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**Beyond Zero: Utopian Horizons and the Evolution of Dutch Mime**

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## **Abstract**

This research examines the evolution of the concept of Zero in Dutch mime thinking, from the 1960's until now, and its relation to utopian thinking. First, the thesis provides a historical overview of mime traditions, starting from the Roman Empire. The focus shifts to the rise of modern mime with emphasis on the work of Étienne Decroux and his concept of the Zero, a state of neutrality and depersonalization of the body achieved through techniques that emphasize the trunk and the minimizing of facial expressions. The Dutch interpretation of Zero is discussed as well as the critical behavior towards Zero by Nieuw West in the 1980's. Then, the research explores utopia in relation to mime by first discussing Thomas More's *Utopia* and Ernst Bloch's ideas about utopia as a concrete fantasy. Next, ideas of Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz about utopia are analyzed, such as Dolan's concept of 'utopian performatives' and Muñoz's ideas about 'queer futurity'. These ideas are connected to perceptions of mime and the Zero through the understanding that Zero can change normative time structures in which utopian possibilities arise. Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity are used to describe how mime can deconstruct the idea of gender. Lastly, the thesis analyzes contemporary Dutch mime and its relation to utopia through an interview with mime artist Gerben Vaillant, conversation with mime artist Suzan Boogaerdt and three mime performances. While Vaillant focuses on the Zero as a fluid moment in time capable of noticing anything that could be, resonating with Dolan's utopian performatives, Boogaerdt adopt Zero to attempt to achieve a non-binary, universal state that connects with Muñoz's idea of the utopian horizon in which queerness can flourish. The research concludes that Zero has evolved from a strict technique to a conceptual tool to investigate and express utopian ideals.

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## Introduction

In the summer of 2022, from the 30th of August until the 3rd of September, a research week was organized by the Mime Opleiding of the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam and DAS Research about the future of mime called ‘Mime Futurity Symposium’ (‘Mime Futurity Symposium’). In this symposium, several researchers and practitioners from the field of mime assembled to discuss how techniques in mime have changed and what the future of mime will look like, as a result of the launch of mime specialist Marijn de Langen’s new book *Dutch Mime* (De Langen). Although I did not participate in the symposium and was not aware of its existence when I chose mime performance and in particular the concepts of stand Zero and queer futurity as thesis topics, it becomes all the more clear how alive the conversations around contemporary mime are. In her book on Dutch mime, de Langen explains that Zero became a key concept in the field of mime in the Netherlands, derived from the French mime practitioner Etienne Decroux who studied mime under the umbrella of ‘mime corporel’ (embodied study of mime) and used the term only once in his writing (De Langen 33). De Langen uses the term as a searchlight, a concept that is visible in various traces of thought. Zero can refer to ideas of dramaturgy, the relationship between the player and their body, and interdisciplinarity. It refers to objectivity, neutrality and transparency (De Langen 33). However, I argue in this thesis that the Zero and its contemporary interpretation thereof by various mime practitioners, relates to a utopian thinking.

De Langen writes the following about Decroux’s interpretation of Zero:

“Zéro is blijkens deze uitspraak een bepaalde staat waartoe de speler zich – na jarenlange en geduldige training – leert verheffen. Decroux’ zéro is interessant genoeg geen punt waarnaar de speler ‘afdaalt’ (al het overbodige weglaten, om als het ware terug te tellen naar nul).” (De Langen 44).

Thus, Zero is not something to fall back to, but rather to elevate to something, something that is not there yet (De Langen 44). Here, a connection between different studies becomes noticeable. In the book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, José Esteban Muñoz writes about the creation of a utopia in relation to queerness and how performance can function as a way of creating an ideal that does not exist yet and how this ‘not-yet’ is what queerness is about since queerness too, is not here yet. According to Muñoz, queerness is performative because it is about doing something for and towards the future, a potentiality for an ideal world (Muñoz 1). Part of the utopia is the notion of failure. Queerness is a failure in the eyes of the normative world we live in. However, this failure opens up possibilities and is part of the performative (Muñoz 153). The notion of failure that goes hand in hand with the creation of an ideal world that is not there yet, connects to the concept of Zero because of Zero’s potentiality as a starting point of which movement can be

created. However, the idea of a utopia and with that, a certain freedom that exists in the 'not-yet' does not pair together with the objectivity and neutrality that is central to the concept of Zero according to the mime practitioners that adopted the term such as Etienne Decroux, Will Spoor and William Dashwood. These practitioners consist of all white men who have a different idea of neutrality than a queer or black female person would have for example. How can we see the concept of Zero as a way to create utopia in contemporary mime practices? How is Zero interpreted by queer mime players and how is an ideal world created by them? In my thesis I will find answers to these questions by relating the concept of Zero to utopian thinking.

### *Research Question*

The utopian atmosphere of something that is not there yet, a blank slate, surrounding a mime performance and in particular stand Zero is something that can be researched further since this connection has not been made yet in performance studies. According to Jill Dolan in her book *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater* the utopia in performances can, in turn, give the audience a feeling of hope which is in accordance with Muñoz writings about the creation of a utopia (Dolan 7). Creating a utopia in performance is unpredictable, spontaneous and idiosyncratic according to Dolan (Dolan 5).

Neither Dolan nor Muñoz write about mime performance in general and de Langen merely touches upon utopia in her writings. Thus, there is a blind spot in the research of the relation between mime and the utopian. Furthermore, the topic of utopia in mime performance is a relevant topic to examine, since in today's theatre and performance field mime is undergoing a change in perception. A change that can be identified through the concept of utopia in mime. According to De Langen, mime brought about a lot of innovation in the national and international theatre landscape (De Langen 22). The intention behind her book *Dutch Mime* was to provide an insight into the Dutch mime culture that had not been written down before. My intention is to broaden this view on the innovative nature of Dutch mime by arguing that utopian thinking is what characterizes contemporary mime culture.

This relationship between mime and the utopia can be examined through focusing on how mime performers perceive the Zero in mime. Therefore the utopia and mime should be examined through the perspective of a performer in order to fully grasp the utopian thinking in mime performance. How the relation between the queer, the utopia and the Zero reveals itself in a mime performance process can be researched more deeply.

The following research question arises: How can the concept of Zero as interpreted by contemporary mime artists be understood as a way to create utopia?

My sub questions are:

1. How has the understanding of the concept Zero evolved over time since the 1960's and how do contemporary mime practitioners conceptualize and utilize this concept in the context of mime performance making?

2. How does the concept of Zero in mime theory relate to a utopian thinking in a queer understanding of the term?

3. In what ways does the Dutch interpretation of Zero of contemporary mime practitioners relate to a utopian way of thinking?

### *Theoretical Framework*

As a starting point for my research, it is important to identify certain terms such as mime performance practices and the concept of Zero in particular. For this, I will examine the book *Modern and Post-Modern Mime* of Thomas Leabhart about the history of modern and postmodern mime traditions and their techniques in order to gain a wider understanding of mime and to provide a background of the concept of Zero which is now widely used in Dutch mime practices (Leabhart). Next to that, *Dutch Mime* by Marijn de Langen provides a theoretical framework for the use of the concept Zero in contemporary mime thinking in the Netherlands (De Langen 21). Moreover, she uses the concept of Zero throughout her whole book as a searchlight inspired by Mieke Bal's understanding of traveling concepts (De Langen 33). Besides de Langen and Leabhart I will consult other sources about mime to provide the thesis with a broad perspective on mime theory and practice.

I will combine the theoretical framework of performance and philosophical studies. While the theory about mime performance and the analysis of the practice of mime through the perspective of a mime practitioner falls under the category of performance studies, the works of José Esteban Muñoz, Jill Dolan, Judith Butler and Jack Halberstam fall under philosophical studies. Muñoz and Dolan draw from the philosophical traditions of Ernst Bloch who is loosely associated with the Frankfurt School of thought which already studied the complications with the utopia (Muñoz 2). Jill Dolan in her work about the utopia, already deals with theories of performativity as well as Judith Butler, in the sense that 'utopian performatives' are enunciated acts of 'doing' like saying 'I do' in a wedding ceremony (Dolan 5). She further explains that "utopian performatives" are moments in the performance that lift the audience up (Dolan 6). These performatives are always grasped as a partial vision rather than a

fixed entity which means that the elements merely gesture towards a possible future rather than comprehending the state of the world (Dolan 7). Mime performance, and in particular the concept of Zero in mime performance making, also works as an unfixed state from which movement can be formed. However, Dolan does not specifically write about queerness in connection to the utopia itself unlike Muñoz and merely touches upon queerness in one of her case studies which is a performance work about queerness.

When it comes to mime performance which works with the body as an instrument to symbolize certain ideas, it is important to take queerness into account. Namely, Judith Butler and her work about gender performativity makes clear that all genders are constructed by norms, procedures and rules in society, but that people always act within the norm, either in compliance or resistance (Rosenberg et al., 5). Drawing from Butler, queer scholar Jack Halberstam points out that this can be further explained through the distinction between the real and 'realness'. With realness Halberstam means that people that fall outside of the norm (through race, class or gender) imitate rather than perform social norms and appropriate the 'real'. The real then, is something of a utopia or fantasy of belonging, something that does not exist here, but there (Rosenberg et al, 6).

Thus, a strong connection can be made with being queer and the utopia, because queerness is an ideal in itself that does not exist but people strive towards, a potentiality. This potentiality might exist in relation to the starting point of Zero, since neutrality, a norm, is something real and in that case, an ideal. Thus, it is impossible to neglect philosophical studies in combination with performance studies in order to examine the connection between the queer, the utopia and the Zero in a mime performance process.

### *Methodological Approach*

I will focus my research question on the perception of the Zero and the utopia of the performers themselves and their philosophical adaptation thereof in the creation process of a mime performance. Therefore, I choose a qualitative research method wherein I conduct interviews with mime makers about their current process, ask thoroughly researched questions about their perspective of the concept of Zero in their thinking about mime, how they approach the concept of utopia and how they adopt these concepts in their creative processes.

Since the thesis is structured around queer theory as well, it is important to use the qualitative method of interviewing with a subject who falls under that category. Gerben Vaillant is a mime performer who calls himself queer as well. Next to that, it is important to use the method of

interviewing since this thesis will research how contemporary mime performers think about the Zero and the utopia and there is a lack of literature about contemporary mime thinking. Therefore this research will include an interview with open-ended questions in order to learn the way mime performers of today are viewing certain concepts used in the thesis. I will consult the book *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* by Bonnie S. Brennen, because it will help me understand how to conduct an interview in research. Besides mime performer Gerben Vaillant, I will include a personal conversation held with mime maker Suzan Boogaerdt from performance collective Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot to provide the thesis with a wider scope on contemporary mime thinking when it comes to case studies. Since they adopt queer dramaturgies in their mime performances and graduated from the same Mime Opleiding as Vaillant but in the year 1999, Boogaerdt's view on mime, the Zero and utopia in a queer understanding will be a valuable addition to a thesis about the way in which contemporary mime performers think about the concepts discussed in the thesis.

Next to the interviews, I will describe two mime performances I have visited and analyze how they prove to be utopian in relation to the concept of Zero. The performances include *On almost every page* by maker Gerben Vaillant (Vaillant) and *Underworlds* by collective Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot (Boogaerdt and van der Schoot). By providing the thesis with these performances, I am able to adopt the theoretical lens of contemporary mime thinking in relation to utopia and Zero when viewing mime performances.

Besides the above mentioned qualitative method, I will perform literature reviews of the theory mentioned in the theoretical framework of the thesis including works by De Langen, Leabhart, Muñoz, Dolan, Butler, and Diamond and examine how different concepts relate to one another before analyzing how they are noticeable in contemporary mime thinking.



## Chapter one: Evolution of Dutch Mime and Interpretations of Zero

In this chapter, I will focus on the question “How has the understanding of the concept Zero evolved over time since the 1960’s and how do contemporary mime practitioners conceptualize and utilize this concept in the context of mime performance making?” in order to provide the thesis with a theoretical context to fall back to. It is important to identify certain terms in mime performance practices besides the concept of Zero to provide the thesis with a starting point. Therefore, I will examine the book *Modern and Post-Modern Mime* of Thomas Leabhart about the history of modern and postmodern mime traditions and their techniques in order to gain a wider understanding of mime which provides a background of the concept of Zero now widely used in Dutch mime practices. In Leabharts book, he explores how mime performance is about the expression of the whole body through writing about how different practitioners and thinkers approach the practice of mime. Next to that, in *The Decroux sourcebook*, Thomas Leabhart explores all the influences of modern mime practitioner Etienne Decroux ranging from innovators such as Eugenio Barba and Edward Gordon Craig and uses interviews and essays to fill the book. It is important to use this source for my research, since it provides me with an extensive background of the mime practices of Etienne Decroux, something I will further investigate in this chapter. In the book *Dutch Mime* by Marijn de Langen, she also refers to Leabhart and extends this knowledge by explaining how mime concepts and specifically Zero were interpreted by Dutch mime practitioners from the 1960’s (De Langen 22). This source provides a starting point for further research about contemporary mime performers, also because the conversation about the interpretations of today’s mime practitioners starts in her book. Next to that, de Langen adopts the concept of Zero, coined by modern mime performer and theorist Etienne Decroux, throughout her whole book as a searchlight inspired by Mieke Bal’s understanding of traveling concepts (Bal 3-5). Furthermore, in her book de Langen sets out multiple paradigms regarding the development of mime in The Netherlands such as ‘physical stillness’ and ‘the Below Zero principle’.

Towards the end of the chapter, I will focus on the first question asked in the title of the chapter and delve into the conception of mime practitioners from the 1960’s. Besides consulting de Langens book *Dutch Mime* on this matter, in which she explains how the practice has evolved over time, I will shine a light on today’s new mime performers in the field and refer to an interview held with Gerben Vaillant and a personal conversation with Suzan Boogaerdt. Vaillant is a Dutch mime performer who graduated three years ago from the mime course at the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam and creates mime performances himself. De Langen focuses on this particular school of art as well and even works at the publishing company connected to the academy called DAS publishing. In Vaillants rehearsal processes, he adopts the concept of Zero as well. However, he makes clear he interprets the concept differently than the theory argues. Boogaerdt is a mime performer and

maker from the performance collective Boogaerd/Van der Schoot and graduated from the same Academy as Vaillant, but in 1999. For the interview with Vaillant, the most fitting interview type as described in Bonnie S. Brennens book *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies*, is the semi-structured conversation. The reason for this is because I will research the interpretations and use of the concept of Zero by contemporary mime artists, and how they view the concept of utopia in their thinking about mime. Therefore it is important to leave room for interpretation in interview questions and think of pre-established questions that will lead the conversation towards finding an answer to how they adopt certain concepts in their thinking.

Before I delve into the practice of Zero in contemporary mime, I will provide a theoretical background of historical mime traditions in order to compare the interpretation of Zero between mime performers from the 60's until the 80's of the 20th century and the contemporary interpretation of Zero, and analyze how utopian thinking correlates with that interpretation of Zero.

