance from institutional to collective power among people.

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## DEPATHOLOGISATION

The politics that made this rebelling shift possible are the politics of depathologisation. The concept of depathologisation is vital to understanding the move away from medical domination in trans\* discourse.<sup>46</sup> The dominant story produced by the medical world is that transgender people are patients with gender disorders. The “cure” is to align their sex markers with their gender identity. After the cure, they can live as ordinary people amongst their gender. However, this story is a pathological understanding of trans\* as a pathology of psychological disorder. Depathologisation moves away from viewing gender transition as a mental disorder to “recognizing it as a human right and expression of human diversity”, according to Amets Suess et al.<sup>47</sup>

A new bill, colloquially called the new transgender law in the Netherlands, amends gender disclosure in the birth certificate, which I understand as a move to depathologization.<sup>48</sup> This law means that one no longer needs a psychological diagnosis to change their birth marker on their legal documents. This is a significant change, especially considering it was only in 2014 that the law stating that transgender people had to undergo sterilization to be able to get gender alleging surgery and change the sex in their passport was overturned. Furthermore, it was only in 2013 that the diagnosis' psychological description changed from gender disorder to gender dysphoria.<sup>49</sup> Thus, over the last decade, much has happened within the law and the medical field through the politics of depathologisation.

Although legislative and medical changes have been happening over the past decade, theories on decolonization from Gloria Wekker make us aware that perceptions of groups of people

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<sup>46</sup> Amets Suess, Karine Espineira, and Pau Crego Walters, “Depathologization,” *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 73–80.

<sup>47</sup> Suess, Espineira, and Walters, 74.

<sup>48</sup> NOS Nieuws, “Wat Houdt de Nieuwe Transgenderwet in? Vijf Vragen En Antwoorden,” NOS.nl, 2022, <https://nos.nl/artikel/2446147-wat-houdt-de-nieuwe-transgenderwet-in-vijf-vragen-en-antwoorden>; De Tweede Kamer, “Wijziging Vermelding Geslacht in Geboorteakte,” tweedekamer, kamerstukken, wetsvoorstellen, 2023, <https://www.tweedekamer.nl/kamerstukken/wetsvoorstellen/detail?cfg=wetsvoorsteldetails&qry=wetsvoorstel%3A35825#activity-2022A07541>.

<sup>49</sup> Ton van der Born, “WHO Schrap Transgender Als Mentale Stoornis,” Het Continuüm, accessed February 13, 2023, [https://www.continuum.nl/\\_artikel/who\\_schrap\\_transgender\\_als\\_mentale\\_stoornis#:~:text=Lang werd er over gender,stoornis gesproken%2C maar over genderdysforie.](https://www.continuum.nl/_artikel/who_schrap_transgender_als_mentale_stoornis#:~:text=Lang werd er over gender,stoornis gesproken%2C maar over genderdysforie.)

from the past continue to influence the perception of the present for a very long time.<sup>50</sup> For example, although laws have changed and being transgender is no longer legally recognized as a gender disorder, the idea continues to exist in discourse. Therefore, much work must be done concerning the depathologisation of all discourse, not only law or treatment but also the cultural mind.

The politics of depathologisation are vital for recognizing gender non-conforming people, according to Suess et al.<sup>51</sup> The medical paradigm of gender created a problem in understanding gender diversities. Gender disorders were always treated linearly from one sex to another, and the disorder was only understood as binary. Hence, if this narrative of trans\* is dominant, there is no possibility of gender non-binary variance. The politics of moving away from pathological and medical understanding are needed to understand trans\* and gender possibilities outside binary conceptions.

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## GENDER FLUIDITY

From the depathologised understanding of trans\*, we can start to examine the ideal of the non-binary story. Moreover, without the restraints of the medical understanding of trans\* embodiment, we can move towards thinking about the future potentiality of trans\*. In the concluding chapter of *Trans\**, Halberstam hints towards the non-binary future of embodiment. They argue to shift the “idea of embodiment as being housed in one’s flesh to embodiment as a more fluid architectural project.”<sup>52</sup> Halberstam makes the quirky comparison between the trans\* body and Lego;

The world of Lego is one of constant transition, and while there is always the possibility of returning to the instruction sheet and following the step-by-step directions, the uncharted territory of creation always beckons.<sup>53</sup>

This conception allows us to move past a determined fixed position of the trans\* body into a fluidity of the gendered body in the non-binary future.

The potentiality of non-binary futurity is to glimpse towards a horizon of gender fluidity. To gather feelings and thoughts about what is missing in the current sex-gender system. Gender Fluidity is the rejection of the gender-fixed reality. Judith Butler was one of the first to argue that gender non-conforming doings have the potential to subvert the systems that produce the norm of gender

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<sup>50</sup> The concept of the cultural archive that Wekker formulated interpreting Edward Said in Gloria Wekker, *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* (Duke University Press, 2016).

<sup>51</sup> Suess, Espineira, and Walters, “Depathologization,” 74.

<sup>52</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 25.

<sup>53</sup> Halberstam, 132.

fixedness.<sup>54</sup> Butler does this over three books in which she theorizes the sex-gender system and how to subvert it. In *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter*, she established, through theorizing gender performativity and the citational law of sex, how the constructed reality of gender fixedness is enforced.<sup>55</sup> In her first books, she hints at the potential of gender non-conforming doings subverting those systems. However, in her book *Undoing Gender*, she makes the latter into a comprehensive elaborated argument through an in-depth analysis of gender non-conforming doings.<sup>56</sup>

Butler used discursive performativity as the force that creates gender fixedness. In a Butlerian view, performativity constitutes the thing it acts to be. The latter is explained clearly in the following quote, gender "proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be".<sup>57</sup> Thus, from the Butlerian perspective, performativity brings into being the gendered subject.<sup>58</sup> Gender performativity happens in the exterior space, so in the physical representation of the self. Thus, the idea of internal fixed gender identity is created by exterior bodily actions, so gender identity is a constructed reality of these actions.<sup>59</sup> Through this bodily action of a presumed stable gender, one becomes a gendered subject.<sup>60</sup> As stated by Butler, one becomes a gendered subject "through becoming intelligible in accordance with recognizable standards of gender intelligibility"<sup>61</sup> Thus, our gendered subjectivities make subjects human subjects. People who fall under the categories of men and women are then validated.

Furthermore, one must understand Butler's argument that sex is part of gender from her second book, *Bodies that Matter*.<sup>62</sup> Butler argues that sex is a signifier of gender, and it is a cultural

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<sup>54</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (Abingdon, Oxon ; Routledge, 1993), <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203828274>; Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 1990, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203824979>; Judith Butler, *Undoing Gender*, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, vol. 3 (New York and London: Routledge, 2004).

<sup>55</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*; Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*.

<sup>56</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

<sup>57</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 33.

<sup>58</sup> Evelien Geerts, "Performativity," *New Materialism*, August 14, 2016, <https://newmaterialism.eu/almanac/p/performativity.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Judith Butler, "Bodily Inscriptions, Performative Subversions," in *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, ed. Judith Butler (New York and London, 1990), 175–93.

<sup>60</sup> Toby Finlay, "Non-Binary Performativity: A Trans-Positive Account of Judith Butler's Queer Theory Non-," *Laurier Undergraduate Journal of the Arts* 4 (2017): 58–69, <http://scholars.wlu.ca/luja>.

<sup>61</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 22.

<sup>62</sup> Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*.

activity to define sex as natural or biological.<sup>63</sup> In *Bodies that Matter*, sex is seen as a citational, like a law. It is a body that materialises through the citational law that signifies the body into sex.<sup>64</sup> Thus, a body becomes materialized/intelligible through the normative law of sex. Therefore, sex is the discursive construction of the (matter) body and is part of gender construction and not separate from it. Making someone into gender is based upon this citational law and gender performativity.

However, some transgender studies scholars renounce Butler's ideas. Amongst these scholars, there are two significant critiques. The first is by Jay Prosser, who worries that destabilizing "true" genders also dispels the need for gender alignment treatments and the reality of transgender existence.<sup>65</sup> Prosser argues that transgender is a fixed subject, and the trans body is not fluid but determined.<sup>66</sup> The critique of Prosser thus opens for normative conceptions of the trans\* body in which the trans\* subject has a fixed timeline. This conception is similar to the way in which the medical world suggests that trans\* people need treatment which is a linear transition process. Thus, Prosser's argument could open to a pathological understanding of trans\* and therefore, a utopian understanding of trans\* or non-binary should renounce his critiques.

The second major critique on Butler amongst some trans\* studies scholars is similar to that of Viviana Namaste. Namaste argues that *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* rely too heavily on the transgender subject without contextualizing them, so trans\* stories are appropriated.<sup>67</sup> However, in *Undoing Gender*, Butler turns her analysis around, and the transgender and intersex subject is the main subject.<sup>68</sup> However, in this analysis, violence against transgender and intersex subjects is the primary concern. Therefore Namaste argues that within this analysis, Butler does not consider the full complex story of trans\* people.

Nevertheless, *Undoing Gender* is an integral theory to understanding how gender non-conforming doing can glimpse towards a gender-fluid future. In *Undoing Gender*, Butler builds upon her argument of *Gender Trouble* on how humans are made intelligible by gender. When one complies with the systems that make the gender binary, one is validated as a human. However, those that do

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<sup>63</sup> Butler, 10–12.

<sup>64</sup> Butler, 15–16.