### *Historical Overview of Mime Traditions*

The online encyclopedia Britannica describes mime as a dramatic artform in which expressive bodily movements tell a story. During the Roman empire, mime developed into a pantomime practice that made use of masks and later came back in the commedia dell'arte of the 16th century. In the 18th and 19th century the pantomime influenced the French and English comedic interludes. This type of mime was mostly comedic, for children and included spoken dialogue. Since the 1950's of the 20th century pantomime has become popular in The Netherlands in French pantomime player Marcel Marceau's view of the term. Famous mime practitioners arose such as Jean-Gaspard Debureau and Jacques Copeau who were influenced by the earlier Japanese Noh theatre, in which masks were used to emphasize the body ("Mime and Pantomime"). Jacques Copeau taught his practices at the school of the 'Ecole du Vieux Colombier' which influenced modern mime greatly and which had Etienne Decorux as a student. The adoption of ballet-like techniques of self-conscious posturing and caperings are qualities prominent in modern mime (Leabhart 24). Copeau taught his students the corporeal mime which included wearing masks to diminish facial expressions and highlight the bodily movements as the main source of communication. This use of masks and the emphasis of the body gave birth to modern mime according to Leabhart (Leabhart 26). Copeau and others wrote down their mime techniques as a systematic language of movements and is being categorized as 'modern mime' ("Mime and Pantomime"). Copeau felt that the theatre as a whole had to get rid of the commercial nature and therefore the theatre had to reach 'a void' and a 'state of unbeing' through a rebirth of sincerity which would be manifested first through movement and the use of the mask (Leabhart 29). This practice would be adopted by Etienne Decroux, who thinks the beauty of art lies in its poorness.

He says that art is only complete when it is partial (Leabhart 44). In order to achieve this 'purity', Decroux diminished stage elements such as lighting and costumes, and focused on the trunk of the body instead of the face and hands which defines the 'mime corporel'.

### *The Zero according to Decroux: Naked on Stage*

Decroux's teachings set off careers of famous mime performer Marcel Marceau, but also Dutch mime practitioners such as Willie Spoor and Frits Vogels (Leabhart 55). Decroux taught them that technique and the use of a systematic language in movement does not restrain freedom, but rather liberates the soul to perform a noble form of art (Leabhart 56-57). Furthermore, Decroux talks about how he detested pantomime for its clear articulation. Pantomime shows extreme facial expressions and thus could have been said just as easily in words according to Decroux (Leabhart 64). That is where modern mime in Decroux's view comes in. Modern mime puts the focus on the body itself and not the facial expressions. You can express something in a different way by focusing only on the body and its dynamic movements. In contrast with dance, the body moves slowly in mime and the focus lies more on its changes (Leabhart 69). This is where the concept of Zero comes in as well. According to Leabhart, Zero is about the depersonalization of the face and body. Through nakedness and the use of certain types of clothing material and masks, no marks on the body or the face can be seen that can individualize it. There is no personality, but a representation of all bodies and is thus neutral. Zero does not only mean standing still with your legs side by side and the resting of the arms, it can also be another position the body takes, and from there the moving can start. It places you in a position without thinking and moving (Leabhart, Decroux, 65) In her book about Dutch Mime, De Langen notices how Decroux only mentions the concept of Zero once in his bundle of writings and lectures about mime (*Paroles sur le mime* from 1963). However, it still became a key concept in mime practices of The Netherlands (De Langen 32). Decroux was interested in questioning what happens when you turn nothing into something. Thus, Zero became a starting point from which everything could happen (De Langen 43). The Zero had to do with nakedness: Not literal naked bodies on stage, but in the sense that even with tight knitwear the player's outline of the body was visible without showing any personality. No scars, no birthmarks, just the body in its purity in order to create symbolic and universal meanings rather than a personal story. The body had to achieve an artificial creation (De Langen 48). Furthermore, in Decroux's teachings Zero can be the starting point, rest point and end point of anything depending on what you want to achieve: From Zero's that show the contrast of one movement to another, Zero's for specific ways of walking, the Zero of a character and more (De Langen 44). A mime player does not fall back to the Zero, but rather elevates themselves. Decroux created an entire hierarchy of body parts in order to achieve a higher sense of neutrality and objectivity. Together with this training of the hierarchy, Decroux wanted to achieve the invisibility of

the person making a movement. He wanted to remove the beginning and the end of the movement visually so that the personality of the performer was removed as well (De Langen 102). The audience could not see that the performer wanted something by starting a movement and therefore the spectator could not get into 'the rhythm' (De Langen 102). This way, the audience cannot foresee what will come next: a potentiality is created that could be turned into anything. However, Decroux leaned more towards a subjective mime practice than an objective one. With the subjective mime, Decroux wanted to achieve a bodily expression of the soul while the objective mime of the 19th century was about creating an illusion as realistic as possible (De Langen 143).

De Langen further connects the thinking of Decroux to the French philosopher Michel Foucault. She writes that although Foucault's intentions are more politically engaged than Decroux's intentions, Foucault also believes that it would be ideal to find a 'nameless voice' and to search for an imperceptible beginning in order to escape the all-consuming power to invigorate discourse (De Langen 104). The Dutch interpretation in mime is politically laden, unlike Decroux which I will tell more about in the next segment.

Another branch of Copeau's school is the teachings of Jacques Lecoq, who mostly is contrasted highly to Etienne Decroux. Decroux's techniques differ from Lecoq's mime de forme in which he focuses on the enactment of mannerisms through repetition and accumulation of movement (Murphy 107). In order to let the performers be open and let the world in with no prior knowledge, he made use of the 'neutral mask' (Murphy 38). With this mask, the focus lies on the bodily movements and a high sense of neutrality can be achieved according to Lecoq (Murphy 38). Similarly to Decroux's practice, Lecoq wants his students to create a self-displacement so that the body can speak for itself and become distinct from the personal. In contrast with Decroux however, Lecoq tries to achieve the same physical choreographies with this neutral mask in order for the audience to really notice the individual that becomes apparent if everyone performs the same movements (Murphy 110). Etienne Decroux contrasts this view by his need to find a higher level of objectivity to not mimic movements from daily life, but to create abstract movements that represent all bodies (De Langen 34). Next to that, Decroux was also inspired by Edward Gordon Craig and the 'Übermarionette'. Decroux wanted the personal to become absent and saw the body as a puppet of which every move could be controlled. Thus, the body as a puppet became very present (De Langen 62). Through this notion, it becomes clear how the corporeal mime can be explained: As something in which it becomes possible to decode, reassemble and appreciate every movement. The purity is a metaphor for existentialism because the body in motion refers to humanity as a whole (Leabhart 49).

Étienne Decroux's contributions to mime emphasized the body's central role and changed the manner in which mime was being practiced until then. His concept of 'Zero', a state of neutrality and

depersonalization, allowed performers to get rid of personal traits and represent universal human experiences. Through removing these personal elements, the body represented something of limitless potential.

This approach contrasts with Jacques Lecoq's methods, which, while also neutralizing the performer, highlight individual differences through collective movement. Decroux's perception of mime was more philosophical in nature, similar to Michel Foucault's view of the 'nameless voice' that eliminated dominant narratives. Decroux's teachings inspired mime performers such as Marcel Marceau, Frits Vogels and Will Spoor who thought of mime as something that expresses the existential and the abstract.

### *The Dutch Interpretations of Zero and Decroux: Objectivity or Subjectivity?*

Although Zero can mean any movement or position according to Decroux, as long as there is an 'emptiness' something could be started from, the Dutch mime interpreted the Zero often as a certain kind of position as a starting point. Arms loosely hanging by a person's sides, chin forward and feet in the extension of the hips. According to De Langen, it is the 'standing still' that the Dutch mime practitioners connected to the Zero (De Langen 90).

Dutch mime practitioner Willie Spoor (active in the 1960's and 70's) adopted the same ideas of stand Zero and neutrality as Decroux but put his own spin on it. Instead of relating body and language strongly to each other and using the body as if it were a musical instrument, Spoor used the body to estrange by creating absurd movements. Next to that, he perished certain limitations set up by Decroux and used sexuality explicitly in his performances. Decroux on the other hand, wanted to prevent emitting sexuality and erotica to promote intellectuality instead of human cravings (Leabhart, *Decroux*, 65). Nevertheless, Spoor noticed the same value of objectivity Decroux sees. Spoor believed mime is not an expression of the subjective inner body, rather an objective analysis. He also notices the power of the Zero in standing still. According to his ideas, the moments between movements can show a metaphorical movement of the mind and body. The art lies not in the observation of the moving human, but in the observation of the human standing still. It's about the moments before an emotion is displayed. The points of zero surrounding the dramatic points (De Langen 89). According to De Langen, the interpretation of the Zero being referred to as standing still, is a Dutch mime tradition still noticeable today (De Langen 90). It is typically Dutch to literally connect the Zero to standing still as a starting point. However, Decroux did not only refer to Zero as physically standing still. Every movement could be the Zero, since for Decroux it is about transforming an emptiness to something else (De Langen 90). Characteristically Dutch is thinking about stillness as a sequence of

still moments that in turn create movement. First you move a muscle and then another. All of these parts are moments of stillness that is widely used as a technique in the Dutch mime (De Langen 94-95).

Another Dutch mime practitioner and founder of the Mime Opleiding in Amsterdam, was Frits Vogels who did something interesting in his teachings inspired by Decroux according to De Langen: Instead of choosing to teach either objective or subjective mime to his students, he chose to teach both in different subjects (De Langen 143). In the objective mime class, he trained students on the technical basis while in the subjective mime class, he wanted students to explore their space and fill in the space by using the techniques learned in the objective class as a basis (De Langen 143). Through making this distinction, Vogels created a space for students to explore the not-yet expressionist and non-psychological before filling the performance room with colors (De Langen 144). The way in which one could fill the room with colors is by sensually and mathematically understanding and experiencing the environment around them and responding instinctively to that environment as a mime player (De Langen 146). Inspired by Decroux, Vogels wanted to get rid of the audience trying to make meaning all the time. Movement should be enough in and of itself (De Langen 145).

In order to achieve the lack of a start and end in movement, Decroux follows the same ideas as Foucault according to de Langen. However, Decroux's intentions are not political, but the Dutch interpretation of his ideas of stillness are. The Dutch mime makers saw the standing still and removal of the personal in the performer (and thus neutrality) as the opposition of 'moving along' and is thus a form of anarchy (De Langen 104). Thus, the Dutch mime traditions viewed neutrality in mime as a political power rather than a negative notion. However, in the end of the 1970's and beginning of the 1980's, mime thinkers and makers began to question the objectivity and neutrality of Zero. A group of young mime performers came up with the concept of 'below zero' to be critical towards the performer's own political situatedness and made performances where the performer became disordered, the relation with audience members disruptive and where they searched for a utopian kind of freedom (De Langen 35). One of those performances was called *Below Zero* by the group Nieuw West in which the mime performers manifested uncontrollable behavior by flirting, swearing and even physically harassing the spectators. All of this and more was meant to reach below the Zero they criticized. The Zero was about controlling every part of your body as a musical instrument as I described earlier, about order and hierarchy. The players of Nieuw West did the opposite and lost control. The movement of this embracing of subjectivity instead of objectivity was a result of the historical context of that time and the structure of the Mime course at the Academy of Dance and Theatre in Amsterdam (De Langen 170). According to one of the founders of Nieuw West, Marien Jongewaard, it is necessary to lose responsibility in order to find the Zero and thus the emptiness on

stage. The theatre is an empty room full of potential and freedom of which the performer is aware and does not bring any history and other ties with them (De Langen 182). This forms a double-sidedness: On the one hand, the Zero creates a utopia without preconceptions and on the other hand, it shows the impossibility thereof. Nieuw West is aware of this conception and sees the Zero as a belief, something to strive for, rather than something that can be reached (De Langen 183).

Furthermore, the Dutch interpretation of Decroux has a strong connection with time and space of which Decroux did not pay as much attention to. The strive towards neutrality and objectivity in the Dutch mime context is meant to make the presence of time and space visible and sensible. The removal of personal expression is to see the bigger picture of humanity being in the grip of time (De Langen 119). While Decroux works with objectivity of the body to make the performer express something symbolically and something to rise to, the objectivity of Zero in the Dutch context is something to fall back to and to not express something else but to rather see the body as it is (De Langen 120). Standing still is not to make a body express something symbolically in the Dutch mime tradition, but to ask existential questions. It shows that there is an individual present, but also a 'we'. Standing still makes it possible for the body to slow down, re-orient and redirect itself (De Langen 121). Thus, it makes it possible to accept the unknown and see the potential that lies out there.

### *Contemporary Dutch Interpretations of Zero in Mime*

According to Thomas Leabhart's writings, post-modern mime practice is based on the advice of Etienne Decroux, who thought that the author and the performer were one and the same and should not be made into a division (Leabhart 114). Post-modern mime can be further defined as mime that is more eclectic and less single-minded. In post-modern mime different styles are often integrated into the same performance such as a humorous style with an asymmetrical one. Next to that, a post-modern mime characteristic is the revealing of something that used to be hidden (Leabhart 110-111). The mime performance *On almost every page* by mime maker Gerben Vaillant is an example of post-modern mime in the way Thomas Leabhart described in his book. In this performance, Vaillant reveals the usually hidden backstage area, he plays with pureness through nakedness and lack of props and he uses humor to lift the audience up (Vaillant). This mime performance is post-modern, since it follows the teachings of Etienne Decroux together with various styles including humor and the revealing of things that used to be hidden in the theatre. These postmodern characteristics, according to Leabhart, are important to notice, since it can contribute in providing a context for the relation between the utopia and queer futurity and the mime.

Gerben Vaillant followed the mime course at the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam where the Zero is still widely used in their teachings. First years are taught how Zero is a way of standing still that is as neutral as possible with an open attitude without a clear expression (De Langen 91). Vaillant however, interprets the Zero more poetically and not as a mere starting point of a position. He notices a difference between the Zero in the body and the Zero in a performance and focuses mainly on the second interpretation. According to him, the Zero is a canvas on which you create a work together with the other performers. With the performers, Vaillant searches for a joint canvas or as he puts it as well, an atmosphere. Similarly to Decroux's thinking about the Zero, Vaillant thinks the Zero is visible in multiple elements and is not something to fall back to. Rather, throughout the creation process of a performance, the Zero can be seen as a compass of potentiality as Vaillant puts it. What he means is that in certain moments of the rehearsal process, you stand still (in the figurative sense) and realize what the potentiality of the next moments will be. This can be about the atmosphere you want to create in the performance. In Vaillant's performances for example, he tries to challenge normativity and the atmosphere can be a compositional one, a psychological one or something else (Vaillant). Thus, Vaillant's interpretation of Zero seems to have more in common with Etienne Decroux than the Dutch mime traditions. As mentioned before, the Dutch mime makers of the 60's and 70's literally connected the Zero to physically standing still, although Decroux thought the Zero could be every movement as long as it is about transforming an emptiness into something else (De Langen 90). I noticed this interpretation of Zero myself in Vaillants performance *On almost every page* in which he draws the audience in with a little talk before the performance, only noticing later that it is part of the performance. The players are constantly playing with anticipation in music making, bright to dark lighting, the small reveal of the backstage area in which you can slightly see performers getting ready but not completely, the play with nakedness but not completely naked, etc (Vaillant, *On almost every page*). Vaillant believes that neutrality is different for everyone and can therefore not be fully achieved. In his rehearsal processes, he wants his performers to show their own personalities and crafts in their mime making (Vaillant). Since Vaillant is a visual thinker, he tried to explain his notion of 'compass of potentiality' by drawing a figure on paper. The figure entailed a graph of a line moving in different directions and with little dots on the line at arbitrary moments. He explained that the dots represent the Zero and that from the dots, a new direction can be made.

On the other hand, there is the performance collective Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot. In their performances, they search for universality by dehumanizing the body and seeing the body as an object. The human personality is not obvious. They play with among other elements, puppets, avatars, masked figures, cyborgs and semi-mechanized characters. They ask themselves: What makes us human? ("Over"). In their performance *Underworlds* the duo attempts to create spaces for the possible future. In a world of structures that are falling, Boogaerdt and van der Schoot seek to resurrect these structures and create new communal spaces to dream in ("Rooms for Transformation, Underworlds").



Suzan Boogaerdt and Bianca van der Schoot graduated from the Mime course of the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam similarly to Gerben Vaillant. However, they graduated in 1999 while Vaillant graduated in 2021. Both Vaillant and Boogaerdt want to create an atmosphere in a performance in which they externalize the distance between humans and reality, Boogaerdt however, has a more positive perception of the search for neutrality in mime than Vaillant does. In a conversation with Suzan Boogaerdt, she talks about how this neutrality is strongly related to their search for the non-binary. When a body becomes neutral, there are endless possibilities of what is to come. The potentiality, according to Boogaerdt, lies in the search for a heightened sense of neutrality rather than in the creation of an atmosphere together (Boogaerdt). Thus, Boogaerdt follows the teachings of Decroux more theoretically accurately than Vaillant does, and the strive to neutrality of Zero is used to take the human away from the center although it can never be reached fully. This is noticeable in Boogaerdt's connection of humans to puppets in mime performance, where the body is used as a puppet with a hierarchy of body parts like Etienne Decroux suggested as well based on the influence of Edward Gordon Craig and the 'Übermarionette'.

In short, through literature reviews of mainly Marijn de Langen's book *Dutch Mime* and Thomas Leabhart's book *Modern and Post-Modern Mime*, and through the help of personal conversations with contemporary mime artists and the viewing of multiple mime performances myself, I will be able to answer the question asked in this chapter: "How has the understanding of the concept Zero evolved over time since the 1960's and how do contemporary mime practitioners conceptualize and utilize this concept in the context of mime performance making in The Netherlands?" Namely, the concept of Zero in mime coined by mime practitioner and theorist Etienne Decroux, has moved towards a more philosophical and theoretical utilization of the term in contemporary mime practices since the 1980's and is slowly returning to the initial interpretation of Decroux with post-modern mime practitioners such as Gerben Vaillant with the use of purity and Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot with the use of masks and the strive towards neutrality as a way to challenge the anthropocene. Although mime started out as a comedic performance art practice with a target audience made up of mostly children, the mime changed forever through the serious training techniques of Jacques Copeau who was greatly influenced by the already existing Noh theatre of Japan. Neutrality became part of mime in this stadium through the use of masks, but was soon adopted more thoroughly by mime practitioner Etienne Decroux who has had one of the biggest influences on the Dutch mime with his concept of Zero (even though he only mentioned this specific concept once). Through the use of masks, nakedness and a hierarchy of body parts a mime player would be able to remove their personal identity and create symbolic meanings such as the representation of humanity on stage as a whole. Although the point of Zero could start from any movement before, in between or after movements, the early Dutch mime practitioners of the 1960's and 1970's took Decroux's Zero quite literally and mostly adopted the standing still with the arms

resting along the sides. It was during this time that the neutrality of the body was highly appreciated, but in the 1980's a more radical movement started with Nieuw West in which they contrasted the high sense of control by doing the opposite: Lose all control. This way, they came to a conclusion: neutrality is not something that is there, but rather something to strive for. The Dutch interpretations of Decroux's philosophies can be connected to those of Michel Foucault in a political sense. The neutrality of the body is the opposite of 'moving along' and can thus be seen as a protest of anarchy. Today's mime practitioners follow a lot of the same ideas as Decroux and thus seem more connected to him than the earlier Dutch interpretations did. However, there is a lot of variety in how the concept of Zero is used. While Vaillant describes the Zero as a compass of potentiality and at the same time a canvas on which he creates an atmosphere with his performers, Suzan Boogaerdt focuses more on the universality and the dehumanizing in order to create a new reality based on the strive towards neutrality of the body that Zero provides. There is one thing they do have in common, namely the philosophical use of the concept of Zero rather than the adoption of heavy and specific techniques that are written down.

## Chapter two: Mime and Queer Utopia

In this chapter I will introduce the concept of utopia in the realm of performance and philosophy and eventually seek a relation between the Zero in mime and the utopian thinking. I will ask the question “How does the concept of Zero in mime theory relate to a utopian thinking in a queer understanding of the term?”

In de Langen’s book on Dutch mime practices wherein she uses the concept of Zero as a searchlight through the book, she touches upon the freedom a utopia brings about when she writes about the radical turn towards a ‘below zero’ (De Langen 170). As mentioned in the previous chapter, she notes that by giving up on all responsibilities the strict techniques of Etienne Decroux ask for, and thus going below Zero, the emptiness of Zero can eventually be reached in which both the utopian freedom is found and the impossibility thereof is becoming noticeable:

*“I use Nieuw West’s work to show that Below Zero reflected a critical attitude to the norm and to the group’s own political and social situatedness. Equally, this piece reflects the group’s fundamentally disruptive attitude to the theatre audience, an attitude born out of a visceral urge to create utopian freedom on stage. The result was a work that gave centre stage to maladjusted behaviour, the grotesque, ugliness, vanity, displays of ‘bad taste’ and lack of control. To one extent or another, all these qualities contravene the founding principles of the Dutch pioneers, with their physical control, love of construction, objectivity, aesthetics, socialism and absence of expression.”* (De Langen 221).

The empty stage which is strongly connected to the Zero on stage, creates possibilities and endless potential. Thus, there appears to be a connection between the Zero in mime and the utopia. This relationship can be further examined through focusing on how mime performance processes can create a utopia in the sense that something is unfinished and in the sense of the ‘not-yet’ central to both the Zero and utopian thinking. As mentioned in the introduction of the thesis, the mime futurity conference held in September 2023 makes clear that further research into the topic of mime and futurity is relevant today.

For this chapter, I will discuss the contents of the books by Jill Dolan about the feeling of hope and utopia in the theatre and by José Esteban Muñoz about the utopia and his perception of utopia as a queer futurity and connect them to literature from the previous chapter. Before I explain both their perspectives, I will furthermore consult the ideas of utopia by Thomas More who coined the Utopia, and philosopher Ernst Bloch who are central to both Dolan’s and Muñoz’s books, in order to provide the chapter with a concise theoretical background of the utopia in philosophical studies. To elaborate on Muñoz’s connections to queer studies, I will refer back to the philosophies of Michel

Foucault as well. In order to explain more about performativity as a key term in both Dolan's and Muñoz's writings, I will use the book by Elin Diamond called *Unmaking Mimesis* to provide more theoretical context to this term. Later on, I will connect mime performance and the utopia by using Judith Butler's philosophy about gender performativity of which Diamond's text will form the basis. In the last part of the chapter, the relation between the Zero and the creation of a utopia will be further elaborated on, to find an answer to the research question of this chapter.

## *Utopia*

Before delving into the perceptions of utopia by Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz, it is important to understand more about where this concept in philosophy comes from.

The term utopia was first coined by Biblical humanist Thomas More from the 15th and 16th century, who wrote a book in two parts about the fictional land of Utopia (More vii). In his books, he describes an ideal society in which there is no private ownership, culture and education is based on classical antiquity and there exists a social equality. He found science and religion both very important and thought that human phenomena should be explained through rational arguments (Nabuurs). He was ahead of his time in his thinking about socialist theory later written down by Karl Marx. Although the Utopia More invented was very radical and controversial for his time, the indignation about injustice of humanity has always been something people try to perfect over time (Gerlo 373). Thus, the fictional country of More stays a utopia since the word literally means no place. The 'U' stands for nowhere and 'topia' for place.

Both Dolan and Muñoz refer to the writings of Ernst Bloch, a scholar loosely associated with the Frankfurt School of thought and who is seen as the most influential philosopher on utopianism according to Vincent Geoghegan who writes about Bloch's ideas in his book *Ernst Bloch* (Geoghegan 144). According to Geoghegan, Bloch sees an interconnectedness between the present and the future. While "the present is pregnant with the future, the future holds ways to understand the present" (Geoghegan 145). Furthermore, he does not think 'the Utopia' exists in one form, rather the utopian quality can be found in many places (Geoghegan 146). As a Marxist, Bloch combines a socialist historical approach with dualism of freedom and order to explain the 'social utopia' (Bloch 475). The social utopia derives back to the time when the proletariat started a revolution. Their utopia consisted of the hope of a better world for them. Furthermore, Bloch noticed a move from an 'abstract' utopia to a 'concrete' utopia of which anticipation and goals are characteristics (Geoghegan 148). This means that making something concrete in the dreams that are utopian, makes the dream even stronger (Geoghegan 149). However, this concreteness is not a quality Bloch brings about in his writings about

utopia. Geoghegan is critical of the way Bloch defines utopia which is a very broad definition. Bloch sees utopia as a response to fundamentalist desires and dispositions in individuals across time and space, which makes it so that there is an assemblage of what can be connected to the utopia and therefore almost nothing does not refer to the utopia (Geoghegan 151).

In the following paragraphs, I will elaborate on the perceptions of utopia by Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz to provide the thesis with a concise theoretical background of utopia in order to analyze how utopian thinking connects to mime and in particular, the Zero, in the last chapter.

### *Utopian performatives on an Empty Stage*

In Jill Dolan's book about the utopia, she deals with theories of performativity in the sense of 'utopian performatives' that are enunciated acts of 'doing' like saying 'I do' in a wedding ceremony (Dolan 5). She further explains that "utopian performatives" are moments in the performance that lift the audience up (Dolan 6). These performatives are always grasped as a partial vision rather than a fixed entity which means that the elements merely gesture towards a possible future rather than comprehending the state of the world (Dolan 7). Dolan connects this to Bertolt Brecht and his use of 'gestus' as a way of putting the audience in a critical way of thinking. According to Dolan, the utopian performatives are the "received moment of gestus" and are not only presented to the audience as a critical remark, but felt and lived by the spectators and actors (Dolan 7). The utopia can be felt in the audience through the performativity being realized in a theatre performance. Questions about social relations and embodiment for example, come alive due to the performance and the performance's negotiation between doing (that of a norm) and a thing done. These 'doings' gesture towards a possible better future (Dolan 6). It is the sense of partiality and of process that makes the audience desire something that is not there yet, that of a concrete fantasy as Bloch also points out. The audience approaches toward a better future and does not comprehend it fully (Dolan 7).

Dolan further explains how this partial vision needs to be reconceptualized in today's world by understanding when the performance encompasses less materials, costumes and other mise-en-scène, it grasps more (Dolan 6). The partiality is more utopian in this sense. Later on in the book, she exemplifies this by stating that how emptier the stage is, how more utopian visions come forward (Dolan 164). The aesthetics in a performance that deals with utopian visions elicits not only hope for a romantic partner for example, but for the abstract notion of humankind and community in general (Dolan 2).

## *Killing Straight Time*

In his book *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity*, Muñoz mostly talks about the topic of queerness and utopia and how queerness is an ideality and potentiality, something that does not exist yet, but is a way of looking into the future (Muñoz 1). Furthermore, he explains how performances in that regard can function as a window to the future, as an utopia, and not a way of merely being in the here and now (Muñoz 10). Muñoz follows Bloch's ideas of the utopia and similarly describes how the utopian feeling is created in the "anticipatory illumination of art" and is forged through the meaning-making as well as the affect (Muñoz 3). Through this process of the anticipatory illumination of art, the not-yet-conscious can be detected (Muñoz 3).

Similarly as Dolan, Muñoz writes about the performativity in utopia. He states that both performativity and utopia question what is there and that they touch upon an epistemological field that can be characterized as a doing in futurity. The utopian quality is the 'becoming' that is present in the 'doing'. Here, Muñoz makes a connection with queerness by saying that this rejection of the present time is 'oddball behavior' as he calls it (Muñoz 26). Performing a utopia then, is going against the here and now and thus normative behavior unlike the gender performativity theory by Judith Butler, wherein it becomes clear that the norm is being performed. Thus, a connection is being made by Muñoz between queerness and utopia through the notion of the not-yet-conscious and going against 'straight time'. He further explains this 'straight time' by referring to Bloch's concrete utopia in which the utopia wants to remake rationalism and an ordering of life that is controlled by the spatiality and temporality of straight time. Muñoz goes on to describe how queerness can be seen as a horizon wherein ecstatic time resides. What he means by ecstatic time is a moment in which one feels ecstasy and in which one contemplates about what has been, what is going on, and what could be (Muñoz 32). I will come back to this focus on time and space as utopia in a queer understanding later in the chapter.

Although Dolan and Bloch use the terms 'possibility' and 'potentiality' more or less interchangeably, Muñoz makes clear the difference: A possibility is something that might happen while a potentiality is a sense of nonbeing that is noticeable. It is present, yet not in the present tense (Muñoz 9). Thus, as Muñoz writes, potentialities are in the horizon which can be called a futurity. In the realm of performance, this means that the potential lingers on after a performance (Muñoz 99). Queerness too, is according to Muñoz, always on the horizon and goes against the here and now. It is something that has not been imagined yet and therefore exists of potential (Muñoz 21).

## *Performing a Gender; Performing a Zero*

Both Dolan and Muñoz write about the speech act theory when talking about utopia. They both agree that ‘doings’ are noticeable in utopian performative. Muñoz sees that the current heteronormative norms adopted in the gay neoliberal political agenda, such as giving the right to marriage, more often than not leads to a ‘not doing’, an antiperformativity. Instead, he proposes to see queerness as a horizon and to engage in a performativity, a doing which is visible in a utopia. He celebrates the doing, performing and engaging the performative as a force that will lead to a futurity and is a way to queerness (Muñoz 32). Dolan further investigates engaging the spectator in the utopia by noting that the spectator stays critical within the utopian performance. Here, she makes a connection to the ‘gestus’ of German director and theorist Bertolt Brecht. The gestus is an action on stage in which a social relation is foregrounded and left for the audience to contemplate about. Dolan then visualizes the utopian performative as “a received moment of the gestus” in which those social relations presented on stage are felt by the spectator as well as criticized (Dolan 7). Thus, the utopian performance rather gestures towards a better future in which the audience is engaged intellectually and physically.

These social relations being gestured on stage Dolan calls ‘doings’ similarly to Muñoz and connects them to theories of playwright and director Augusto Boal by seeing them as affective rehearsals for revolution (Dolan 7). In theorist Elin Diamond’s book *Unmaking Mimesis*, she unknowingly relates Muñoz’ theory on queerness and Dolan’s use of the term gestus as being part of the utopian performative to the theory on gender performativity of philosopher Judith Butler. Diamond acknowledges how gender is an ideology in which conventional, heteronormative norms are imposed on the bodies of people (Diamond 47). As Judith Butler writes, the body in itself is a construction based on gender norms. The body acts as a certain gender through a stylized repetition of acts of movements, bodily gestures and enactments (Butler 519). A woman *becomes* a woman. Diamond relates Brechtian theatrical effects to Butler’s gender performativity theory through the way in which the *Verfremdungseffekt* creates a critical distance between the performer and the spectator. The *Verfremdungseffekt* deconstructs the conventional norm and ideology of what gender should be (Diamond 47). This can be done through the use of the *Gestus* in the play. The *Gestus* is a gesture or action in which the meaning of the subtext in a playtext becomes distinctly clear for the audience and the action or the tableau is merely gestured instead of enacted. (Diamond 52). That way, the spectators do not immerse themselves in the fiction of a play but stay at an intellectual distance.