<sup>65</sup> Jay Prosser, "Judith Butler: Queer Feminism, Transgender and the Transubstantiation of Sex," in *The Transgender Studies Reader* (Routledge, 2006), 257–80.

<sup>66</sup> Prosser.

<sup>67</sup> Viviane Namaste, "Undoing Theory: The 'Transgender Question' and the Epistemic Violence of Anglo-American Feminist Theory," *Hypatia* 24, no. 3 (2009): 11–32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1527-2001.2009.01043.x>.

<sup>68</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

not conform are seen as less than human. Butler made this argument by analyzing violence against transgender people and how the acts of violence are justified. A transgender person is undoing gender in the eyes of an aggressive group, and without the attribute of gender, they are defined as less than human.

However, alongside this dark reading, there is a positive note within the book. I am drawn to Elizabeth Kelan's reading of Butler which argues that the transformative attitude towards gender norms of gender non-conforming people can undo gender by destabilizing the gender binary.<sup>69</sup> Undoing is, in this reading, not the alienation of gender but a transformative doing. With *Undoing Gender*, Butler argues that this transformative doing is vital to human diversity.<sup>70</sup>

Butler makes this analysis by analyzing violence towards transgender people. However, like Tobi Finlay, I think a trans-positive reading, with less violence, of Butler is possible.<sup>71</sup> For instance, Lilith, the drag performer described in the interlude, is undoing gender. They undo gender by re-linking normative gender aesthetics; They have a moustache that cities typically to males, but they also have breasts that citie females. Hence, their doing breaks with the citational law of the binary. Moreso, they call themselves not a king or a queen but Quing. Thus, in the performative act of naming, they also undo the gender binary and destabilize the idea of gender fixedness.

Nonetheless, I intend to reformulate the notion of "undoing gender" into one that recognises the potential for collective transformation through such efforts. Undoing gender suggests an alienation of gender that the actions are contrary to doing gender. While I agree with Butler that the acts she calls undoing gender are subverting gender, I understand that subversion is a relational and collective critique of the norms of gender and is doing gender by making an alternative to the norm. Undoing gender is queering gender, and Muñoz emphasised the importance of recognising queerness as a collective and relational critical value.<sup>72</sup> Those collective and relational critical values of undoing gender are visible in Halberstam's argument, which points out that the collectivity and relational creation of a new language brings about the paradigm shift.<sup>73</sup> As Lilith names themselves a Quing, that naming is done in relation to Drag Kings on stage and made through the collectivity with the audience

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<sup>69</sup> Elisabeth K. Kelan, "Gender Logic and (Un)Doing Gender at Work," *Gender, Work & Organization* 17, no. 2 (March 1, 2010): 17 + 19, <https://doi.org/10.1111/J.1468-0432.2009.00459.X>.

<sup>70</sup> Butler, *Undoing Gender*.

<sup>71</sup> Finlay, "Non-Binary Performativity: A Trans-Positive Account of Judith Butler's Queer Theory Non-," 9.

<sup>72</sup> José Estaban Muñoz, "Thinking Beyond Antirelationality and Antiutopianism in Queer Critique," *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 825.

<sup>73</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 11.

recognising them as a Quing and not a King. So the power of the acts of undoing lies in the collective effort of recognising the act as an alternative way of doing gender.

In addition, to further understand the relational and collective critique of undoing, I want to reference Halberstam in *The Queer Art of Failure*, which asserts that queerness is the act of failure, a refusal to perpetuate normative acts dictated by heteronormativity.<sup>74</sup> Similarly, undoing gender can also be understood as acts of failure. However, Halberstam suggests that failure, encompassing "failing, losing, forgetting, unmaking, undoing, unbecoming, not knowing," opens up new avenues for creativity and alternative thinking.<sup>75</sup> Failure or unbecoming can yield not only dangerous encounters but also new possibilities. Creating queer alternatives is not a solo project but contributes to a counterhegemonic knowledge system.<sup>76</sup> Thus, undoing gender are acts that counter normative knowledges of gender and have the potential to create a counter-hegemonic system. Thus, I argue that we rename undoing gender in a manner that acknowledges its collective relational critique. Therefore, from now on, I will use the term counter-doing of gender

A concept that adds to this relational and collective power of counter-doing of gender is that of gender self-determination. In the understanding of Eric Stanley, gender self-determination "opens up space for multiple embodiments and their expressions by collectivizing the struggle against both interpersonal and state violence".<sup>77</sup> It is what Halberstam named the collective practice of understanding contrary embodiment.<sup>78</sup> Gender non-conforming people are determining with other trans\* people or allies their embodiments instead of state or medical institutions. Thus, self-determination is a collaborative practice of rejecting the dominant understanding of trans\*.

Stanley notes that conceptualizing gender self-determination can help to formulate critiques of normative trans\* movements.<sup>79</sup> At this moment, for more privileged trans\* people, becoming trans\* is a possibility. Halberstam marks that for many generations, there was an impossibility of becoming trans\*. There was no timeline for a trans\* future. Muñoz argued that black and queer people of colour could not afford to lose hope for an alternative future.<sup>80</sup> To lose hope for that alternative future could

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<sup>74</sup> Judith Halberstam, "The Queer Art of Failure," in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 87–121, <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1215/9780822394358>.

<sup>75</sup> Halberstam, 2, 16 + 17.

<sup>76</sup> Judith Halberstam, "Low Theory," in *The Queer Art of Failure* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 1–25, <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1215/9780822394358>.

<sup>77</sup> Eric Stanley, "Gender Self-Determination," *Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1, no. 1–2 (2014): 91.

<sup>78</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 11.

<sup>79</sup> Stanley, "Gender Self-Determination," 91.

<sup>80</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 96.



mean not having a future. Until recently, similar arguments could be made for trans\* people across the spectrum. However, with the current acceptance in law and medicine, there is a realistic possibility of trans\* for those with a more privileged intersectional position.

However, these realities lead to normative and linear trans\* time path. Halberstam states, “With recognition comes acceptance, with acceptance comes power, with power comes regulation.”<sup>81</sup> For instance, Halberstam argues that with the acceptance of trans\* came the new phenomenon of trans\* children.<sup>82</sup> The trans\* child is no longer viewed as disrupted but gets accepted and regulated into the family. Halberstam states the “trans\* child is also placed by their parents within an ever-expanding and dizzying array of disabilities that the parents claim for their children and then seek to cure, ameliorate, or medicalize.”<sup>83</sup> Thus, the trans\* child is made into something that can be dealt with, and the trans\* ‘disability’ can be overcome through the medical transition, establishing the linear trans\* time path.

However, the utopian aspect of gender self-determination can help glimpse towards alternative potentialities of trans\* becoming that fit Jasbir Puar's conception of becoming.<sup>84</sup> “Becoming is not about trying to make the body more capacitated but about allowing and reading more multiplicity, multiplicities of the impersonal and of the imperceptible,”<sup>85</sup> Thus, we need to glimpse towards a potential that renounces the end game of trans\* in which the trans\* bodies are singular and curable. Instead, the trans and non-binary futurity need to idealize the potential of the fluid trans\* and non-binary body as an ongoing and multilayer trans\*ing being.

Gender self-determination is a practice that can activate this utopian ideality. The utopian potential of self-determination is in its relational ontology that Stanley describes.<sup>86</sup> Self-determined understandings of embodiment are made in collectivity. These understandings or terms that arise show that something is missing. They reject the here and now of trans\* understanding and glimpse towards a then and there of trans\* embodiment. The understanding is not alienated but makes way for a relational trans\*. A trans\* that rejects the old paradigm into the new paradigm. It glimpses towards a horizon of alternative potentialities of trans\* becoming.

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<sup>81</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 18.

<sup>82</sup> Halberstam, chap. Trans\* Childeren.

<sup>83</sup> Halberstam, 60.

<sup>84</sup> Jasbir K. Puar, “Bodies with New Organs: Becoming Trans, Becoming Disabled,” in *The Right to Maim: Deblility, Cpacity, Disability*, ed. Jasbir K. Puar (Duke University Press, 2017), 33–61, <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822372530-002>.

<sup>85</sup> Puar, 63.

<sup>86</sup> Stanley, “Gender Self-Determination,” 90.

## FUTURITY IN PERFORMING ARTS

How are these horizons of alternative potentialities made visible in performance? In this last section, I review Muñoz's theory on how performance shines towards utopia. Additionally, I review the opposing view of Jill Dolan about where performance has a utopian potential.

However, while the view on where performance constructs utopia differs, Dolan and Muñoz show similarity in their conception of utopia. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, they both view utopia as a constantly evolving ideality. Their difference in utopian construction in performance is rooted in a different ontological view on performance. This section aims to review both views and understand the lens needed for my research aims.

Muñoz's approach should be understood as a "backward glance that enacts a future visions".<sup>87</sup> He does not follow an ontology of performance that views performance as something that passes in time. Instead, Sara Warner stated about Muñoz, he analyses his book's performances as a text from the past that "enacts a future visions".<sup>88</sup> He takes performances from the past and analyses them in hermeneutics to understand how they create future visions. The book is an ode to queer performance of the past, and most analyses look for the queer gesture, which he understands as performativity.<sup>89</sup> These gestures repeat modes of queer desire and hope that bring forward utopia.