This defamiliarization of a certain action can be connected to the utopian performative. As Dolan and Muñoz made clear, the utopian is a ‘doing’ in which contemporary conventional norms are being deconstructed and the audience feels uplifted as well as intellectually stimulated by the

atmosphere created in the theatre, of a hopeful future that does not exist yet. Thus, this critical, uplifting utopian atmosphere can be achieved through the alienation effect of Bertolt Brecht because it intentionally creates a deconstructive alternative to reality, which is the utopia.

Drawing from Butler, queer scholar Jack Halberstam points out that the connection between gender performativity and the utopia can be further explained through the distinction between the real and 'realness'. With realness Halberstam means that people that fall outside of the norm (through race, class or gender) imitate rather than perform social norms and appropriate the 'real'. The real then, is something of a utopia or fantasy of belonging, something that does not exist here, but there (Rosenberg et al, 6). It is exactly this fantasy of the real that can be performed on stage in the form of a Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt*.

### *Mime and the Utopia: Deconstruction, Time and Potentiality*

The relation made between utopia in the theatre and Brechtian theatrical effects will be the first step towards connecting the utopia to mime. Namely, mime in the traditional Dutch interpretation of the practice, is utopian through its relation to Brecht's *Gestus*. Although mime is seen as an embodied, corporeal art practice, there is an alienation effect happening. According to Diamond, the performer's body is distanced from their identity during the *Gestus* (Diamond 48). This is exactly what happens in Etienne Decroux' theory of modern mime, adopted by Dutch mime practitioners in the 60's. In his theory on the mime corporel, Decroux makes clear how art is only complete when it is partial. Therefore, he diminished stage elements such as lighting, props and costumes in order to achieve a sense of purity. Next to that, the body should be detached from the performer's identity by focusing on the trunk of the body instead of the facial expressions and the hands (Leabhart 44). The focus lies on the bodily movements and the changes within those movements. The Zero is an important factor in the depersonalization of a performer's body. It is a starting point from where anything can happen, a limitless potential and exists to represent all bodies of humanity (De Langen 43). In the Dutch mime from the 1960's onwards, the Zero was often interpreted as a literal position of the body of which the arms rest alongside the body, chin forward and feet in the extension of the hips (De Langen 90). By reaching the Zero, the beginning and end of the movement was removed and therefore the performer's personality as well (De Langen 102). Then, the intentions remain invisible and a potentiality is created. Thus, the adoption of the Zero in mime shows similarities to the interpretation of the *Gestus* by Elin Diamond in which the body is at a distance and is utopian in nature through the deconstruction of the norm at work. Because rather than enacting certain movements from daily life, as the often comedic and expressive pantomime would offer, modern mime by Decroux and Dutch mime practitioners is more abstract and is able to deconstruct certain



ways of thinking in the audience. Although Decroux' mime practice was not political in nature, the Dutch mime interpreted movements (or rather the lack of movements in the Zero and standing still) as metaphors. Standing still, removing the performer's identity and lacking a beginning and end of movement was seen as the opposite of 'moving along' and signified anarchy (De Langen 104). Similarly, the Gestus informs the audience on hidden meanings by demonstrating actions rather than immersing the audience in a fictive story. Thus, a utopian performative is created through the deconstruction of the norms in mime performance through depersonification and invisibility.

Furthermore, the purity in mime is a metaphor for existentialism and the body in motion for humanity as a whole (Leabhart 49). Jill Dolan in her book on utopia describes how the aesthetics of performances that exhilarate and are in that sense utopian, convey affective and effective feelings for humanity as a whole and an abstract notion of community (Dolan 2). This conveying of affect is apparent in modern mime as well, through the body in motion or the standing still signifying larger themes such as anarchy and overall, humanity. However, the connection between mime, the Zero and the utopia does not merely lie in the metaphor of humanity. Its connection lies in the making tangible of time and space of mime as well. In her book, Dolan mentions the following:

*"The emptiest stage in a theater can be filled with utopic visions. The body of an actor treading those boards can always make a gesture of utopian performativity."* (Dolan 164)

A clear connection between the modern mime by Etienne Decroux and the Dutch mime from the 60's becomes noticeable here. The body in mime performs a utopia by the visions it embodies in being merely a naked body on stage.

Within the concept of Zero, standing still is an important notion. This standing still can have two functions according to De Langen in her book about Dutch thinking about mime. One of them is to extend the time the body is standing still in order to make the stillness seem dynamic by emphasizing everything that is happening during. The other function is to use the standing still in gaps in between movements in order for the audience to escape their current point of view and become attentive (De Langen 118). Through this standing still, the performer creates a direct line between them and the audience and makes the moment palpable (De Langen 118). Although Decroux did not interpret the standing still as being something more than striving for objectivity, Dutch mime practitioners emphasized the importance of standing still to return to the here and now. Instead of being about personal expression, mime is about the passing of time (De Langen 119). Since the Zero is the vanishing point and starting point of movement, a chain of Zeros makes for a control over time (De Langen 119). This existentialist viewpoint is central to the Dutch interpretation of Decroux' teachings. Decroux thought of mime and standing still as being part of an abstract symbolic

expression while the Dutch thinking of mime is about body as it is, a body (De Langen 120). In Muñoz' writings about the utopia, he notes that queerness does not reside in 'straight time' that dictates the lives of queer people, but in an ecstatic time in which one feels ecstasy through pleasure but more importantly, contemplation of the past, present and future (Muñoz 32). The Zero is able to make the audience contemplate about time as well through the extension of time in the lack of movement and standing still. Thus, the straight temporarily and spatiality is being deconstructed in the Zero and thus, mime performance. Again, the Zero surrounds itself with an aura of the not-yet-conscious by going against straight time and the heteronormative norms of contemporary society. Especially in the Dutch interpretation of Decroux' teachings with its political nature.

As mentioned above in the section about Muñoz' perceptions of the utopia, the difference between possibility and potentiality is that a potentiality is a nonbeing that is present, but not existing in the present tense since it exists in the horizon. In contrast, a possibility is connected to the presence since it is something that might happen soon. In the context of a performance, a potential is something that lingers after watching the performance (Muñoz 99). In the use of Zero in mime, every non-movement marks potential and possibility. In De Langen's book, the two terms are used interchangeably similarly to Dolan's book. Muñoz takes potentiality further into the horizon as something that has not been manifested yet. However, I argue that the Zero emits both possibility and potentiality in Muñoz' use of the terms. According to De Langen, Dutch mime practitioners value the presentness that modern mime and the Zero affectively bring about. Furthermore, De Langen mentions how a mime player is both present and absent at the same time in Decroux' interpretation of mime. Absent through the removal of personality, identity and earthly needs such as sexuality, and present through the focus on the intellect and symbolic expression by focusing solely on the body as an instrument. Since inner expression is gone, the neutral body in Zero becomes godlike (De Langen 58). Thus, the possibility lies in what movement may come next since the body is used as an instrument and is focused on 'playing' in the present moment. The potentiality lies in the larger than life meaning behind the Zero through the absence of identity. Although the Dutch mime thinking is more about the body as it is, the Zero is still thought of as something that conveys existentialist thoughts, meaning that there is potentiality in the non-movement as well.

When it comes to mime performance which works with the body as an instrument to symbolize certain ideas, it is important to take queerness into account. Namely, Judith Butler and her work about gender performativity makes clear that all genders are constructed by norms, procedures and rules in society, but that people always act within the norm, either in compliance or resistance (Rosenberg et al., 5). The Zero strives towards a certain kind of freedom in which the strive towards objectivity and neutrality are central towards providing that freedom. This use of Zero in mime tries to break the norms constructed by society, even though it is never completely achievable, through its

ability to remove a beginning and ending and showing a limitless potentiality. A utopia is being performed in mime, the utopia that is in relation to a queer futurity which will stay at the horizon, something that is not here yet. Through elevating to the Zero and with that, standing still, one continuously asks questions, reorients and chooses a new direction.

### **Chapter three: Contemporary Dutch mime thinking and the Utopia**

In the last and final chapter of the thesis, I will turn from the thinking in mime by Dutch mime practitioners from the 20th century to the thinking about mime in the 21st century and in what way this thinking relates to a utopian thinking. I will answer the following question: “In what ways does the Dutch interpretation of Zero of contemporary mime practitioners relate to a utopian way of thinking?” By asking this question, I will delve into the contemporary thinking about mime and in particular the concept of Zero, and in how far there exists a connection to the utopia. In order to answer the question of this chapter, I will start with analyzing the literature from the previous chapter about utopia by Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz, and examine how the concept of Zero in contemporary mime thinking correlates with utopian thinking. I will first base this on my analysis of the academic debate of this topic, viewings of contemporary mime performances and on interviews and personal conversations with professional mime performers Gerben Vaillant and Suzan Boogaerdt. Afterwards, I will analyze the interviews and conversations held with the same mime performers about the relation between Zero and the utopia. The interview will be academically formed, based on the book *Qualitative Research Methods for Media Studies* by Bonnie Brennen. In the final part of this chapter, I will summarize my findings of the interview together with the analysis of relating the concept of Zero to that of utopia in a contemporary Dutch context of mime thinking.

As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, I will start by explaining how the thinking about mime and the Zero of Gerben Vaillant and Suzan Boogaerdt relate to the utopian thinking of Dolan and Muñoz. In order to form this connection, I will return to the philosophies of Dolan and Muñoz of the second chapter and to the personal conversations I had with mime performers Gerben Vaillant and Suzan Boogaerdt next to the mime performances I have visited.

#### *Anything Can Happen in Mime*

Starting with mime artist Gerben Vaillant, whose ideas on the use of Zero in mime I previously mentioned in chapter one, there exists a connection between Vaillants comprehension and practice of mime which will be laid out below. According to Vaillant, the Zero is a physical mode of being in which you become highly aware of the space and people around you, and of the here and now. The way the light hits the performer’s face, the way the wind blows, the composition of colors in the space: everything has an influence on what is going to happen next (Vaillant). What happens next, does not have to be a movement of the body, but it can be anything. You might start to dance with the other performer in the room, make music somehow, start to fight, or start to say something. Vaillant is an interdisciplinary performer and he mentions how contemporary mime has become interdisciplinary

as well. The Zero, according to Vaillant, has become very fluid as well (Vaillant). Since Vaillants generation (Millennial) has become more and more critical of the teachings of deceased old white men who wrote down their theories (such as Etienne Decroux), today's Dutch mime school graduates choose their own interpretations of the Zero and put a lot of their own identities in their mime performances (Vaillant). Vaillant's interpretation of the Zero and mime in general has thus become more fluid as well. For him, the Zero is about reading everything that is going on in a space and what in turn, might do to the body. If the performer slightly tilts their head, what could it physically do to the other performer or to the spectator? The Zero is the benchmark in which we all meet each other and the creation of the possibility to read the next thing that could happen, the potentiality of the moment (Vaillant).

Vaillant sees the Zero he describes as a form of freedom. That nothing can become anything without excluding any external influence (Vaillant). This relates to Etienne Decroux's thoughts on the Zero in how he values the body and mind being in the here and now and how he wants to create nothing into something through the use of the body as instrument (De Langen 43). Frits Vogels, as mentioned in the first chapter, adopted the subjective mime of Decroux and similarly to Vaillant, believed that Zero is the basis from which something wonderful could happen by instinctively responding to the environment surrounding the body on stage (De Langen 146). The difference between Vogels, Decroux and Vaillant's perception of the Zero, is that Vaillant does not only refer to the body when he mentions how anything could happen from the Zero, but rather includes any artform or happening which Vaillant calls the interdisciplinarity of mime (Vaillant).

### *The Alchemy of Zero*

Vaillant notes that in his perception of the Zero, it does not rule out any language from the space surrounding the performer. It does not exclude the lighting, the music, the coughs in the audience: everything has an influence on the performer and the spectator. This can be connected to Jill Dolan and her usage of the concept 'utopian performatives'. Namely, according to Dolan utopian performatives are made up of a mixture of form, content, context and location (Dolan 8). Dolan calls this mixture an 'alchemy' that is never finished and thus presents itself as a doing and a process (Dolan 8). The form, for example, consists in Decroux's perception of modern mime, of a lack of props and other mise-en-scène in order to create an empty stage. Vaillant values this lack of props and empty stage as we can see from his performance *On almost every page* in which the stage looks like a rehearsal space rather than a performance space. In such a space, it becomes easier to sense the liveliness and awareness of the here and now, because the focus is solely on the performer's body. This empty stage also creates the illusion of something unfinished and therefore can be seen as an

utopian performative, since everything can still become from this sense of something unfinished. This sense of potentiality surrounding an empty stage and this type of atmosphere provides a certain kind of freedom that both Dolan and Vaillant call utopian. The sense of liveliness Vaillant talks about, is the moment in the performance Dolan calls a utopian performative which is a fleeting moment that can only be partially grasped (Dolan 6). The fleetingness is what the Zero makes possible: the endless potential that exists only in the moment.

### *Oddball behavior of Vaillant*

This fluidity of the atmosphere in a performance and mime making process can be connected to how queerness plays a role in the utopia according to José Esteban Muñoz. According to Vaillant, queerness does not follow a linear timeline because it is fluid. For queers, gender can change at any time, but according to the current norms of society you must pick one gender throughout your life. According to the norm, you cannot identify as non-binary and identify as a woman later in life. In his making processes and performances, Vaillant tries to create a different reality together with his performers for people who do not feel like they belong in the current world. A world that does not exist yet, a utopia. The Zero helps create this world, since it does not follow the linear time structure of the current system. Instead, it creates a basis from which you can move in different directions and come back to as well. There is not one truth according to Vaillant's perspective on the Zero (Vaillant). Here it becomes clear how this view on the Zero is strongly connected to Muñoz's perception of the utopia. As mentioned in the previous chapter, a utopia can only exist outside of what Muñoz calls 'straight time' (Muñoz 32). The ecstatic time of the queers is about contemplation of the past, present and future and breaking the norm of the current system we live in (Muñoz 32). The Zero provides the performer with a taste of another experience of time in which standing still is central.

Muñoz explains this relation to queerness earlier by stating that performativity and the utopia both question the norm and by questioning the norm, creating a 'doing' that implies a futurity. A better, alternative world that is not here yet. Muñoz visualizes the 'doing' of a utopian performative as a becoming as well. Something that is becoming the future apart from gesturing towards a future. To come back to the ecstatic time, Muñoz calls the behavior of people who fall outside the norm as 'oddball behaviour' (Muñoz 26). The queer utopian element in performance not only questions, but challenges the status quo by performing with odd and strange elements (Muñoz 26). Vaillant mentions how in his making process, he values the performers he works with and the atmosphere they create together, because they value Vaillant's odd way of being and thinking (Vaillant). Thus, Vaillant attempts to create an atmosphere in which 'oddball behaviour' can reside.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this perception of utopia relates to the performativity theory of Judith Butler. By pointing out the normative structures that formed the performing of certain gender roles (what Butler is doing), you automatically criticize the epistemological. According to Muñoz, through reading the performativity, you start to actively criticize the norm. This criticism is a 'doing' in the future, a futurity. This activism in pointing out certain normalized structures turns into a 'becoming'. While the Zero in mime is being perceived literally as 'standing still' by many Dutch mime practitioners from the 60's, some mime performers such as Will Spoor thought of the moments between, before and after the standing still as metaphors for the body and mind. According to Spoor, the art does not lie in the movements, but in the standing still, because many things happen during that time (De Langen 89). Thus, it is the literal 'not doing' in mime that can symbolize a 'doing' and 'becoming', since the Zero provides the canvas from which movements are created that 'do' something to the body of the performer, the other performer and the spectator.