In his analysis of the one-act play *The Toilet* he demonstrated the gesture and its utopian potential.<sup>90</sup> *The toilet* shows the brutality of high school, where the character, Karolos, is beaten-up. When Karolos is beaten up, another character, Fots breaks the play's violent flow. Fots is part of the group of bullies but is an underdog in disguise. Fots connects to Karolos, and there is an image made of "the lover holding/enduring/supporting the other's battered body".<sup>91</sup> The gesture interrupts the toxic masculinity of the play by changing the pace and showing empathy. The gesture glimpses towards a "collective modality of endurance and support"<sup>92</sup> shows what is missing in this world by interrupting the normative flow of time and movement. The moment hints at a queer mode of connectivity and hope in the midst of straight time.

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<sup>87</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 4.

<sup>88</sup> Sara Warner, "Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (Review)," *Modern Drama* 54, no. 2 (2011): 255–57; The quote is from: Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 4.

<sup>89</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, 66+67.

<sup>90</sup> Muñoz, chap. 5. Cruising the Toilet.

<sup>91</sup> Muñoz, 91.

<sup>92</sup> Muñoz, 91.

With this hermeneutic approach, Muñoz demonstrated the possibility of constructing moments of futurity within performances. Alongside analysing the gesture, he also analyzed aspects of queer utopia aesthetics. Muñoz defined aspects of queer utopian aesthetics to be failure and virtuosity.<sup>93</sup> He uses failure as the aesthetics that vocalizes residents, escape and refusal and embodied virtuosity of performers as the mode that breaks with “production based systems of value”.<sup>94</sup> Muñoz can define queer utopian aesthetics by interpreting the composition of performances. To be able to define these aspects means we could recreate these aspects and (re)produce queer futurity in performance.

Dolan’s approach is different as she is not interested in interpreting the constructed doing of performance but instead in the utopian experience and utopian performatives in the live moment of performance.<sup>95</sup> Dolan’s utopian performances are moments in which the audience can glimpse to the horizon of a better world. Dolan follows an ontology like that of Peggy Peland, arguing that the ontology of performance is in its disappearance.<sup>96</sup> Thus, that ontology essentialized the liveness of performance. Dolan understands that utopian moments are created when the liveness of performance creates a moment of multiple connectivities between the audience and the performers, letting us feel something else is possible.<sup>97</sup>

The spectator gets this utopian feeling in “profound moments” elevating them to a hopeful state where they envision a world where every moment of life is as “emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.”<sup>98</sup> Dolan understands this profound moment to be the moment of close connections in which a feeling of togetherness is established. For instance, she talks about moments when an actor enters the audience and touches people’s backs.<sup>99</sup> At those moments, the audience is lifted from the present towards a utopia by the sudden connectedness between the performer and the audience. It is a moment Dolan understands to be *communitas*, a concept she uses from Victor Turner. She explains:

*Communitas*, a term popularized in performance studies scholarship by anthropologist Victor Turner, describes the moments in a theatre event or a ritual in which audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual

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<sup>93</sup> Muñoz, 169.

<sup>94</sup> Muñoz, 174 + 178.

<sup>95</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, 63.

<sup>96</sup> Warner point out this ontological difference with Muñoz Warner, “Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity (Review).”

<sup>97</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*, 62.

<sup>98</sup> Dolan, 5.

<sup>99</sup> Dolan, 32.

way; spectators' individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience.<sup>100</sup>

Hence, Dolan views the utopian potential of performance as moment spectators are lifted above the present by a feeling of connectedness to the other spectators and performers.

A crucial element in creating this connectivity is creating the right conditions for the spectator to experience them. Therefore, it matters where we position the audience, who the audience is, the venue, etc. Angela Jones uses this notion of Dolan in her book on queer utopian space and searches for the conditions in the every day that make utopian dreaming and world-making possible.<sup>101</sup> The essays in the book are interested in the conditions that create the utopian performative. Therefore, Dolan's theory can be used to understand that situatedness is vital for the utopian potential of performance.

I do not see why Muñoz and Dolan's approaches should exclude each other. From Dolan, I take the importance of the role of the spectators, that their experience is vital to the political imagination of utopia. As explored within the interlude story, the connectivity of the happening lifted me above the present. However, I also need to understand that it was the non-binary aesthetics of Lilith and their gestures in performance that made for a non-binary political imagination. Hence, a Muñoz-like interpretation of the performance is needed to understand the political doing.

Moreso, as a producer, I need to consider both takes. Jones's usage of Dolan suggests that the created context around the performance is essential in creating utopian moments in the performance. Finding stages, audiences, and partners is the work of the producer, which means that creating conditions for connectivity is part of the utopian work of the producer. However, we need a hermeneutic interpretation to understand how these moments are non-binary. Dolan investigated utopia in performance, not in a specific relation. I argue that one needs to use Muñoz analyses to understand the politics activated in the utopian moments. A producer needs to understand these politics to make frames that connect to them. Hence, the producer can use Muñoz his hermeneutic approach to understand the working of the artwork beyond the liveness,

## CONCLUSION

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<sup>100</sup> Dolan, 11.

<sup>101</sup> Angela Jones, *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. Palgrave Macmillian, *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias* (New York, 2013), <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137311979>.

This chapter aimed to explore the concept of non-binary futurity in performance. The first and second sections established that non-binary futurity involves rejecting traditional linear understandings of trans\* and embracing gender fluidity. The emergence of the term non-binary indicates a paradigm shift towards this fluidity, which can be realized through acts of self-determination and counter-doings of gender. These actions enable individuals in collectivity to explore their trans\* embodiment and envision a future in which gender is not fixed but constantly in flux. The third section highlights the importance of creating interruptions in the performance that glimpse alternative possibilities and create utopian moments. These moments can be constructed by connecting spectators and performers and by political gestures in the performance.

In summary, the concept of non-binary futurity in performance encourages the construction of moments that showcase the drive towards counter-doings of gender and offer glimpses into a future world where gender is fluid and constantly evolving. Furthermore, by providing spectators with alternative doings of gender, performers, creators, and producers create a space for imagining and realizing a version of the world that is not yet present.

## CHAPTER 2: ENBY UTOPIAN AESTHETICS: A CLOSE READING OF ART WORKS & PERFORMANCE OF R3LN4CHT AND *MORE IS MORE*

This chapter examines aspects of a non-binary utopian aesthetic by analyzing artworks and performances that are part of R3LN4CHT, and *More is More*. By doing so, the chapter aims to answer the second sub-question; What artistic aspects of the artworks & performances in *More is More*, and R3LN4CHT activate non-binary futurity? Through answering this question, this chapter highlights the work's aesthetic characteristics that create feelings and thoughts on the gender fluid and trans\* future. This understanding is vital to the main question because it helps clarify what aspects are essential for the non-binary storytelling of potentiality.

From R3LN4CHT, the data for the analysis included clips, scripts and images of the performance *a.queer.obj*. This performance from 2021 was the starting point of the talent development program of R3LN4CHT in 2023, which I helped shape as a creative producer. From *More is More*, five works selected for the event were included as data; 3D printed nail art by Samuel, the multidisciplinary art project, *The Arctium* by Monika Diezenburg and Lisa van der Pleatse, *Bag-a-Robis* with Lady Bag and an unnamed photo series by Miss Lulu Rodgers and Rex. Alongside a close reading of the data, ethnographic and autoethnographic data also makes up part of this chapter. The data includes field notes from community events and engagements with the artists and is used to situate the artworks.

The close reading process focused on unravelling non-binariness in the artworks and performances by conducting two rounds of coding analysis. The first round of coding was the initial coding round.<sup>102</sup> Then, within the second coding round, focus coding was applied to select the moments of non-binariness as the most significant codes.<sup>103</sup> I completed this process twice, as the first time, I filtered out all the parts not related to queerness or the non-binary and second, I filtered out all that was not specific to creating non-binary aesthetics. Hence, codes like hypersexuality or anonymity were left out because they relate to queerness but do not have a specific non-binary angle. Finally, the left codes were combined and renamed within an axial coding to get cohesive codes.<sup>104</sup>

From the two coding rounds, two codes were left: gender-bending and embodiment-with. These codes are the common aspects of non-binariness in the data. This chapter explains and

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<sup>102</sup> Johnny Saldaña, *Coding Manual, The Coding Manual For Qualitative Researchers*, 2013, 100.

<sup>103</sup> Saldaña, 213.

<sup>104</sup> Saldaña, 216.

understands these aspects and specifically explores how these aspects contribute to non-binary futurity.

## COUNTERPRODUCTIVE BODY ENGAGEMENTS

The aspect of embodiment-with is abstract and can best be explained by understanding it presented in *a.queer.obj* by Didi Kreike. This 2021 performance is the starting point of R3LN4CHT. The overall performance could be understood as exploring how the digital world can enhance the queer story. Didi claims to be an optimist about technology and believes that the digital world has the potential to embrace and strengthen the queer story.<sup>105</sup> In the performance, multiple digital mediums, like webcamming, chat rooms and Artificial intelligence (AI), were used in a queer manner. The latter medium was used for what I understand to be embodiment-with.

The AI within the performance explored the queering of the body. Didi and the cocreators explored the potential of the queer body using AI techniques. To understand how Krieke and the team created a queered body with AI, one must understand the basics of their AI technique. In this text, I will outline the AI technique as it was explained to me by Didi during one of our many conversations. They used a technique in which the AI learns to synthesize real-world data. A cohesive real-world training dataset is the input for a supercomputer that then learns to synthesize that dataset making synthetic data. The AI does not copy the real-world dataset but learns how to synthesize it. It is noteworthy that the dataset is extensive and cohesive, so the AI has enough data to train itself with.

Within the production of *a.queer.obj*, the training dataset were real-world videos of the performers. In the videos, the performers were sexually mimicking movements from a webcam show. The AI-generated synthetic video stills from that training dataset are in figure 1. As one can see, the AI-generated images are glitched. The synthetic data does not look like a clear real-world picture. The glitching was the result of a limited dataset. One could understand that the AI experiment failed because it did not create a synthetic dataset similar to the real-world dataset.

However, Didi understood the glitch, the failure of the AI to be queerness. I understand Didi's interpretation of the AI output as Jack Halberstam's view of queerness as an art of failure.<sup>106</sup> As Halberstam argues, within the failure, one can allow itself "more creative, more cooperative, more surprising ways of being in the world."<sup>107</sup> Failure or a glitch is not an ending point but opens new ways

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<sup>105</sup> Paraphrase of an early draft of an funding application that Didi and I wrote.

<sup>106</sup> Halberstam, "Queer Art Fail."

<sup>107</sup> Halberstam, "Low Theory," 2.

of understanding life. The failed AI showed a different version of the body that can open to understanding alternative forms of embodiment.

### Impression research Artificial Intelligence

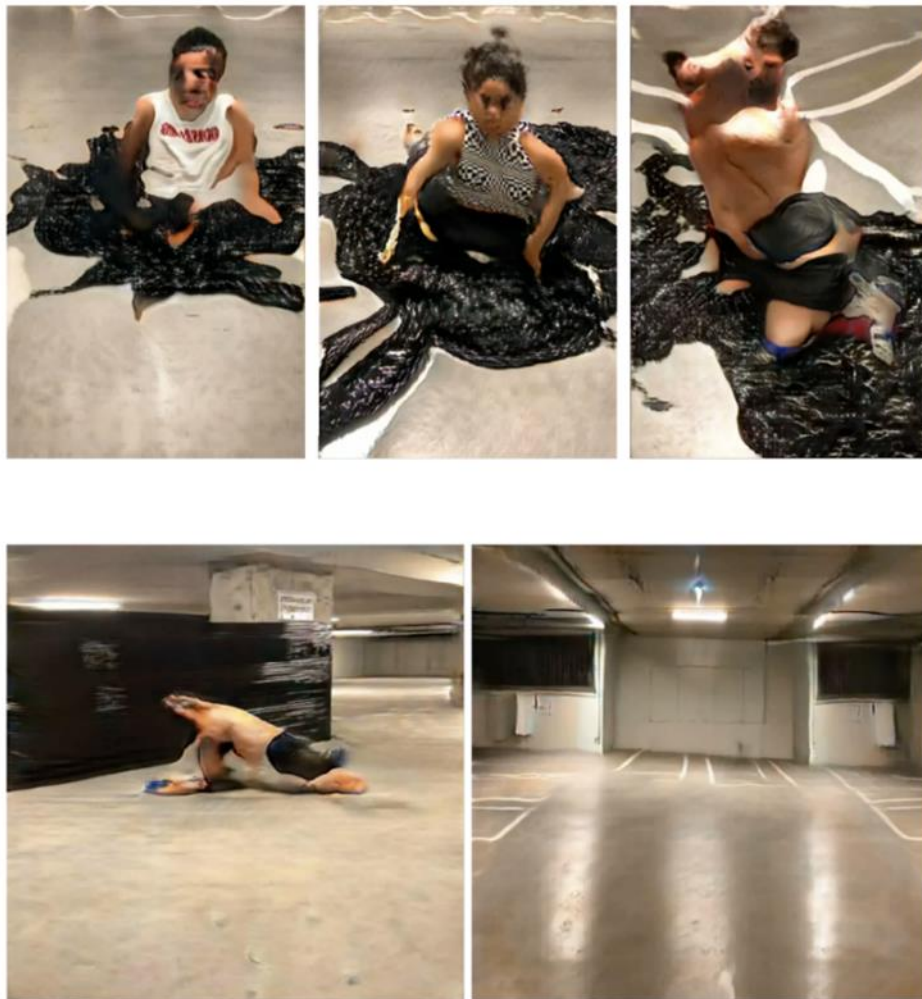


Figure 2: Didi Kreike, *Impression Research Artificial Intelligence*, (Portfolio *a.queer.obj*, 2021)

The morphing bodies created by AI are released from gender norms which still constrain the performers' bodies in the inputted images. The spectator can determine the gender of the performers through the citational law of sex as the spectator can still seek the sex characteristics of the performers. However, within the AI-created images, we can understand the bodies to have human attributes, but we cannot see sex characteristics. Thus, these bodies cannot be cited from the law of sex and cannot be attributed to gender. They are instead of a counter-doing of gender that critiques gender fixedness and opens people up to dreaming of gender fluidity.

I understand the relationship between the performer's body and the AI images as embodiment-with. To create this concept of embodiment-with, I used the structural phrasing of Donna



Haraway's concept of becoming-with.<sup>108</sup> Becoming-with is the understanding that one can only become with the other. Haraway understands that the other is fundamentally part of the self and that all critters of the world are interdependent. With this concept of becoming-with, she invites her readers to think about humans' disrupted relationship with other critters and asks them to become-with them to create sustainable relationships for this world.<sup>109</sup> A concept needed to overcome the climate crisis and biodiversity challenges.

Similar to Haraway, embodiment-with is about relationality and togetherness in becoming. As stated in Chapter 1, trans\* becoming is not an individualized process, but one becomes through collaborative practices like that of self-determination. There is a relational process that makes trans\* becoming. Halberstam talks about the new paradigm of embodiment as a new mode of "seeing and being seen".<sup>110</sup> They acknowledge within this phrasing that embodiment is about how we relate to each bodily form and content. Hence, trans\* embodiment is an ongoing relational project of elevating each other view of the body. Embodiment-with invites to think about the relationality needed for creating alternative forms of embodiment.

Moreso, I used this structural phrasing of Haraway to acknowledge that the multiple artists in this research explored embodiment in the relationship with a non-human actor. In *a.queer.obj*, the interaction between the bodies present in the real-world dataset with the AI creates the glitching bodies in the synthetic data. It is that synthetic data that let us glimpse into a non-binary utopia. The relationship between AI and the performers' bodies produces the alternative embodiment. Hence, I understand that the non-binary utopian aesthetic is made through that relationship. Thus, embodiment-with is an aspect of creating non-binary utopian aesthetics.

The data analysed also included a second artwork exploring alternative embodiment through the embodiment-with the digital world; the multiple-disciplinary art project *The Arctium* by Monika Diezenburg and Lisa van der Pleatse. Within their project booklet, Lisa introduces the project as "a collective initiative, exploring the use of alternative universes as a tool to research gender performance through experimental creation."<sup>111</sup> Hence, the project aimed at exploring counter-doings of gender through collaborative artistic practice. It is a vast project with many outputs, including a booklet, an exposition, 360 video and designing heels (shoes). All the outputs are part of what Monika and Lisa

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<sup>108</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2016), 96, <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1215/9780822373780>.

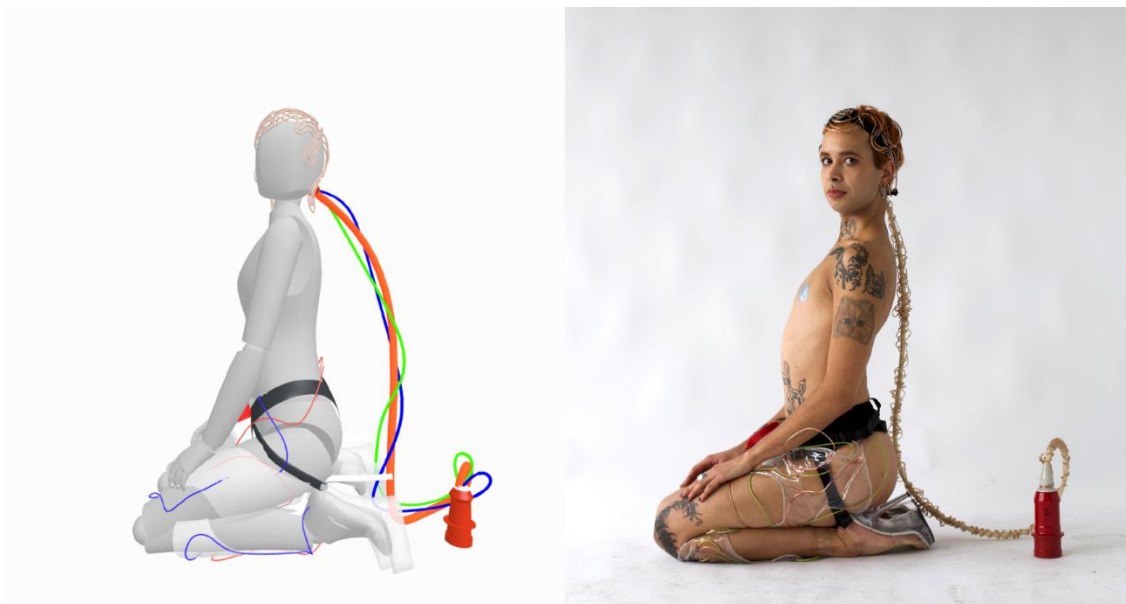
<sup>109</sup> Haraway, 13–15.

<sup>110</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 87.