### *Boogaerdt and Universality*

According to De Langen, a mime performer attempts to become a neutral body on stage by using the Zero as a technique (De Langen 48). By attempting this, they try to go against the gender performativity people are brought up with, therefore performing a 'doing' and 'becoming'. Mime and dance performance collective Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot value the neutrality and objectivity central to the Zero. They think that through the use of Zero in their performance making, they can reach a universality that symbolizes a new world we could live in. In other words, a utopia: an ideal world that is not there yet. Although they are aware they might not achieve a complete neutrality, the attempt thereof is already a utopian approach. In their performance *Underworlds* for example, they are searching for a new communal space that is non-binary. In this atmosphere that they created on stage, the performers do not show clear culturally inscribed femininity or masculinity in their movements.

However, the focus does not lie on the performers during the performance, but rather on the mediatized visuals the makers have created. With an extremely high use of colors and overstimulating visuals on a screen that suggest an alternative world, with sinister music playing and an unusual set of props that blend the digital reality of today's world (with lights surrounding a camera used for YouTube videos) and a supernatural world (oddly shaped props), Boogaerdt and van der Schoot create an atmosphere that you can either feel at home with or feel alienated from (Boogaerdt and van der Schoot). According to Vaillant, Boogaerdt and van der Schoot are professionals when it comes to creating an alternative world on stage (Vaillant). While Vaillant is still not quite there yet in his own words, Boogaerdt and van der Schoot are able to form a utopia on stage. What they do have in common, is that Vaillant as well as Boogaerdt and van der Schoot, work with interdisciplinarity in

their mime making. Vaillant explains that the Zero does not exclude any language (Vaillant). In Boogaerdt and Van der Schoot's case, this includes the use of technology and visual art.

Although the world that is created implies a universality and is thus non-binary, the Zero does not become very visible on stage except through the use of masks for the performers. According to Boogaerdt, they adopt the Zero as a practice in their rehearsals by dehumanizing their performers' body (Boogaerdt). By doing this, they explore existential questions about humanity. This connects to Decroux, who used the body as an instrument and attempted to get rid of identity to symbolize humanity as a whole (De Langen 48).

In a conversation with Suzan Boogaerdt, she talks about how this neutrality is strongly related to their search for the non-binary. When a body becomes neutral, there are endless possibilities of what is to come. The potentiality, according to Boogaerdt, lies in the search for a heightened sense of neutrality (Boogaerdt). This is similar to Vaillant's understanding of the Zero when he mentions how the Zero is a compass for the potentiality that lies in the room. Anything can happen from nothing. This correlates with utopian thinking by Dolan as well, in which the utopian performatives lift audiences up with the possibility of the future (Dolan 6).

Furthermore, Boogaerdt's search for the universal and non-binary also correlates with Muñoz's understanding of utopia being a horizon in which queerness resides. Since striving for a certain level of neutrality through the Zero goes against the norm of gender construction and deconstructs normative ideologies overall, it implies an alternative world in which queerness can thrive. Wherein there exists an 'ecstatic time' that is more fluid, relating to the Zero in mime which is also fluid through its contemplation of what is to come and being able to reorient (Muñoz 32).

In contemporary Dutch mime, the concept of Zero transcends its origins in Etienne Decroux's teachings to become an important element of utopian thinking. Decroux's Zero strived towards a neutral, universal state by depersonalizing the performer's body. However, today's Dutch mime practitioners, like Gerben Vaillant and the duo Suzan Boogaerdt and Bianca van der Schoot, reinterpret Zero in a way that fits a utopian thinking.

Gerben Vaillant's performance demonstrates how Zero serves as a fluid state of readiness and potential. Vaillant's interdisciplinary performances embody Jill Dolan's idea of utopian performatives: moments in performance that lift the audience up and present them with new possibilities. Vaillant views Zero as a compass to notice everything that is possible in the room, creating atmospheres where freedom exists.



Boogaerdt and van der Schoot interpret the neutrality in Zero more positively than Vaillant and use the Zero to deconstruct traditional norms and explore existential questions. Their approach aligns with Muñoz's vision of utopia as a horizon, filled with limitless possibilities. In their performances, the Zero is not just a point of neutrality but a way to create alternative realities and challenge binary perceptions of identity.

These contemporary interpretations of Zero in Dutch mime underscore its role as a dynamic and inclusive concept. Rather than merely a neutral starting point, Zero becomes a compass of fluidity and potential where traditional constraints can no longer reside and create an atmosphere where utopian ideals can be strived for. Thus, the evolution of the Zero in Dutch mime consists of clearing the way for new kinds of spaces where queerness and with that, a utopia, can be formed.

## Conclusion

To provide an answer to the research question of “How can the concept of Zero as interpreted by contemporary mime artists be understood as a way to create utopia?”, I can state the following: contemporary mime thinking embraces the fluid, the unfinished, and the 'not-yet' as utopian qualities of the Zero. The Zero provides today's mime performers and audiences alike with a basis to explore utopian elements through creating a high sense of awareness and liveliness that can only exist outside of the norms of the current society. Although the strict mime training techniques of Etienne Decroux impose an extreme sense of neutrality and objectivity, it is in fact the subjective mime of Decroux that aligns with contemporary mime performers and their practice. The subjective mime is about creating an atmosphere by responding to a mixture of content, form and other elements surrounding the performer. While the objective training is an integral part of mime according to mime practitioners Frits Vogels and Gerben Vaillant, it is the subjectivity that creates the limitless potential that can differ for every performer. When an audience member coughs, the performers might respond to that in different ways. The Zero is the compass that notices all of the potentiality in the room. It is a form of readiness to accept everything that is to come.

### *Summary of the chapters*

The first chapter examines the evolution of the concept of Zero in mime since the 1950's and how contemporary mime artists interpret and adopt this concept. It explores how the pantomime was often expressive in its body language, told stories comically and included spoken dialogue (“Mime and Pantomime”). Mime performer Jacques Copeau and his student Etienne Decroux distanced themselves from the traditional mime and thus began the modern mime (Leabhart 26). However, Decroux transcended Copeau's ideas and focused on the beauty of poorness in mime and theatre. Decroux coined the zéro, a form of nakedness on an empty stage (De Langen 46). According to Decroux, the Zero is a state of neutrality and depersonification that can be achieved through training specific techniques such as the minimizing of facial expressions, the emphasis on the trunk and the use of masks and neutral clothing (De Langen 48). Zero is not only a position of standing still, but a concept that can be applied to every movement, as a starting point, a resting point or end point, from which a feeling of endless possibilities arises (De Langen 44). The Dutch mime-tradition adopted Decroux's concept of Zero, but was often interpreted as a literal position of the body (De Langen 90). Dutch mime artists such as Will Spoor and Frits Vogels put their own spin to Decroux's ideas and used Zero to explore absurdism, sexuality and a balance between objectivity and subjectivity (Leabhart, Decroux, 65; De Langen 94-146). In the 80's of the 20th century there existed criticism on neutrality and objectivity of Zero and the strict discipline of the mime practice. Performance groups

such as Nieuw West explored the borders of Zero and emphasized subjectivity and disruption (De Langen 35). They searched for a utopian kind of freedom in the mime, similarly to how mime today, but with a different perception of what is utopian. This leads me to the next chapter.

In the second chapter, the relation between Zero and utopian thinking in performances is explored. It covers a discussion of the original connotations of utopia by Thomas More and the philosophies of Ernst Bloch, Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz. Dolan emphasizes the importance of ‘utopian performatives’. Moments in a performances that lift the audience up and convey feelings of hope and possibilities (Dolan 6). Muñoz transcends Dolan’s perception of utopia and connects the concept with queerness. He states that both queerness and utopia are going against a normative ‘straight time’ and queerness can only excel in an ‘ecstatic time’ in which one is able to contemplate their past, present and future and live in the here and now (Muñoz 32). The connection to Zero lies in the manner in which Zero can depersonalize the performer, manipulate time and space and create a feeling of potential, similar to the effects of Brecht’s alienation effect. Brecht’s alienation effect, namely, disrupts normative ideologies and opens up utopian possibilities which can be done through the Zero with its alienation to straight time. The second chapter concludes that Zero in mime can be seen as a utopian performative that catches a glimpse of an alternative, more inclusive future.

The last chapter examines how contemporary Dutch mime artists perceive and use the Zero in relation to utopian thinking. The focus lies on two contemporary mime artists: Gerben Vaillant and Suzan Boogaerdt. Vaillant interprets the Zero as a fluid state of being, a ‘compass of potentiality’ that welcomes all external influences (Vaillant). This perspective joints together with Dolan’s ideas about utopian performatives in which the emphasis lies on the creation of an atmosphere of freedom and possibilities. The performance collective Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot use Zero to deconstruct traditional norms of Zero and search for a universality and a non-binary approach of identity (Boogaerdt). Their work connects to Muñoz’s vision of utopia as a horizon, filled with limitless potentiality. The chapter concludes that Zero in contemporary Dutch mime is a dynamic and inclusive concept that transcends the original teachings of Decroux. Zero serves as a compass of fluidity and potential, that can strive for utopian ideals and atmospheres can be created in which queerness and utopia can take form.

### *Limitations of the Research*

In my search for findings that would either support or dismiss my thesis statement, I have adopted the fitting research methods that would lead me to this conclusion, such as a semi-structured interview type (Brennen 29), analyzing performances and writing literature reviews. However, since the research is about thinking about mime in contemporary Dutch mime practitioners, it lacks a larger

amount of interviews of mime artists that can give a broad scope of information on how their thinking about the Zero and utopia innovates today's mime scene.

### *What Comes Next?*

Mime performer Gerben Vaillant taught me that in mime there are no conclusions. Only open-ended limitless interpretation of an atmospheric impression created in the room. Although I am providing this thesis with a conclusion, in light of the contemporary thinking about mime, I will also end this thesis with an open-ended question from which anything can still arise. Namely, this research is merely a small step towards examining the change Dutch mime is undergoing today. In my conversation with Vaillant, he told me that mime making is similar to the way in which philosopher Gilles Deleuze writes down his philosophies. Moreover, mime making is similar to Deleuze's philosophies themselves. Vaillant describes how throughout the process of mime making, the Zero functions as a compass from which any new or old direction can be taken. The Zero reinvents itself at any point in time. Similarly to this process, is Deleuze's and philosopher Félix Guattari's concept of the assemblage (Deleuze and Guattari 24). This theory implies that there is a multiplicity to agency which means that humans act in connection to the socio-material network external to the content of the body (De Assis & Giudici 12). Furthermore, this assemblage consists of heterogeneous components parts that are not things by rather semiotic, material and social flows. These flows then consist of multiple blocks and series that make for an assemblage that are ever changing. The assemblage is an entity that is fluid and keeps moving and transforming into something else (De Assis & Giudici 17). Vaillant uses the assemblage theory in his process by creating lines that are connected to Zero's, in other words, compasses of potentiality, which notice the influences of the socio-material network external to the content of the body. Thus, contemporary mime thinking might entail more than a utopia and requires an in-depth research that goes beyond the academic writing structure, to a Deleuzian kind of writing.

### *The Beginning of the Future in Mime*

In conclusion, the research explores the intersection of mime and utopian thinking, particularly through the lens of queer futurity. The concept of Zero in mime shows a parallel to the idea of utopia as a canvas of potentiality and unfinished possibilities, leading to interdisciplinarity in contemporary mime. Contemporary mime performances create a utopian atmosphere on stage by embodying the 'not-yet-conscious' and bring about a feeling of hope for an alternative world. Scholars like Jill Dolan and José Esteban Muñoz argue that such performances offer glimpses of

utopian freedom and challenge existing social norms, connecting to the study of queerness. Namely, Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity and Bertolt Brecht's alienation effect show how mime and performance can disrupt normative ideologies, particularly through the use of Zero. Butler writes that gender is constructed through a stylized repetition of behaviors (Butler 519), which aligns with the performativity of mime and Zero that deconstructs identity by placing the performer in the here and now. This placement in the here and now disrupts a linear 'straight' time which Muñoz writes about (Muñoz 32).

Furthermore, the contemporary thinking in mime through Vaillant highlights the subjectivity that mime teacher Frits Vogels adopted in accordance with Decroux's teachings, because the Zero serves as a kind of radar that can oversee all of the potential in the room, but what follows depends on the performer's and that of others (Vaillant). Although Vaillant values the objective practice by Decroux as well, similarly to Vogels, it leans towards a subjective interpretation of the Zero. Meanwhile, Boogaardt highlights objectivity and neutrality by striving for universality in their performances and rehearsals, which creates the queer utopian atmosphere full of possibility that Vaillant appreciates but feels he fails to achieve (Vaillant). I disagree with Vaillant and believe he does achieve a high sense of utopia in his performances, through his anticipatory elements and process of making mime in which he creates an atmosphere wherein anyone can practice their 'oddball behavior' that Muñoz mentions as well (Muñoz 26).

Thus, the study highlights the dynamic nature of the Zero in mime, showing its journey from a strict physical technique to a rich, theoretical framework that continues to inspire contemporary performance. The thesis predicts an importance in the continuation of the study of mime and the Zero and its ability to explore the philosophical notion of utopia. Mime performance and the Zero offers us spectators merely a glimpse of a different world while mime practitioners are at the brink of this possible future.

(15137 words)

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## Appendix

### Interview questions

Interview questions formulated for interview with Gerben Vaillant.

#### Starting questions

1. Could you introduce yourself and what your life story is in a nutshell?
2. How did you become interested in researching your body in relation to mime? Where did your fascination for mime performance come from?
3. Could you tell me more about your previous work and the work you are busy with right now? What are recurring themes that interest you in your mime practice?

#### Open-ended questions

First, I will explain more about my research into the Zero in mime and its relation to utopian thinking to provide him with former knowledge I gained during my research and to give him an idea what the next questions will be about.

1. Could you tell me something about what you have learned during your theoretical classes at the Mime Opleiding about the concept of Zero? What are the philosophical ideas behind it according to what you have learned?
2. What did you learn about the mime practitioner Etienne Decroux and his ideas on neutrality and objectivity in mime?
3. Follow-up: In your view, how has the understanding of "Zero" evolved from Decroux's time to contemporary mime practices? Or: Can you identify any significant shifts or transformations in the interpretation of "Zero" since the 1960s?
4. What is the difference between the way you have studied the concept of Zero during your course and your perception of the Zero now?
5. Can you tell me more about how you adopt the Zero in your mime practice?  
Tell him about your perception on Vaillant's performances and the themes he uses
6. Can you tell me something about how the themes in your performances could reflect the concept of Zero we have just discussed?
7. What do you know about the philosophical concept of the Utopia? (If he does not know a lot about the concept, tell him your findings on the subject.