<sup>111</sup> Pleatse, Liza van der, *The Actricum (Booklet)*, Graduation essay, 2021 self-published

call *The Arctium*. That art project should be viewed as a liminal space between a virtual world and the physical world; for instance, the 360 video consists of graphic design, a robotic voice as the narrator, and video material recorded in the physical world. The 360 video is preferably watched with a virtual reality helm to immerse in that world entirely. *The Arctium* is an imaginary space that allows for art and gender experimentation where the creators can search for alternative gendered potentials, which are then visualized in the different outputs.

One of these experiments was creating the character The Humanoid in figure 2. The Humanoid character was born when Monika “walked ” at a Ballroom event. Ballroom is a space in which Monika explored her trans\* becoming through being characters and being seen as the characters when walking at the balls. The Humanoid was one of these characters visible. *The Actricum* was away to explore trans\* becoming outside of the Balls. Monika did this by uploading the Humanoid to the 360 videos in the virtual world Monika designed. Within the virtual *Articum*, the Humanoid is born without any gender or sex written to them. The story of the Humanoid is that they can make their trans\* becoming from what I understand to be a point zero. The Humanoid is similar to Didi’s AI, free from boundaries and definitions of gender. In the 360 video, the spectator follows the Humanoid as the narrator, and they explore with the spectator in the video different gender stories to make their trans\* becoming.



**Figure 3: Lisa van der Pleatse & Monika Diezenburg, *Humanoid real-life version and graphic version* (The Actricum Booklet: Self Publication, 2022)**

The story of The Humanoid visualizes the not-yet of radical self-determination. The point zero of gender is a radical statement that is not-yet possible in this world. However, it would be the praxis of

radical self-determination; what if humans could grow up and find their gender identities and expression in collaboration? Butler has shown that we do not have a point zero but are constructed from birth into a gendered being.<sup>112</sup> Although the humanoid is fictional, it invites thinking of radical self-determination.

I understand this utopian narrative to be made through the aspect of embodiment-with. The interaction with the digital mediums of graphic design and 360 videography allows us to create the fictional story of gender zero. As well as embodiment-with through interaction with digital media within the data, alternative embodiments were created in the interaction with heels in figure 3 or with nail art in figure 4. Shoe design is essential to *The Arctium* project. These heels are not designed to be comfortable or pretty but are made to explore different mobilities for some characters in *The Arctium*. The design changes the way the body moves. Alternative possibilities of being seen with the body arise with this interaction between the shoe and the body. It enacts what Halberstam called a different mode of “seeing and being seen”.<sup>113</sup> Through the interaction between the body and alternative design matter, new potentialities of seeing and being seen with the body arise.

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<sup>112</sup> Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*.

<sup>113</sup> Halberstam, *Trans \*: A Quick and Quirky Account of Gender Variability*, 87.



Figure 4: Lisa van der Pleatse & Monika Diezenburg, *Heels of the Shell, loose and worn by the Shell* (The Actricum Booklet: Self Publication, 2022)



Figure 5: Samuel Does, *Tentacle Nails* (@samu.el: Instagram, 2021)

Throughout this section, I argued that the multiple artists within the projects of R3IN4CHT and *More is More* were exploring alternative embodiments by letting the human bodies interact in counter-doings of gender with non-human actors. I consider this to be embodiment-with as new potentialities of embodiment arise through the interaction with non-human actors. These alternative embodiments glimpse towards a horizon in which gender flexibility is possible and challenge the vast structure of the gender binary by showing what is missing and evoking new alternatives.

### **GENDER FORGETFULNESS**

The second aspect of producing non-binary futurity is gender-bending, an aesthetic of being in-between femininity and masculinity which are counter-doings of gender. Gender-bending as an aesthetic was visible in four of the five analyzed works. For instance, within *a.queer.obj* in text and outfits, gender aesthetics are mixed. Gender-bending is a prominent aspect of non-binary aesthetics because it is in-between aesthetics.

The non-binary is often understood as the third category between the two “main” categories. However, as stated in Chapter 1, the potential of the non-binary is to escape gender fixation, so also

the fixation of being deemed the third category. The non-binary potential is to disrupt gender fixedness, not to recreate another false idea of a stable category with a determined aesthetic. Thus, the non-binary aesthetic as an in-between can contribute to the false idea of the non-binary as a third category.

Therefore, this section aims to understand how gender-bending in aesthetics can glimpse a future that moves beyond that conception of non-binary as an in-between. As argued in Chapter 1, the non-binary is about the endless potential of fluidity, so although it can be in-between, it can also be outside, within and around femininity and masculinity.

Drag performer Lady Bag is someone that plays with gender-bending. In the video of Lady Bag *Bag-a-Robics with Milkshakes*, gender-bending is visible in the look of Bag. As shown in figure 5, Bag does not hide away all their masculine body features in their lady drag. They show their muscular arm and body hair. However, they combine these features with female elements within the make-up and outfit. The aesthetic of gender bending is made within this interplay between feminine and masculine aesthetical components. Gender-bending is not only an aesthetic in looks but also in performance. For instance, when Lady Bag makes their handbag a training weight by putting a stone in it, the feminine handbag is blended with traditional understandings of masculine exercise. Throughout the whole video, Bag is bending binary gendered aesthetics.



Figure 6: Lady Bag, *Lady bag Bag-a-Robics with Milkshake*. (Still from video: Youtube, Milkshake Festival, 2022)

I want to argue that the gender-bending construct interrupts time in the interaction between spectator and performer. It interrupts the normative present and productive gender projection. In social interaction, we seek to understand gender performativities and sex markers to determine gender. However, there is an error in our program mechanism within the interaction between the spectator and a gender-bending performance. This error raises the question many gender non-conforming people and binary trans people have heard on the street “what are you? A man or a woman?”. These kinds of questions are asked by people that are uncomfortable with gender-non-conforming aesthetics because they are confused about determining the gender of the person.

Bag even plays with this mode of confusion in the video. That confusion is visible in figure 5, in which the woman with the carrier looks confusedly towards Bag. Bag made this spectatorial state reflective by alternating what the woman passing by would think, editing in the alternative thought of “...Mabye I should do Bag-a-Robics...”.

The power of confusion is that it is a mode of failure. However, in the positive take on Halberstam's failure, failure creates space for creativity.<sup>114</sup> Gender-bending comes from the failure of the performer to feel and act like the gender norms allowing them to find new ways of making gendered aesthetics by staying with that failure. However, that counter-doing of gender also lets the spectator fail. If the spectator does the work of staying with the confusion, it can find the creativity of failure. The spectator can reflect on their gendered being and glimpse into the potential of their gender. With that, the spectator experiences non-binary utopian dreaming.

In the unnamed photo series from Miss Lulu Rodgers and Rex Collins, the mode of failure moves beyond confusion towards forgetfulness. In this series, of which figure 6 is part, the themes of secrecy and aesthetics play with two similar-looking individuals we find in unknown places. In all the pictures, the characters' looks change, and their gendered role also seems to change. However, it is hard to determine what kind of role they have. In one picture, the gendered roles are clear, mother and daughter. However, in another photo, businesspeople in drag engage in sexual acts. In figure 6, we see more feminine-dressed characters, and it seems they are about to kiss. The series has the aspect of gender-bending by switching the gender aesthetics of the models throughout the series.

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<sup>114</sup> Halberstam, “Queer Art Fail.”



Figure 7: Miss LuLu Rodgers and Rex Collins, Untitled (@real\_Julu\_official): Instagram, 2022)

However, the gender-bending aesthetics create a more considerable array of confusion with the spectator than Bag. The nuance of gender-bending in the picture subverts not only gender performativity but also sex determination confusing the spectator about the sexed body. This



confusion gets enhanced by the themes of secrecy, intimacy, and anonymity. There is something within the picture you cannot know, and this enhances the confusion in our instinct to determine gender through sex. The only other option the spectator has is to act in forgetfulness of sex. Halberstam also talks about forgetfulness as a queer mode of being by analyzing Dory from *Finding Nemo*.<sup>115</sup> Dory is, according to Halberstam, very queer, the forgetfulness that she presents allows an alternative way of being and brings the characters into unexpected new situations.<sup>116</sup> Thus, forgetting the citational law that creates a body into sex into gender makes room for alternative embodiments.

The analysis of gender-bending in this chapter is based on Dolan's conceptions of utopia in performance, that utopia dreaming can be activated within the relation between performer and spectator. However, Dolan understands these moments to be about connectivity, and I instead understand the disconnections. The potential of gender confusion is not in the moment of the confusion but in the reflection on that feeling. I understand this potential because I believe that the potential of gender forgetfulness and confusion is when the spectator reflects inwards.

Gender confusion is something trans\* and gender non-conforming people trigger on the street. The uncomfortable confusion makes people shout, call out or be physically violent. However, more people that are gender confused on the street will just have that feeling for a moment and not put any action to it. By creating gender confusion in art, we invited the spectator to stay with that feeling. Within the presence of being at the event, one is invited to slow down their regular time. By doing so, gender-bending is, as Muñoz would formulate it, a gesture. A gesture that invites you to slow down and look inwards at your gendered self.

Thus, the potential of gender-bending is the feelings it creates with the spectators. Feelings of confusion and forgetfulness can bring forward what is missing in the self, an alternative gendered potentiality. If the spectator reflects on those feelings, they could seek to understand the potentiality of gender non-conforming experiences. Hence, it could build bridges between the experiences of the performer and the spectator,

## CONCLUSION

This chapter's central question was: What artistic aspects of the artworks & performances in *More is More*, and R3LN4CHT activate non-binary futurity? The research included a close reading of five artworks and a performance. With the analysis, the research understood the over-compassing aspects

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<sup>115</sup> Halberstam, 43.