## Research based questions

1. How do you address the idea of neutrality and objectivity in your work, especially in light of Decroux's and the Dutch interpretations?
2. In what ways do you think Decroux's approach to "Zero" is relevant or outdated in today's mime practice?
3. Do you believe the Zero can be a form of protest or anarchy, as interpreted in Dutch mime traditions? How do you incorporate this aspect into your practice?
4. How do you utilize the concept of "Zero" in your rehearsal and performance process?
5. Follow-up question: Decroux emphasized objectivity and depersonalization in mime. How do you balance this with expressing individuality or subjectivity in your performances?
6. Follow-up: How do you integrate "Zero" with other mime techniques or principles in your work?
7. Can you describe a specific moment in a performance where the concept of "Zero" played a crucial role?
8. Concluding question: How do you define the concept of Zero in the context of your mime practice?
9. In your opinion, how do the philosophical underpinnings of "Zero" align with or diverge from political themes in contemporary mime?
10. How do you use the Zero to express themes of equality, freedom, or other utopian ideals in your performances?

About the utopia:

11. Utopia is often seen as an ideal but unattainable vision. How do you see the concept of utopia reflected in mime, particularly through the use of the Zero?
12. In your view, does mime offer a way to envision or even temporarily achieve a utopian state? How does the Zero contribute to this vision?
13. Ernst Bloch described utopia as a potential that is always in the making. How do you relate this idea to the Zero in mime? Does the Zero represent a potential that is perpetually evolving?

Dolan:

14. Dolan talks about "utopian performatives" as moments in performance that lift the audience towards a vision of a better future. Have you experienced or created such moments in your work with the Zero? Can you share an example?

Muñoz:

15. Muñoz speaks about queerness as a horizon, something not yet realized but always in view. How do you see the Zero in mime aligning with this notion of futurity?

16. In what ways does the Zero allow you to challenge or disrupt the normative concepts of time and space in your performances, as Muñoz describes with "straight time"?  
Future:
17. Looking ahead, how do you see the role of mime and the Zero evolving in contemporary performance art?
18. What are your aspirations for how the Zero and the concept of utopia might shape the future of mime?

### **Interview with Gerben Vaillant**

Beaudine: Kun je jezelf introduceren?

Gerben: Ik ben Gerben Vaillant, geboren in 1994, dus ben net 30 geworden! Ik ben drie jaar geleden afgestudeerd aan de Mime Opleiding aan de Academie van Theater en Dans te Amsterdam. Daarvoor heb ik Docent Theater gedaan in Arnhem en afgemaakt. Afgelopen drie jaar ben ik bezig geweest met interdisciplinair performance maker en mime maker geworden. Daarnaast schrijf ik veel en doe een ontwikkelingstraject om mijn schrijverschap te ontdekken in Nijmegen en ben ik maker aan het huis van Frascati. En af en toe speel ik zelf. Dat is nieuw. Ik wilde namelijk alleen docent worden en toen ontdekte ik dat maken leuk zou zijn, en toen pas spelen.

Beaudine: Hoe ben je gefascineerd geraakt met mime, beweging en het lichaam als kunstvorm?

Op ArtEZ, 10 jaar geleden, ontdekte ik in derde jaar tijdens het maken van een amateurvoorstelling dat ik liever met dansers wilde werken. Ik kreeg veel vrijheid en ze zeiden ga maar doen. Toen ontdekte ik een grote liefde voor bewegen. Binnen de dans ben je niet zo gebonden aan wat alles betekent, want dat was juist mijn grote erge in theatermaken. Dat ik iets wilde maken dat heel abstract was met blokjes van hout. Mijn medestudenten probeerde erachter te komen wat alles betekende, maar ik dacht alleen: Het zijn blokjes hout en bruggen, waar heb je het over 'Wat betekent dit?' Het is iets. Dus dat was eigenlijk mijn eerste confrontatie met het feit dat theater zoals het daar bekend was, niet zo goed paste bij wie ik toen was. Dat ik liever wilde kijken en ervaren dan per se de hele tijd willen begrijpen wat alles betekent en interpreteren. Dat is natuurlijk een platte interpretatie van hoe de opleiding was, daar denk ik nu heel anders over. Maar daaruit ontdekte ik wat het was om te werken binnen dans. Daar vond ik veel vrijheid maar ook probleem, namelijk: hoe communiceer ik met een danser door bewegingen, lichaamstaal, vocabulaire in het fysieke zonder zelf danser te zijn. Want veel choreografen werken vanuit het eigen lichaam, maar ik ben nogal een stijve, 2 meter lange man (toen nog jongen): ik heb dat vocabulaire nog helemaal niet! Maar ik ontdekte wel dat ik door middel van taal en beelden een soort van museum kon maken van die dansers om daarbinnen te bewegen. Ik vond dat proces, dat ik toen tijdens het derde jaar van de docentenopleiding ontdekte, mega interessant. Dus mensen vertalen iets naar het fysieke, zonder dat zelf hoeft te doen. Toen studeerde ik daar af, en kreeg meer liefde voor het beeldende. Mijn voornemen was om de Mime oriëntatie-cursus te doen om beter te leren communiceren met het lichaam van een danser. Terwijl ik zelf geen danser hoeft te zijn en toen werd ik een beetje verliefd. Ik dacht dat ik niet kon spelen, maar toen merkte ik dat mijn hele beeld van het spel niet klopt bij wat mime dacht dat spel was. Ineens was een bepaalde manier van stilstaan goed materiaal, terwijl ik altijd ermee zat dat het idee van spel heel ouderwets was. Ineens had ik genoeg in mijn marge om te spelen. Ik werd verliefd op wat ik daar allemaal mee kan uitdrukken. Dus langzamerhand deed ik auditie en werd ik aangenomen.

Beaudine: Waar werd je dan zo verliefd op?

Gerben: Een sense van levendigheid. Van spelen op de vloer maar ook van anderen die spelen op de vloer. 'A sense of life' dat alles te maken had met het 'hier en nu'. Dat deed ieder moment. Dat alles wat in het hier en nu gebeurt, alles wat volgt kan bepalen. Een extreme levendigheid. Het moment dat je als speler voor een publiek staat, en iemand zou op dat moment beginnen te lachen, het gevoel gaf alsof vanaf dat punt de improvisatie volledig anders zou kunnen lopen dan als het heel stil zou blijven. Die extreme oplettendheid van het hier en nu geeft het gevoel van een bruisende levendigheid die ik daarvoor niet zo had gevoeld als speler en me ontzettend intrigeerde. Alsof de wind op het podium, de wind in zo'n repetitielokaal, precies die ene vlaag kon bepalen waar de hele improvisatie heen zou gaan. En dat vibrerende is een levendigheid die ik niet op andere plekken terug zie.

Beaudine: Dat is echt pure improvisatie eigenlijk.

Gerben: Ja, eigenlijk wel. Een écht spel. Zonder voorgenomen betekenissen.

Beaudine: Ja, dat heb je natuurlijk wel met iets als De Vloer Op-improvisatie. Als ik zo'n scène zou maken, moet je je aan bepaalde voorwaarden voldoen, zoals het bezitten van een wenteling. In mime kan het echt anders zijn.

Gerben: Daar zeg je iets interessants. Waar je gelijk in hebt in die vergelijking, is denk ik dat je bij een De Vloer Op-improvisatie moet vallen binnen de regels van wat eerder gebeurd is. Het zal niet voorkomen dat een speler ineens zegt: 'Maar ik ben helemaal niet je moeder, ik ben altijd je zus geweest! Ik ben eigenlijk geen mens, ik ben een boom!' Dat zal niet snel voorkomen. Waar ik verliefd op ben binnen de mime, is het vergelijken met het verhalende en het fysieke. Het zou ineens van taal en spel naar dans kunnen leiden. Alsof de realiteit andere regels heeft. Dat vind ik heel belangrijk. Ik denk dat de realiteit een veel minder vaste structuur heeft dan dat we vaak representeren in het ouderwetse theater. Hoe ik de wereld ervaar, is veel vliegende, veel meer van rubber gemaakt, dan de vaste structuur van het narratieve.

Beaudine: Kun je me meer vertellen over het werk waar je nu mee bezig bent, en waar je mee bezig was? Wat zijn thema's en onderzoeken die steeds terugkomen in je werk?

Gerben: Dat ben ik mezelf nu ook aan het afvragen. Als jonge maker moet je veel tekstjes over jezelf schrijven van 'ik sta hier voor', 'ik wil dit onderzoeken', maar eerlijkheid gebied me wel om te zeggen dat dat niet klopt. Dat ik eigenlijk tast in het duister en niet weet wat voor thema's ik behandel, is voor mij nodig om niet te gaan peinzen over dingen die eigenlijk niet meer belangrijk voor mij zijn. Dus in vorm probeer ik altijd een vuur te volgen die dan brandt. In mijn vorige werk probeerde ik meerdere dingen uit. Wat centraal stond was de eindeloze parade aan jongens die voorbij komen en weer weggaan uit mijn leven. En dat is een beetje zoals ieder leven wel verloopt, dat mensen komen en gaan. Dat vind ik een bizarre dynamiek. Hoe dat eruitziet als ik die mensen die komen en gaan achter elkaar zou monteren, is een soort parade. In die voorstelling betrok ik dat op liefde, relaties en intimiteit en dat je op een gegeven moment ontdekt: oh ja, na deze liefde komt weer iemand anders. En daar moet je dan maar oké mee zijn, maar op het moment zelf lijken alle relaties die nog komen minder uniek, en daar ging de voorstelling een beetje over. Mijn werk maakt sfeerimpressies zonder conclusies te trekken. En dat is ook de reden waarom mijn inhoudelijk antwoord over wat die voorstelling was, niet zo heel helder is. Want eigenlijk hield ik de hele tijd een gedicht in mijn hoofd tijdens het maken. Een gedicht van Frank O'Hara genaamd Meditations in an Emergency. Dat gedicht gaat alle kanten op. Het is een liefdesgedicht, maar eigenlijk meer een heartbroken gedicht. En er zijn

delen die pathetisch lijken, die plat zijn, er zijn dingen die bijna heilig zijn. Er zijn dingen die ik niet begrijp, die scholars na heel veel jaren studie ook nog steeds niet begrijpen aan dat gedicht. Maar dat gedicht heeft een dynamiek van complete overgaves. Jezelf compleet binnenstebuiten keren. Met alle inconsequenties, met alle incoherenties van dingen, jezelf eigenlijk al je ingewonnen op tafel leggen. Voilà, dit is het. En ik wilde die dynamiek toepassen op het probleem van die eindeloze parade van liefdes en die vreemdheid. Maar ik ben er heel benieuwd van hoe fucking vaag dit klinkt. (14:39) En hoe nietzeggend het ook klinkt. Maar dat is denk ik ook wel de regels van poëzie ergens ofzo. Dus dat mag dan wel, denk ik.

Beaudine: Ja, ik denk het ook.

Gerben: Oké, dankjewel.

Beaudine: En dan gaan we nu meer in op mijn onderzoek. Over de zero dus en de mime.

En in relatie tot het utopische denken.

Dus mijn eerste vraag. Het gaat over wat je misschien al bij de mime opleiding hebt geleerd over het gebruik van de zero. En wat ideeën zijn achter wat je hebt geleerd daar op die opleiding. Wat je nu ook nog zou gebruiken in je werk.

Gerben: Dus welke ideeën van de mime over zero ik nu nog steeds gebruik.

Beaudine: Ja en over nadenkt.

Gerben: Ja, de belangrijkste lessen waar ik dan onmiddellijk aan denk zijn die van Irene Schelpacker. En ik moet even goed denken hoor. Ik neem even een goed minuutje om hierover na te denken, want het is veel.

Het allerbelangrijkste is het opmerken van hoe je zelf als speler, maar ook hoe de hele ruimte, jouw lichaam op dat moment aan het lezen is. Dus als we praten over die nul als basis toestand. Oh man dit is zo complex. Ja, de zero is eigenlijk het canvas waarin eigenlijk alle aanwezigen in de ruimte klaar staan om te lezen.

Wat betekent dit moment? Dat is hoe ik met name de lessen van Irene Schelpacker interpreteerde.

Waarin je in zero staat en dan in zero gaat rondlopen.

Heel traag ga je inclinaties en rotaties met je hoofd maken. En die nulstand die daar dan voor zit is eigenlijk de openheid om te kunnen lezen wat dit betekent. Wat betekent het als ik mijn hoofd ineens til of een klein stukje naar links draai. Dus eigenlijk jij en ik die allebei tegelijkertijd als toeschouwer

en performer merken dat dit iets betekent. Met voor mij geen bedoelingen opgeplakt, behalve de openheid van wat betekent dit als ik dit nou tegenover jou doe.

Wat betekent dit nu als ik dit tegenover jou doe (*Gerben tilt zin kin omhoog*). Wordt het ineens heel asociaal en gevaarlijk op een bepaalde manier? Als ik dit doe kijk ik op je neer.

Maar het kan mogelijk ook iets anders betekenen. Maar ik moet die openheid van de zero zien te blijven behouden. Het is je ijkpunt van waar we allemaal elkaar even treffen om de mogelijkheid tot het volgende woord te lezen. Dat is denk ik wel heel erg wat ik meeneem in mijn werk.

Als ik dan denk aan het utopische, dan zitten er heel veel onverwachte dingen.

Beaudine: Ik heb ook nog meer vragen wat daar ook nog wel naartoe kan leiden.

Gerben: Oké, dat is goed. Ik heb denk ik ook nog meer antwoorden op deze. Maar dit is het eerste wat er nu in me opkomt. Dus dat is ook zo verwarrend. Je wil zo graag hierop een definitief antwoord geven.

Beaudine: Ja, dat is ook onmogelijk denk ik. Maar de vorige keer gebruikte je ook wel het woord canvas. En hoe je daarmee met meerdere mensen in de ruimte beweegt. Dus dat is wel hetzelfde. In jouw opzicht, denk jij dat het begrip van Zero geëvolueerd is van de tijd van Etienne Decroux naar nu? Heb je al een idee van wat dat zou kunnen zijn? Hoe dat anders is geïnterpreteerd hier in Nederland?

Gerben: Ik heb het vermoeden dat die Zero veel zachter geworden is.

Veel fluider. Waarom ik dat denk is ook omdat wij als studenten minder trouw zijn geweest aan, en minder onszelf commiteren aan een techniek of een wijsheid van iemand die er niet meer is. Dat is ook een beetje denk ik een tijdsdingetje. Dat wij als jonge generatie kritischer zijn geworden over wat witte oude mannen hebben gezegd die nu dood zijn. (22:47) Ik vind het heel moeilijk om me daar aan over te geven.

Maar ook iemand die pretendeert het zo erg te weten. Dat geeft al een beetje gekkige bijmaak in mijn mond, waardoor ik sneller in een kritische houding schiet. En ik denk dat dat ook een beetje kenmerkend is voor onze generatie. Waardoor wij ook anders daartoe zijn gaan verhouden. De huidige studenten zien het feit dat hij een dode witte man is, als vertrekpunt om ons er tegen te verzetten. Het verzet tegen het conformeren aan iemands gedachtegoed. Maar dat is dus ook precies wel een beetje een probleem nu.

Want ik denk dat je eerst iets tot je moet nemen voordat je erop kan antwoorden en er tegenaan kan schokken. Maar ik denk wel dat dat ervoor zorgt dat we nu per persoon andere leermeesters kiezen. Dus dat is denk ik een opleidingsdingetje.

Maar betrekking op die veranderende zero nu is natuurlijk inderdaad het bewustzijn een belangrijk aspect waar we het vorige keer ook over hadden. Het feit dat jouw lichaam, dat jij niet de maatstaf bent van het andere lichaam. Dat andere stemmen gehoord moeten worden. Dat speelt in alles door weet je wel.

Als het goed is, bevraag je echt gewoon alles. En daarom neem je ook zo'n traditie, zo'n verstroming minder serieus. Ja, ik weet het niet.

Maar juist het progressieve binnen het denken van Decroux, is het opmerken van het hier en nu. Wat betekent dit gebaar op dit moment wanneer ik hem uitvoer? Of wat doet, in plaats van wat betekent, dit gebaar? Wat doet mijn hoofd?

Ik vind het moeilijk om het woord utopie op mijn voorstelling te plakken. Het is te groot, omdat de utopie ook een specifieke sensibiliteit met zich meebrengt van vrijheid. Dus dat woord heeft zoveel smaak. Mensen hebben afgevraagd of het een toepassing is op mijn voorstelling. Maar dat komt denk ik ook omdat heel veel mensen mijn voorstellingen distribueren.

Beaudine: Utopie kan ook juist betekenen dat je tegen de norm in gaat tijdens een voorstelling en heel radicaal bent in voorstellingen.

Bijvoorbeeld in de jaren tachtig had de mime groep Nieuw-West een voorstelling gemaakt, dat Below Zero heette, en mensen gingen juist heel erg tegen dat neutrale in en vertoonden onverantwoordelijk gedrag, ook tegenover het publiek door middel van heftige interacties zoals door tegen toeschouwers te schreeuwen. En dat kan ook wel weer een utopie zijn, dat gewoon heel erg een andere wereld creëert, door tegen de norm in te gaan.

Gerben: Alles wat niet per se handelt volgens de regels van de werkelijkheid zoals we hem accepteren, is dan eigenlijk een beetje een utopie.

Beaudine: Ja, en als jij praat over jouw werk, denk ik ook dat er wel echt een utopie in zit.

Gerben: Marijn de Lange zei dat ook eens een keertje.

Zij wilde dat relateren aan de hand van Cruising Utopia's, die eerste pagina'. We moeten nog een keertje praten over hoe dat past bij jouw voorstelling, zei ze, want ik zie daar ook gelijkenissen zitten. En dat snapte ik toen beter dan dat ik het nu snap. Maar dat komt ook denk ik omdat het woord utopie zo erg in mijn hoofd kan veranderen.

Ik ben nu gewoon heel zwart-denkend over de wereld om me heen. En dat er in een politieke veiligheid utopie een ander woord is dan op het moment van wanneer 'shit de fan hits'.

Beaudine: Heb je ook een verschil ervaren tussen hoe je de zero hebt bestudeerd op je opleiding en hoe je er nu zelf naar kijkt? Of is het een beetje dat het daar is begonnen en dat je het nu ook zo ziet?

Gerben: Daar was de zero tastbaarder, omdat de zero ook een sensibiteit kan zijn. De zero is nu niet ongelooflijk voelbaar meer voor mij. Dat moment van spelen en niet weten of het links of rechtsom is, het moment van klaarstaan om te lezen wat het volgende moment zal zijn terwijl dit moment nog neutraal op een aard is, is een ongelooflijk fysieke gewaarwording om dat te voelen.

En die voelbaarheid van zero kwam het meeste naar voren in een klassituatie, in een training of in repetities waarin jij als acteur op de vloer staat. En omdat ik de afgelopen drie jaar niet zo vaak in zo'n constellatie in improvisaties heb gestaan of in lessen heb gestaan, is mijn idee van zero theoretischer geworden, omdat ik hem niet meer iedere dag voel. Dat is jammer, want eigenlijk denk ik dat mijn voorstellingen sterker worden door de zero als die dagelijkse voelbaarheid, die dagelijkse sensibiteit van de zero aanwezig zou zijn. Dat is ook de reden waarom ik eigenlijk weer zou moeten 'chicoenen' op dit moment. Dat ik iedere dag eigenlijk zou moeten 'chicoenen'. Dat is echt zo'n training waarbij je de zero goed voelt. Dan wiebel je van links naar rechts en moet je zoeken naar het midden van je voeten. Iedere keer weer opnieuw, zonder dat je concludeert, mijn voet is ongeveer daar in het midden.

Ieder moment weer opnieuw, ah mijn linkervoet, ah rechts, links, links. Het is echt een hele fysieke vorm van meditatie. En dat maak je extreem in het hier en nu.

En dat is wel een gewaarwording dat je eigenlijk moet blijven trainen. Maar je doet het niet.

Beaudine: Kun je misschien wat vertellen over hoe jij denkt dat de thema's de zero reflecteren? Het is iets dat je gebruikt in het proces van het maken.

Gerben: Ja, ik ben heel erg op zoek geweest. En ik denk dat ik dat nog steeds ben, maar minder expliciet. Ik ben heel erg op zoek naar manieren om te snappen wat de realiteit is. Hoe we daarover praten, wat de norm is, wat normatief is. Ook simpelweg uit het feit dat ik gewoon niet goed geplaatst ben in deze wereld. Ik heb soms het gevoel dat ik nogal op het toilet zat toen de regels van de wereld werden uitgelegd, en daarom gewoon permanent niet snap. Ik begrijp heel veel niet van hoe mensen handelen, hoe mensen doen.

Ik begrijp niet hoe consistent en coherent andere mensen de wereld snappen, ervaren, begrijpen. Dus eigenlijk die realiteit zien als een flinke laag beton. En ik heb dat nooit zo ervaren. Voor mij is de realiteit met de manier waarop ik mensen ervaar, mezelf ervaar in de wereld, eigenlijk constant een soort van fluïde, onbegrijpelijk, ontastbaar gevoel. Nogal vliegend, zwevend, zwemmend. Wat ik vaak doe in voorstellingen is dat ik, denk ik, vrij ouderwets, expressionistisch eigenlijk, probeer hoe ik de wereld ervaar, probeer ik eigenlijk als een soort van atmosfeer te vangen en dat dan neer te leggen.



Dus zo'n gedicht van Frank O'Hara, *Meditations in an Emergency*, voelt voor mij als een hele goede omschrijving van hoe de wereld werkt. Niet begrijpelijk in één taal, maar in meerdere systemen, meerdere talen. Tussen fysiek, tussen talige, tussen psychologische, tussen het sferische, tussen het metafysische in. Dansen tussen al die verschillende talen, is de enige manier waarop ik het kan begrijpen. En ik denk weleens dat, nou de vorm van utopie dan, waar ik me dan misschien wel schuldig aan ga maken, is proberen om dat te externaliseren, een wereld te creëren die zo voelt als dat ik hem ervaar. En daarmee merk ik dat andere mensen, die ook een beetje losgeslagen zijn of niet zo goed passen in de wereld, vaak die voorstellingen als een heel fijn iets ervaren.

Mijn doelgroep bestaat ook een beetje uit verdwaalde zieltjes, mensen die niet zo lekker passen in de wereld. Grappig genoeg, vaak queers dus, maar ook vaak misschien een beetje neurodiverse mensen. Die kunnen vaak veel met mijn werk.

En ik denk dat dat permanent, het niet passen in de wereld zoals het door andere mensen wordt voorgedaan of wordt verbeeld, dat is denk ik een beetje wat wel centraal ligt in het werken aan een voorstelling. Er zit vaak een verdriet in. Een onvermogen, een verdriet, een donkere kant. En daarom vind ik het ook lastig om het woord utopie te gebruiken. Ja, soms wel. Tegelijkertijd is het een vorm van utopie, omdat ik een wereld kan creëren en nog belangrijker, een werkproces kan creëren waarin ik met mensen werk en met mensen samen ben op een manier die wel werkt voor mij.

En grappig is dus als ik het woord utopie zou plakken op die vorige voorstelling die je dan hebt gezien. Het grootste deel van utopie zit hem in dat proces, in het feit dat ik heel veel tijd mocht doorbrengen met hele gevoelige, hele slimme mensen die niet weglopen op het moment dat ik mezelf tegenspreek, dat het te emotioneel wordt, te persoonlijk, te verdrietig, te spiritueel, te vreemd. Dat die mensen hoe dan ook een verband met elkaar hebben waardoor ze blijven. - use to conclude how Munoz' view of utopia fits Gerben's perspective the most and also of Boogaardt and Van der Schoot, and how the utopia resides in a mime performance making process rather than the performance itself. It can reside in the performance too, but more as a feeling created for the audience.

Met name Fleur van den Berg, iemand met wie ik dus heel fijn samenwerk. Zij is er hoe dan ook. Hoe weird het ook is, wat we gaan bespreken of doen, of hoe onlogisch dan ook, ze zal er zijn.

En in zo'n werkproces is wel degelijk een vorm van utopie te vinden. Dus die persoon, de componist met wie ik werk, wij kunnen echt gewoon weken verdwalen in rare theorieën. En daarop staat eigenlijk ons eigen universum.

En dat universum past hoe dan ook altijd beter bij mij dan mijn dagelijks leven. Hoe de wereld werkt, hoe Nederland werkt. Dus daar zit een vorm van utopie in waarvan ik denk dat als je dat goed doet, ik weet nog niet of ik daar ben, maar als je dat goed doet dan wordt het voelbaar als een klein universum op een podium.

En dan heb je wel degelijk, denk ik, een sterk voorbeeld van utopie. Maar dat is voor vele jaren werken denk ik dat het echt voelbaar wordt. Dat het echt heel sterk wordt.

Dat vind ik bij voorstellingen van Boogaardt/Van der Schoot heel sterk. (12:06) Zij maken echt een ander universum in hun voorstellingen.

Dat doen ze heel goed. Daar kun je in ronddwalen, weet je wel. Ja, dat is een heel atmosferisch voorstelling.

Gerben: Het grappige is wel dat hoe dan ook die relatie tussen zero en gender is op dit moment heel duidelijk voelbaar, denk ik. Ook omdat we over gender tot nu toe heel lineair denken. Daar zit de grootste denkfout op dit moment in.

Verdurende tijd dat dat altijd zo blijft, weet je wel. Nu zijn we wel langzaam aan het accepteren dat je tussen verschillende genders kan bewegen. Maar we houden het nog wel vast aan de tijd.

Je kunt bijvoorbeeld maar één keer ontdekken dat je non-binaire bent. Maar als je daarna ontdekt dat je eigenlijk een vrouw bent, zien we dat als een formele denkfout.

Dat non-binaire is dan in pre-definitie onwaar. Terwijl je misschien wel non-binair was, maar daarna een vrouw. Misschien is het fluïde door de tijd heen. Daar komt die zero bij kijken, die je daadwerkelijk op dit moment voelt. Wat is dit lichaam cultureel gezien? Hoe reageert dit lichaam op de tijd om zich heen dat het wordt voorgeschreven? En dat als de omgeving verandert, dan misschien ook wel de perceptie van het lichaam verandert. Daar zit ontzettend veel kennis in. Ontzettend veel vermogen op gevoelens. Om te begrijpen hoe deze realiteit van een fluïde gender op dit moment werkt.

Er is nog een gedachte die daar achteraan komt, die ik heel belangrijk vind.

En als ik die gedachte daadwerkelijk goed doortrek, dan sluit die zero geen talen uit. Het sluit geen culturele taal uit.

Zoals ik bijvoorbeeld zou zeggen. Als ik mijn gender nu zou moeten bepalen, kan ik daarbij de gedachte die binnen het systeem van mijn lichaam valt, nooit uitsluiten. Het is altijd een relatie met mijn omgeving. Met hoe de wereld die dingen benadert.

Dat heeft invloed op elkaar. Op de spelvoer heeft het licht dat schijnt op de performer of het licht dat aanwezig is op het publiek, even zo goed invloed in dat moment. Maar als er een dissonante klank is in de airconditioning heeft dat ook een invloed op hoe jij het ervaart. Als ik nu met mijn hoofd omhoog ga en er zou een dissonante klank klinken, zou dat anders ervaren worden dan als je gezellige jazzmuziek zou horen.

Niks binnen die zero wordt uitgesloten. Onze voorgeschiedenis kunnen we niet uitsluiten.

We kunnen die muziek niet uitsluiten. We kunnen het licht niet uitsluiten. Die onuitsluitbaarheid van verschillende talen zorgt dan met dezelfde vrijheid ervoor dat wij van taal kunnen wisselen. Zoals binnen die improvisaties van het fysieke naar het talige. Naar het verhalende. Naar het abstracte. Naar het beeldende. Het pleit eigenlijk voor een extreme fluiditeit.

Beaudine: Ik zie hier ook een link met Muñoz en zijn werk over de 'straight time' en hoe gender fluïditeit niet volledig kan bestaan in de tijd van het huidige systeem waarin we leven.

Het kapitalistische systeem natuurlijk. En dat het heel moeilijk is om daarin te bestaan als je buiten de norm valt.

Gerben: Het is grappig nu je dit zegt. Ik vind het ineens een stuk makkelijker om de voorstellingen die ik maak te zien als een utopie. Het is heel waar wat je zegt.

En dan met zo'n voorstelling maken of gedicht lezen. Zo'n bevrijding van al die regels van de straight time.

Beaudine: Ja.

Gerben: Dan wordt het ineens heel aannemelijk weer. Dankjewel daarvoor.

Beaudine: In jouw voorstelling bijvoorbeeld. Dan is dat al een stukje utopie. Maar dat het nu niet is en dat het nooit komt. Misschien. Ja. Ergens daar.

Gerben: Het grappige is nog een ander voorbeeld dat me nu te binnen schiet. Over hoe die utopie een rol speelt, bijvoorbeeld binnen mijn voorstelling. Ik werk als performer extreem veel met mensen die er niet zijn op dat moment. Een groot gedeelte van die voorstelling sta ik te werken met de gedachte dat mijn ex ergens in de zaal zit. En dat zorgt ervoor dat mijn lichaam zo emotioneel geladen wordt. Dat het daadwerkelijk van buitenaf ook iets gaat betekenen.

Mijn bewegingen worden belangrijk omdat ik ze voor hem doe. En dat heeft iets ontzettend spiritueels. Ik heb het ook gedaan met een vriend die ik vroeger had.

Met iemand die er niet meer is. Een jongen die ik ooit in mijn leven had, maar uit zijn leven is gestapt. En in heel veel van de voorstellingen heb ik met hem in mijn gedachten gespeeld. Dit is extreem spirituele shit. En tegelijkertijd ben ik een hele wetenschappelijke jongen die daar helemaal niet in gelooft.

De utopie in dit geval is dat het allebei mag naast elkaar. Ik mag én heel wetenschappelijk zijn en denken dit is zo'n bullshit. En tegelijkertijd mag ik volkomen genieten van het feit dat ik met hem kan dansen.

Dat ik hem voor me kan zien. En dat ik door training langzaam beter wordt in zijn handen in mijn nek voelen als ik hem verbeeld. En dat het, naast dat het niet waar is, volledig waar mag zijn.

En dan mist de utopie in dit geval dus. A. Dat ik dingen kan doen die in een afgesproken werkelijkheid dus niet mogelijk mogen zijn. Via het wetenschappelijke wereldbeeld.

Maar B. Nog meer, dat ik ambigu mag zijn. Over dat iets zowel tegelijkertijd waar als niet waar mag zijn. Volgens mij is dat ambiguïteit.

Ze hebben zo'n belangrijke relatie met elkaar. Dan wordt je zero ook nog belangrijker als geladen moment. Omdat met ambiguïteit als mogelijkheid er veel meer mogelijk is. Dus dat je als toeschouwer ook uit alle vaatjes moet kunnen tappen. Om te voelen welke kant we met z'n allen gaan.