<sup>116</sup> Halberstam, 53–55.

that create non-binary utopian aesthetics. Two aspects were defined: embodiment-with, the interaction between the human body and a non-human actor that glimpse towards a horizon of gender fluidity by exploring alternative embodiments. The second aspect is gender-bending, an aesthetic heavily connected to the idea of the non-binary being in-between. However, the aesthetic has the potential to move past this in-between idea as through the interaction between spectator and performer, another potential arises. Gender-bending glimpses towards the possibility by presenting a possibility of forgetfulness to the spectator; they present the option to care, maybe not, and to forget gender rules.

### CHAPTER 3: STRATEGIZING UTOPIA: AN ANALYSIS OF STRATEGIES FOR NON-BINARY UTOPIAN SPACES

This chapter aims to explore the strategies I encounter in my time in the field for the making of non-binary utopian spaces. In this thesis, I understand the utopian dimension of space to be made in the social interactions within that space, and thus, creating a utopian space is to situate the social space. In the understanding of Morida Siagian, the social space is made through social interactions and cultural processes.<sup>117</sup> Likewise, according to Sarah Steele, in the queer utopian space, one creates conditions that allow for interaction and process of “stranger sociability, queer sensibility, and relationality”.<sup>118</sup> By producing conditions that invite these social conditions, the space becomes open to queer doings, which allows for a queer utopian potentiality.<sup>119</sup> Thus, the social conditions of space are essential for its utopian potential.

The creation of these conditions is a transformative practice. Aminata Cairo's book *Holding Space* relates to the social space in which she understands the social aspect of space to be made through stories and the power relation between those stories.<sup>120</sup> Through theorizing that stories are in power dynamics in the system of *the dominant and the other*, she understands what also could be called the construction of the social space and argues for the practice of holding space to shift the dynamics of *the dominant and the other*. The practice of holding space is the transformative practice that helps to flip these dynamics. Within my practice, the aim was to create conditions that could have this transformative working. Thus, this chapter explores the conditions that allow this transformation of the dominated space into the utopia space of *the other* story.

The analysis within this chapter is based on ethnographic field notes on producing the definition and design phase within the projects of *More is More* and R3LN4GHT. The definition and design phase are the first two of five production phases: definition, design, production, operating and aftercare and phase-out.<sup>121</sup> We set the production parameters in the definition phase, streamlined partners, and assembled the team. Then, in the design phase, we design the production, which are

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<sup>117</sup> Siagian, “The Social Space in the Making of Identity (Case: Pekan Labuhan, Medan, Indonesia),” 2.

<sup>118</sup> Sarah Steele, “Performing Utopia: Queer Counterpublics and Southerners on New Ground,” in *A Critical Inquiry into Queer Utopias*, ed. Angela Jones (New York: Palgrave Macmillan US, 2013), 145.

<sup>119</sup> Steele, 132.

<sup>120</sup> Cairo, *Holding Space* see introduction of this thesis about Dominant and the Other and Cairo's chapter on the Dominant and Other.

<sup>121</sup> These five phase are different then project management phase as describe by Project Management Institute. This are the phase I learned to understand during two course at the academy for theatre and dance.

the first sketches of a set, the dramaturgical design, and the productional and artistic process design. That design phase leads to making the project's plan, which is used as a funding application. Thus, while in the field, I created with Rex and Didi designs, project plans and funding applications. The data for this chapter were the outputs of these phases. Additionally, the data are field notes on meetings, inspiration sessions, meetings with partners, seeing artists and any other activity happening within these phases. This chapter aims to understand how, within these phases, the creators and I design transformative conditions to create non-binary utopia spaces.

In *Cruising Utopia*, Muñoz explores or better-put cruises around queer utopian spaces in clubs and performance spaces where he finds queer desire, queer longing, and queer utopian dreaming.<sup>122</sup> Within my research and practice, the aim is not to cruise this space but to strategize these spaces. Hence, this chapter explores the strategized conditions that open for counter-doings of gender in space and understanding that allows for a non-binary utopian potential. Answering the third sub-question: What strategies are envisioned to create non-binary utopian spaces?

The analysis done for this chapter understood that both projects took a different strategy to make non-binary utopian spaces. Thus, the chapter first breaks down the *More is More* project's strategy and then that of R3LN4CHT. Finally, the chapter ends with insights overall and a concluding section.

## SAFER SPACING

Collins and I developed the strategy of *More is More* by conversing with five participating artists. They expressed a clear need for more spaces in which their art is understood in its complexity, as some express that their work is sometimes put away as that queer or transgender work and is then viewed within a singularity of only being about the struggle of trans\* and queer. However, their works, as shown in Chapter Two, are not about the struggle but glimpse towards the potentiality of the non-binary story. However, the artists feel this utopian potential is not understood within heteronormative art spaces. Thus, the strategy of Collins and I is to create a space that counters straight understandings.

In *A Queer Time and Place*, Halberstam argues similarly to the participating artists that genuine trans\* or queer understanding of art is rare in straight contexts.<sup>123</sup> Halberstam argues that

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<sup>122</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, chap. Stages.

<sup>123</sup> Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place*.

these genuine understandings are made within the sub-cultural space.<sup>124</sup> However, outside those spaces, understanding one's story needs to be simplified to be perceived as understandable to a broader audience. Halberstam makes this analysis by showing how trans characters in films are often understood within a gaze of homosexuality.<sup>125</sup> Halberstam's analysis is related to the argument of the artists that their work is not understood within its complexity but simplified to that what is easily understandable for straight audiences.

Collins and I need to create a strategy that would exclude these simplified straight understanding and includes the non-binary utopian understanding of the art. Therefore, we designed the strategy around the concept of a safer space. As stressed by the informants, a safer space for the gender-diverse community means creating and holding a space in which gender-diverse people feel represented and safer from aggression and microaggression, as well as from the need to explain themselves or be overcharged by questions about trans\*ness. Creating a safer space for a gender-diverse community is about creating a space where gender diversity is not seen as transgressive but as a unique part of gender diversity.

Furthermore, safer spaces can uncover more complex and idealistic interpretations of one's narrative. My grasp of this possibility stems from the Roestone Collective's conceptualization of safer spaces. They understand safer spaces as spaces of segregation.<sup>126</sup> This makes it a paradoxical space between inclusion and exclusion and is a negotiation between these binary components<sup>127</sup> As to what extent we should exclude, for there must remain space for diversity and challenge. The safer space should not be defined by its uniformity but should allow complexities to be understood.<sup>128</sup> As I comprehend, the safer space focuses on a particular story aspect, creating a segregated space. In the case of *More is More*, this aspect would be gender-diverse narratives. However, by segregating a space based on that narrative, the space enables us to perceive and appreciate the diversity within that narrative. Since I cannot understand the story just as "that non-binary story" because all are non-binary, so I need to move beyond that simplified understanding and embrace the fullness of the story, which may include a future-driven idealism.

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<sup>124</sup> Halberstam.

<sup>125</sup> Halberstam, chap. The Transgender Look.

<sup>126</sup> The Roestone Collective, "Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization," *Antipode* 46, no. 5 (2014): 1353.

<sup>127</sup> The Roestone Collective, 1354.

<sup>128</sup> The Roestone Collective, 1355.

As Martin Bos, diversity trainer on the power of difference, argues, people can connect strongly in difference.<sup>129</sup> That connection arises when we can look at someone's story in fullness. Hence, a safer space creates connectivity in the difference by paradoxically segregating on a unified aspect. However, that connectivity was essential in Dolan's theory about utopian performatives.<sup>130</sup> Thus, the strategy of a safer space supports the connectivity needed for the utopian moment in the performance.

For the design of the *More is More* Safer space, Collins and I talked with artists and other informants about bad practices and best practices of safer spacing. When talking about bad practices, they mentioned certain dance clubs and festivals that claim to be safer spaces. However, according to the informants, the policies are too minimal to speak of a safer space as they only have house rules hanging on the wall, which is only a passive step. The question informants ask at this venue is about accountability; how is someone held accountable for breaking the rules? When someone is excluded, the paradoxical relation between inclusion and exclusion arises. These spaces want the benefits of including marginalized groups but are not actively negotiating with what needs to be excluded for safety.

KLAUW collective Rotterdam was mentioned twice by artists and several times by other informants as a best practice regarding safer space. Informants and artists applaud KLAUW for their means of creating a sense of shared responsibility. They do this at their party at WORM by talking to everyone at the door. Within that conversation, the door hosts check the intentions of the people coming in. Do they know this is a queer party? Do they know what all the house rules mean? From that conversation, they invite you into their space and ask you to hold space with them. People who seem less familiar with the house rules or queerness are made aware of the intention of the evening. They must then choose to enter and hold the space with those intentions or leave. Within the party, KLAUW has trained Floor Angels who can help with unsafe situations. People who display undesirable behaviour at the door or within the party must leave. KLAUW's best practice is a safer space based on awareness, accountability and exclusion of undesirable behaviour.

From these conversations, Collins and I understood that the safer space is an active doing and asked one to create a collective responsibility in holding space. The bad practices indicate that it requires constant work to hold a safer space and that merely announcing it is not enough. The

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<sup>129</sup> From lecture visited by author but theory is included in the following book Marten Bos, *Coaching En Diversiteit* (Bohn Stafley van Loghum, 2013).

<sup>130</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*.

example of KLAUW invites us to think about creating reciprocity between the audience and organizer. KLAUW communicates their intentions and checks in with the spectators to see whether they have the same intention. It is not just sending the message but also asking whether it is shared, which creates a feeling of shared responsibility.

The primary intention of More is More is to create a space that fosters a multifaceted understanding of gender-diverse stories. By articulating a clear curatorial framework that centres around the concept of non-binary futurity, we aim to communicate our objective of amplifying the voices and perspectives of gender-diverse individuals. Through our PR text and the introduction of the artworks, we aim to showcase how the participating artists relate to and explore the notion of non-binary futurity. Vital in all of this was that Collins and I made room for multidimensional understandings. We regularly voiced that there is a paradox within our upcoming events as we aim to make a night of non-binary aesthetics. At the same time, one of the critical elements of the non-binary is that it frees us from gender fixedness. How can we escape being an evening that claims a specific non-binary aesthetics? We still do not have a clear answer, except that we are embracing this paradox. We embrace it by inviting the artist to join this conversation during the events and in meetings in front of the event.

Like KLAUW, Collins and I intend to check in with the audience about their intention by using a door host. The door host needs to check in and see whether people understand it is a night designed for gender-diverse artists. They are made aware of their responsibility for the safety of these artists. To do so, we thought the door host would welcome people with a text similar to this one;

We have one crucial element of our night, and we need you to hold that element with us. Our main element of the event is gender non-conforming and trans\* people to the front. The event is created for them, so if you are not part of that community, we invite you to practice mindful listening. To be aware of your perception. However, after listening, we hope you join in envisioning a gender-diverse future with artists and the audience.

Using such a script, we aim to make our intentions clear whilst creating awareness and accountability by inviting the audience to help hold space.

As well as an introduction at the door, the event contains an educational section. Alongside the three performances and three exposition works, there is a need to activate the audience's thinking. Within that educational part, it was again necessary to voice the non-binary story. For example, the

night could include writing down a statement about non-binary utopia. We planned to make a wall where audience members could write their thoughts around these statements, allowing room for discussion.

Next to these two parts, we aim to exclude straight audiences by limiting our reach. In producing *More is More*, the intent is not to reach a big audience and to have the event at the major theatres in Amsterdam. Like Halberstam argues that a genuine queer and trans\* understanding is made within a sub-cultural space, Collins and I want to keep it in the sub-cultural setting. Hence, like many queer safer spaces, we exclude straight audiences by limiting our marketing to queer and trans\* communities in Amsterdam. Next to that, the door host can reject people from entering.

In conclusion, the strategy of the safer space is applied to overcome a simplistic narrative of the non-binary within the artworks & performance. The safer space connects the gender-diverse community in its gender story. However, it can also make the difference and nuances of the story visible and create connectivity. By doing so, the strategy supports the potentiality of the artworks and performances' utopian interpretations and utopian moments.

## CRITICAL SPACE

The gender-diverse safer space creates a protective group that already hopes and follows the dream of a genderfluid world. Such an evening is essential for all reasons stated in the first section. However, can we start dreaming of non-binary futures with heteronormative audiences? Could they feel the warm illumination of a non-binary utopia? Or is that for them not warm illumination but the frizzling feeling of dystopia? Kreike and I are interested in these questions, and therefore we searched for more rebelling strategies than safer spacing. We wrote this aim within the name 'ReInacht' translated into English as 'riot night', meaning to stir up straight audiences with night and queer culture.

The vision of R3LN4CHT relates to the notion of troubling by Donna Haraway. Haraway argues for the much-needed paradigm change in the relationship between humans and non-humans: "Our task is to make trouble, to stir up potent response to devastating events, as well as to settle troubled waters and rebuild quiet places".<sup>131</sup> Although the context in which Haraway writes this differs, I like to apply her troubling notion to R3LN4CHT. The mission of R3LN4CHT is challenging the status quo through troubling. We want the audience to "settle in troubled water" to stay with the uncomfortable of challenging the status quo to start thinking about rebuilding.

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<sup>131</sup> Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (Duke: Duke University Press, 2016), 1, <https://doi.org/https://doi-org.proxy.library.uu.nl/10.1215/9780822373780>.



In thinking about the strategy for the social space, we need to design a strategy in which the audience can “stay with the trouble”. However, it was challenging to make this design. Some colleagues suggest we aim to make a safer space, referring mainly to a safer space known in the educational context. That is a space not limited by segregation but a room where all perspectives are welcome. Within the educational context, the safer space is not about comfort but about safety to express one’s viewpoint.<sup>132</sup> That kind of space is about dialogue and carefully exploring each other views. However, Didi and I searched for a more challenging space for the spectator. As I have come to know, the Didi style is explicit. It does not shadow away from being sexual and edgy.

However, being too explicit can result in the spectator framing it as a distant queer narrative. This distancing effect can result from the audience's perception that the story being portrayed is outside of their own lived experiences or social norms. Such a perception can be attributed to the spectator's biases, assumptions, and limited understanding of diverse perspectives. Aminata Cairo describes with the concept of consummation how distance could lead to fuelling biases.<sup>133</sup> Cairo describes consummation as when marginalized stories are used for entertainment or as a way of feeling good.<sup>134</sup> For example, Cairo describes a story in which she teaches a business and anthropology course to a primarily white male student group at a university in the USA. She had trouble getting the attention of these students until she told a story in which the students could perceive her as an angry black woman. The students loved the story because the confirmation of a stereotype entertained them, and they could passively engage and get confirmation instead of being confronted.<sup>135</sup> If Kreike and I put forward only the excessive, heavy sexual and extreme queerness, we would open to a stereotype of queer extravaganza. Therefore, we must find a precarious balance between evoking and relating to the spectator.

Kreike and I envisioned this balance within the frame of the critical space conceptualized from Bruno Latour's text *Critical Zone*.<sup>136</sup> The critical zone is a way of looking at and seeing the earth as a network of zones, unstable and therefore ‘critical’ systems of only a couple of kilometres up and down.

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<sup>132</sup> The Roestone Collective, “Safe Space: Towards a Reconceptualization,” 1354.

<sup>133</sup> Cairo, *Holding Space*, chap. Consumption.

<sup>134</sup> Cairo, 86–88.

<sup>135</sup> Cairo, 86–88.

<sup>136</sup> Bruno Latour, “Bruno Latour on CRITICAL ZONES ,” ZKM, 2020, <https://zkm.de/en/zkm.de/en/ausstellung/2020/05/critical-zones/bruno-latour-on-critical-zones>.

»Critical« because it is far from equilibrium; because it is fragile; because it is disputed; and because it is an interface between the deep earth below and the vast expanse of space above.<sup>137</sup>

Latour asserts that ecosystems exist in a constant state of fragility, despite appearing stable on the surface. In the quote, Latour explains critical as a fragile system. Similarly, the system of power dynamics between *the dominant and the other* appears stable and invisible until scrutinized. Didi and I designated our performance space as critical, intending to create a sense of vulnerability and unease within the audience. We invite the audience to embrace this fragility by presenting a queer alternative to their conventional narrative, encouraging them to remain present with their discomfort.

Didi and I are still exploring the potential of the critical space. However, we defined two ways in which we create this critical space. Firstly, R3LN4CHT aims to perform within a performance context in which our story could clash. This means we do not look for queer sub-cultural space but for a context of the dominant performing arts field. For 2023 and 2024, the plan is to perform at Oerol, Motel Mozaïque, Over Het IJ, and the dance festival DGTL. All these spaces are predominantly straight. However, it is also crucial for the critical space that the audiences are open to experiencing new things and queerness. This openness is essential because of the fragile balance the non-binary story should be clashing but not alienating. For instance, the clash would be evocative, even dangerously evocative, within an ultra-conservative context. However, it is vital to have an audience that is not part of the non-binary and queer story but is open to hearing it.

Secondly, we need to create an active spectatorship. Dolan notes that utopian performatives are activated within the connectivity of spectators and performers, so a performance that stirs up the present should not be distanced. In R3LN4CHT, we try to create connectivity through simple gestures in digital media. Within the work, *a.queer.obj*, there are scenes in which the performer mirrors a prerecorded video of themselves moving erotically on a life-size screen. The video is recorded so that the performer always looks the spectator in the eye. By doing so, the audience is intrigued with the erotically dancing performer, and it is hard to distance oneself. Another example is that during *a.queer.obj*, performers and spectators were in a Grindr-inspired chatroom with each other during the performance. In this way, the audience and performers were in direct contact. These moments of connectivity between performers and spectators are essential. Dolan suggests that this connectivity

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<sup>137</sup> Latour.

can lift the spectators above the present and utopian performatives, and thus, non-binary futurities could be activated.

Therefore, the utopian potential of the critical space is in its critical connectivity. The balance between the evocative and connective creates a dynamic in which counter-doings of gender cannot be consummated but can be put into a relational connection with the spectator. With the critical space, the spectator is invited to experience the non-binary and queer story. By doing so, it moves past an explanatory narration of what non-binary or queerness is. For instance, Kreike's dramaturgy coach notes that *a.queer.obj* invited her into the non-binary and queer story. It did not invite her by explaining the story, but she was invited into a queer and non-binary experience. That experience had a reflected value, as described in the previous chapter, due to gender forgetfulness. She explained that she thought about her gendered being and that if the coach grew up in these times, she might identify differently.

## CONCLUSION

Within the strategies of *More is More* and *R3LN4CHT*, I understand both to enhance the connectivity of the spectator. In *More is More*, the safer space enforces open connections between gender-diverse people. By relieving them from the outside world's stress, we allow them to connect more substantially to the art and each other. *R3LN4CHT* takes a different road but still searches for moments of connection with the spectator. However, the connection is made within the critical stir-up. However, in this understanding, the strategies align with Dolan's vision of creating utopian performative moments through intense moments of connectivities between art, spectators and performers

Throughout this chapter, I have shown the importance of producing the social setting around a performance or performance-based event with consciousness. It is an essential condition to the meaning-making of the art. Although the strategies are designed to support the non-binary utopian aesthetics described in Chapter Two, the strategies for the social space can also lead to creating utopian moments. For example, the photos of Lulu and Rex within a safer space would present much more intimacy, and their trans\* understanding would be apparent. Through that and the interaction with other like-minded people, one can be lifted in ecstasy and feel that the outside world is missing this trans\* connectivity. Second, with *a.queer.obj*, the spectator would quickly feel distanced if placed in a regular theatre setting. Thus, producing the social space is essential when producing non-binary futurity.



## **CONCLUSION: CREATIVELY PRODUCING NON-BINARY FUTURITY**

The title of this MA thesis is "Producing Utopia: Creatively producing non-binary futurity in queer art projects", and the title reflects my mission as a producer to co-create art that catalyzes non-binary utopian dreaming. That mission originated from the experience of non-binary futurity at the party in Berlin described in the interlude. This experience of futurity fueled joy and hope for an alternative future, free from the constraints of straight time. Through this experience, I recognized the transformative power of queer art-making with a non-binary narrative. Hence, I dedicated my practice and my thesis to this power of queer and non-binary cultural production.

The guiding question for this thesis was; *How can framing non-binary futurity hold space for the non-binary story within the creative producing of queer performing art projects?* This inquiry invited exploration of the potentialities of the non-binary story through the lens of creative producing. As the research was practice-led, the creative producer's practice was central to the data and guided the study's perspective. However, the focus of the production practice centred on queer cultural production, and thus a queer methodological framework was employed. The Enby-on-enby framework, established as a reformulation of femme-on-femme by Urika Dahl, was used to comprehend the interaction between my production practice and non-binary queer life.

My research aimed to answer the primary question by addressing three sub-questions. Chapter 1 answered what the concept of non-binary futurity is in performance. I reviewed theories of trans\*, among other things, Halberstam, Butler and Stanley and reviewed theories on utopia in performance by Dolan and Muñoz. In the review of trans\* theories, I understood that acts of gender non-conformity should be perceived as counter-doings of gender. These counter-gender doings challenge the normative construct of gender fixedness, allowing to glimpse towards the ideality of gender fluidity. Ultimately, in my theoretical review, I understood that non-binary futurity is activated in performance through moments of counter-doings of gender that lift the present of fixedness into dreaming of fluidity. Those utopian moments in performance can be analysed in interpreting how the composition of performance glimpses to utopia or analyzed in the spectator's experience.

Chapter 2 confirms in many ways this theoretical framework through its analyses of the aspects of non-binary utopian aesthetics. First, the embodiment-with aspect showed how artists explore alternative embodiments of gender by engaging with digital media like AI or 360 videos and performative interaction between the body and designed matter like heels. The artists allow this other actor to be part of their embodiment. By doing so, they uplift gender from being fixed to human nature into a collaboration between human and non-human actors. The second aspect of gender-bending

pushes the presence of the spectator by creating an experience of gender confusion and forgetfulness. Halberstam understands confusion and forgetfulness as a mode of failure that allows for thinking and producing alternatives. Hence, the power of confusion is its mode to reflect and build on seeing new things on the horizon.

Chapter 3 centres on the producing practice. Chapter 3 of my research analyses two strategies for creating non-binary utopian spaces: safer and critical spacing. These strategies have the common characteristic of creating a solid connection with the audience. Both approaches reach their utopian potential when the spectators connect strongly with the art, performers and spectators. Although the safer and critical spaces are different strategies, both are essential to creating inclusion for the non-binary story. The safer space allows *the other* to explore and experiment with care and joy. The critical space, on the other hand, may not be an exploration of their stories' potential for those of *the other story*. However, it is a space that allows people of *the dominant story* to get more connected to the *other* story. Thus, the safer space and critical spacing contribute to including *the other* stories.

Many sub-cultural producers, like queer producers, invest in safer spaces, which is essential work. Halberstam also showed *In a Queer Time and Place* the importance of sub-cultural space. However, I want to emphasize the need to invest in producing critical spaces. In the polarizing climate, as artists and producers, we should aim to invest in creating more understanding of each other stories. The critical space is a way to make this effort. It is a way to make the sub-cultural story be heard in a hegemonic space.

Having gained insights from the three chapters, I am convinced that creative producing is central to realizing non-binary futurity in art and performance. The analysis of the strategies in Chapter Three shows that it matters how the producers frame their work to reach the utopian potential. From that chapter, I gather that framing involves creating specific conditions by linking art to particular locations and adding contextual elements to the performance or performance-based events, such as a door host for "More is More," to shape meaning-making. The critical connectivity of R3LN4CHT's performance is dependent on a specific context. If the spectator were in a less immersive context, it would be easier for them to distance themselves, and the performance's utopian potential could be lost. Hence, the creative producer's role in shaping context is vital in realizing non-binary futurity.

Although the latter argument is made with the insight of Chapter Three, Chapters 1 and 2 contain essential parts of creative production. The creative producer can be compared to the curator as being next to a facilitator, an artistic researcher and a dramaturg. I understand that I produce the frames from a dramaturgical and artistic frame. In this thesis, the bits of knowledge from Chapter 1

and the dramaturgical analytical approach of Chapter 2 create a lens for the creative producer in Chapter three. A lens through which the producer can, for instance, understand how to evoke the collective and relational critique of counter-doings of gender in the performance and artworks.

To have theoretical and dramaturgical insight when framing, so the process of making links to partners, locations, or publicity, the producer can follow the artistic line in making these links and even add the extra perspective that fits the producers or the project objective. For instance, Didi is less keen on consciously including a non-binary narrative within R3LN4GHT. However, with the frames and analyses of our work, I try to make decisions which enhance a non-binary narrative consciously.

To sum up, the creative producer is crucial in framing non-binary futurity and creating conditions that enable audiences to connect with the relational and collective critique of counter-doings of gender. As a facilitator, dramaturg, and artistic researcher, the creative producer occupies a position that enables them to deeply understand their work and create frames that appreciate its nuances and complexities. Through this approach, the creative producer can transform the power balance of *the dominant and the other* and hold space for non-binary stories. Practising creative producing involves adopting an attitude of producing that consciously adds to the meaning-making of art production.

## LIMITATIONS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Reflecting on the methodology, it is noteworthy that the extent to which my non-binary voice or my producer's voice led in the study differed and was sometimes surprising. Fellow researchers, students or teachers could suggest that this differing voice is problematic and that the thesis misses cohesion because of my embodied role as a non-binary subject and creative producer in small research. Indeed, the wideness of the data did not allow for super in-depth analysis, and I could have written fifteen thousand words on the non-binary subject or the field of the creative producer. Both types of research would have been urgent and relevant because of both topics' lack of literature.

However, I think combining the two is more potent research. The producer practice of this research allows me to use my embodied knowledge of being non-binary in ways that help to understand that subject and support the production of non-binary/queer culture. Dahl suggested that her research is about both producing and understanding queer culture.<sup>138</sup> Additionally, creative production is rooted in a personal social solid and artistic mission or goal. Hence, the study of that

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<sup>138</sup> Dahl, "Femme on Femme."

practice must include the urgency of the creative producer. Thus, there was a vital need to include both the non-binary and the producer in this research.

Nevertheless, longer, more in-depth research would have some opportunities. First, this research mainly focused on the relationship between the artist, art, audience, and producer. However, another critical aspect of the producing practice is stakeholders. Hence, follow-up researcher or new research on creative producing should be longer and broader to include this part. Second, this research had a few moments of intersectional reflection, but an enthusiastic intersectional approach was lacking. The intersectional position of the artists and art could be more foregrounded in follow-up and more extensive research. Thus, I suggest that follow-up research on non-binary and creative producing can have a more extended research trajectory and longer text to include more facets of these topics.

However, I hope research in whatever capacity on trans\*, queer and non-binary cultural production by trans\* and queer scholars will blossom. There is urgency for this research with the rising danger of anti-trans legislation from the USA, and in the Netherlands, the danger of conservatism should not be underestimated. I write these last words of my thesis with the 2023 Dutch Provincial Council election results fresh in my mind. In that, a new party, the BBB, won by an incredible result; looking at their contributions to the new transgender law (discussed in Chapter 1), the chances of it getting through the first chamber seem slimmer. With a political climate where trans\* progression is not beacons, the trans\* and queer community must continue to shape their narrative. The paradigm shift that Halberstam describes in which trans\* people get agency over their narrative should not be dimmed. Research by trans\* and queer people into queer cultural production is essential for shaping our narrative. More so, queer futurity in research and cultural practice is crucial because it can give us hope for a better future despite an emerging kickback.



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