Of je het moet kunnen voelen. Of je het moet kunnen denken. Of je het moet kunnen proeven.

Of je het moet kunnen ruiken. Ik denk dat het daarmee een andere aanspraak voelt. Een vorm van ervaren die je misschien, ik weet het niet, minder op scherp zet of zo. Ik weet het niet zo goed. Hoe begrijp je datgene wat je nog nooit gezien hebt.

Hoe moet je dat ervaren? Dat is het spannende aan het gedicht. Dat je soms moet zoeken. Hoe moet ik dit lezen? Welke tools in mij heb ik nodig om dit tot me te kunnen nemen? Want kennelijk, mijn begrip doet het niet.

Dus misschien gaat het over de smaak van de woorden. Misschien moet ik nu kijken naar het feit dat ik misschien niet begrijp wat er staat. Maar het ritme trekt me mee.

Dus kennelijk moet ik iets anders doen. Iets anders in mezelf aanspreken. Iets anders in mezelf openzetten.

Om te kunnen ervaren wat jij en ik hier nu doen. Het zorgt voor een extreem luisterende, gevoelige toeschouwer.

Beaudine: Dus moet je nu ook weer zien hoe het gaat als een bepaalde instelling in je hoofd of in je lichaam. Waarmee je bepaalde dingen ervaart.

Gerben: Ja. Ja, dat denk ik wel. Bedoel je dat het klinkt als een missie? Hoe bedoel je dat? (23:30) Als een overtuiging? Of als een...

Beaudine: Gewoon een manier van zijn.

Gerben: Ja, het is wel een ideaal ergens. Ja. Een ideaal waar ik zelf ook niet aan voldoen.

Want dat zijn allemaal dingen die we nu zeggen. Die inderdaad eigenlijk in die zin wel utopisch zijn.

Ook op een andere manier. Namelijk dat het ideale zijn in waar ik niet aan voldoe, maar die ik probeer te realiseren op een gegeven moment. Die ik hoop dat mensen kunnen realiseren. En waar een geloof achter zit dat de wereld een beter atmosfeer zou zijn als ze dit zouden kunnen met z'n allen. Dus er zit een politiek interesse in meestal.

Maar dat komt ook door deze tijd nu en de afgelopen maanden.

Beaudine: Ja. Utopie is ook wel heel politiek geladen. .

Gerben: Misschien is dit off the record. Dat je hier niks aan hebt. Maar ik ben op dit moment heel erg aan het worstelen met empathie. Met hoe we weer empathie kunnen triggeren bij mensen. Want kennelijk kunnen mensen niet buiten hun eigen huisje, boompje, beestje denken. Kennelijk doet een verhaal van iemand een paar honderdduizend of een paar duizend kilometer verderop niks en is het niet mogelijk om in te voelen. En de staat waar ik nou op zoek ben in die voorstelling is een wereld waarin juist alles voelbaar is.

Je staat moet kunnen zijn om verliefd te worden op iets wat je niet begrijpt. Of met iets om te gaan wat je niet begrijpt. Zoals in een gedicht ook.

Misschien begrijp je iemand die over de grens je land binnenkomt niet. Maar er moet een staat zijn van openheid om diegene op een bepaalde manier te kunnen ontvangen.

En daar zit een gelijkenis in waar ik nu mee aan het worstelen ben. Hoe kan het zo zijn dat zoveel mensen die slag van empathie niet hebben. En hoe breng je die mensen dan weer in de positie dat ze dat wel kunnen hebben. Dat vraag ik me zo erg af, daar ga je met je stomme kunstjes en je stomme voorstellingen niet komen.

Beaudine: Kunst heeft naar mijn mening wel de kracht om perspectieven te doen veranderen.

Gerben: Ja, dat hopen we dan wel. Dat is wel moeilijk

Beaudine: Ik denk dat we nu dus naar het laatste deel van het interview kunnen. Oh jee, er zijn nog heel veel vragen.

Gerben: Oh helemaal goed joh, ik zit hier lekker, dus doe wat je moet doen.

Beaudine: Ah oké, goed. We hebben eigenlijk al veel vragen behandeld, zie ik nu, dus dat is goed.

Gerben: Als we weer iets moeten samenvatten is het ook oké hoor. Als het makkelijk is voor jou.

Beaudine: Nou ja, ik denk dat ik wel weet wat je antwoord is, maar een van de vragen die ik ook had opgeschreven was over Ernst Bloch, iemand die schreef over Utopia, die beschreef het als een soort potentie dat altijd in de maak is. En hoe denk je dat je dit idee aan Zero relateert? Dus hoe representeert Zero deze potentie dat misschien aan het evolueren is?

Gerben: Ja, dat is die invoelbaarheid van het moment, of die leesbaarheid op dat lege canvas. De leesbaarheid van het moment, van verschillende systemen en talen, en wat ze op dat moment allemaal zouden kunnen, de potentie zouden kunnen hebben om te worden. Het gaat over potentieel, over dat je

kunt merken op dat moment wat iets allemaal zou kunnen worden. Dat is denk ik de samenvatting daarvan.

Ik gebruik er te veel woorden voor, maar het gaat over die verschillende talen. Hoe dit gesprek nu verder gaat is nu in de werkelijke realiteit bepaald door dat wij nu in de interview setting zitten. Maar wat nou als we ineens begonnen te bewegen met elkaar? Of dat we ineens dansen? Het heeft de mogelijkheid om meerdere dingen te zijn.

Het is ook iets compositioneels. Jij zit namelijk met je roze trui op een min of meer roze bank. Wat ineens ook iets gaaf is. Je past ook bij de bloemen. Zo zijn er meerdere talen om te lezen in dit moment, maar die verschillende talen hebben verschillende potenties. Want als ik zou doorgaan op de taal van compositie, dan zou ik misschien iets groens aan doen en naast je komen zitten. Maar als het gaat over beweging, dan zou ik misschien nu jouw beweging gaan kopiëren. Dus die verschillende brillen op de werkelijkheid van dit moment, die hebben allemaal een verschillende mogelijkheid, een verschillende potentie. En die zero heeft dus als vermogen om een verandering in al die verschillende talen te kunnen opmerken. Een 'undecidedness' richting compositie, richting dans, richting zang, richting politiek, richting gevecht, richting liefde, richting familie. Al die verschillende talen zijn in potentie daar. Beantwoord ik hiermee je vraag? Stel hem nog eens.

Beaudine: Hoe je het idee van de zero zou relateren aan het idee dat de utopia ook een potentie is dat altijd in de maak is.

Gerben: Die utopia heeft het vermogen om nog alles te kunnen worden, om nog kanten op te gaan die we nog niet kennen. En die leesbaarheid van de zero is dan belangrijk als een vrijheid van denken van dit interview. Het kan nu omslaan in een gevecht. Er kan nu een dans ontstaan. En de openheid van dat moment, dat is denk ik die utopia die erin zit. Het is het besluit om het vastliggende in vraag te stellen.

Beaudine: Ja. Klinkt goed. Doen we.

Gerben: Ja, doen we haha. Laten we op de vuist gaan.

Beaudine: En een andere filosoof die schrijft over utopia is Jill Dolan. Zij gebruikt de term 'utopian performatives'. Dat zijn delen in een voorstelling of in een performance die het publiek eigenlijk een soort van 'upliften' richting een visie toe van de toekomst. Wat zou kunnen zijn, een betere toekomst.

Gerben: Dus dat is meer het oorspronkelijke gevoel van utopia. Waarin er een smaakje van goedheid in zit. In plaats van Muñoz, wat meer gaat over een concept. Iets wat niet per se goed of slecht of lekker of niet lekker is.

Beaudine: Ja, ja. Zo'n idee krijg ik inderdaad wel bij deze verschillende schrijvers.

Munoz gaat gewoon meer over utopia als het onbekende. Goed of slecht.

Dolin gebruikt het als een gevoel. Dat je een heel fijn gevoel krijgt.

Dat je naar buiten gaat en dan denkt: oh wat jammer. Dat heb ik wel bij films ofzo. Dat je dan naar buiten gaat en het gevoel hebt dat je nog in een film zit. En dat je zou willen dat het gevoel blijft, maar het gaat toch weg. Want je komt toch weer langzamerhand in de gewone werkelijkheid.

Gerben: Oh ja, dan denk ik aan Call Me By Your Name.

Beaudine: Ik had dat bij La La Land.

Gerben: Oh ja, dat snap ik.

Beaudine: Dus, hoe ervaar jij zulke momenten in jouw werk met de Zero? Ervaar je dat überhaupt?

Gerben: Ja, ik denk het wel. Het is zo grappig, want het zijn zulke andere connotaties van utopie. Dat het ook heel moeilijk is om te shiften in het gesprek en weer terug naar die oorspronkelijke vorm van utopie te gaan. Die we tot nu toe hebben behandeld, is er eentje die theoretischer is, conceptueler. En ik denk dieper, filosofischer, complexer. En deze vorm van Dolan is meer aan de oppervlakte. Het speelt meer in op dat gevoel, inderdaad de uplifting waar we eigenlijk mee begonnen afhankelijk. Het gevoel van utopie, wat dat woord bij je doet op het moment dat je het hoort. En dan sla ik wel terug op dat moment, waarop ik oorspronkelijk voor die mime gevallen ben, was wel a sense of life. In die momenten dat je aan het spelen bent en het gevoel hebt, ik kan nog links of rechts. Een pure levendigheid gevoel. Het gevoel dat je nog alle kanten op kan. En dat is wel een utopisch gevoel. Of dat link ik daar wel een beetje aan. Ja, misschien is dat wel een utopisch gevoel. En daar komt die tweede utopie vorm wel bij kijken, denk ik.

Waar we het nu net over hadden.

Beaudine: Eigenlijk beide vormen van hoe utopie wordt beschreven. Dat ervaar je allebei wel.

Gerben: Ja, ik ervaar ze allebei, maar op verschillende momenten. Op verschillende manieren. Maar ik denk dat de reden waarom ik verliefd ben op die mime is wel dat gevoel van utopia, zoals Jill Dolan omschrijft. Die vibrante zin van leven. We kunnen nog die kant en die kant op. En de wind bepaalt, nu gaan we die kant op. Dat ultieme, levendige, alles staat op het spel op dit moment, hier en nu. Ik kan me voorstellen dat dat eenzelfde levendigheid met zich neemt. Noem ik het per se utopie? Zelf niet, denk ik. Maar ik snap wel dat je het zo zou kunnen interpreteren. En dan nog specifieker in

werk zelf, of in werk maken zelf. Dan zit misschien in het maken de kant van dat gevoel, we kunnen links of rechts. Dat is er als performer zijnde, met het publiek samen, die levendigheid van we kunnen nu die kant of die kant op. Maar als maker, of als schrijver, of als dichter, is er een moment van utopie, op het moment dat je iets kan verbaliseren, wat je al die tijd nog niet hebt kunnen verbaliseren, en ineens valt dat tot mogelijkheden, tot expressie. En dat is ook een explosie van de utopie, denk ik. Op het moment dat je iets kan externaliseren, wat je al die tijd gevoeld hebt, en poef, ineens ligt het daarvoor. En dat is ook een enorme opruchting. En dat is dan denk ik weer van de makers kant, zo'n vorm van utopie.

Beaudine: Ja. Maar je blijft wel zeggen dat je het zelf niet de utopie zou noemen, eigenlijk.

Gerben: Misschien wel, ik zit eraan te twijfelen.

Beaudine: Dus er zijn wel inderdaad elementen dat je verbindt aan hoe jij ernaar kijkt en hoe je te werk gaat. Maar dat is toch nog een twijfel.

Gerben: Ja, omdat ik het echt heel groot vind om dat te noemen. En ik op dit moment ook gewoon voorzichtig ben met dat woord.

Beaudine: Ja, ook door de huidige staat van de wereld.

Gerben: Ja, dat ik daar echt voorzichtig mee ben. Hoe dreigender de situatie, hoe meer ik uit kijk met zulke soort woorden.

Beaudine: Kun je dat een beetje uitleggen, misschien? Waarom? Want zelfs al is de wereld helemaal naar de kloten, dan is er toch altijd die fractie van hoop dat nog wel ergens bestaat.

En is dat al niet de utopie? Dat is waar Dolan het ook echt tegen terug heeft, dat gevoel van hoop.

Gerben: Ja, ik denk dat dat gevoel van hoop wel echt een stuk makkelijker bereikbaar is op het moment dat je mensbeeld en je wereldbeeld op dat moment niet te pessimistisch zijn. Niet te donker zijn.

En op dit moment is mijn wereldbeeld en mijn mensbeeld gewoon een paar maanden later dan dat we elkaar spreken, toch een stuk donkerder dan dat het eerst was en dat maakt het wel dat je je nogal snel in het maken van werk naïef kunt voelen. En ik denk dat het gevoel van naïviteit niet helpt aan het geloof dat je nodig hebt in dat moment. In dat moment van gewichtloosheid, in dat moment van we kunnen die kant op en die kant op. Want we kunnen niet die kant op op dit moment. Dan heb je helemaal niks meer aan de realiteit, het zo zien of zo zien. Mensen hebben honger en gaan dood. En



dan is ineens al die verschillende vormen van de wereld te kunnen bekijken, stelt ineens helemaal niks meer voor. En dat maakt ineens je handelen binnen zo'n kunstvorm heel relatief. Ik denk nog steeds dat kunst wel noodzakelijk is, omdat het dus een training is in omgaan met dingen die je niet begrijpt. Het leren empathisch zijn, ik denk dat het leren empathisch zijn een van de belangrijkste dingen is die kunst kan geven op dit moment. Heel erg noodzakelijk, maar dat kan niet binnen de omstandigheden dat echte shit aan de deur staat. En dat is op dit moment een beetje mijn staat van zijn.

Beaudine: Ja, goed om te weten. Nou ja, ik had het hier ook al wat over gehad. Net met het tijdsbesef, de 'straight time'. Ik zie ook dat ik er vragen over had: Op wat voor manieren zou je de zero bestaan om uit te dagen of het storen van de normatieve concepten van de tijd en ruimte in je voorstellingen? Maar ik heb het in Engels opgeschreven, dus een beetje...

Gerben: Vraag hem eens in het Engels, maakt het jezelf niet te moeilijk. Mag ik het een keer zien? Holy fuck, het is ook echt gewoon best wel een moeilijke vraag om te bepalen hier.

Oké, nog een keer. "In what ways does the Zero allow you to challenge or disrupt the normative concepts of time and space in your performances, as Muñoz describes with "straight time"?" Of we doorgaan in dans, taal, mode, compositie, politiek, discussie, weet ik veel wat. Dan vergt dat een heel fijnzinnig spel van aandacht. Want iedere verandering in die verschillende talen moet dan eigenlijk opmerkelijk zijn om te kunnen voelen welke kant vliegen we op met z'n tweeën. In welke wereld vliegen we door met z'n tweeën? In welke wereld dan? Naast elkaar misschien zelfs. Dat spel met aandacht vertraagt de tijd gigantisch. Het creëert een soort van andere tijdsbeleving.

Een stilte die ineens valt kan heel interessant zijn in het lichaam, waar we met onze gedachten naartoe vliegen. Dus dan schieten we eigenlijk in een ander universum dan dat we op papier zouden doen bijvoorbeeld. Of in een geschreven script.

Als we de straight time zouden zien als een geschreven script van feiten, van dingen die narratief gebeuren in de tijd en de plaats en feitelijkheden, dan zou de sensibiliteit van dat moment daar bijvoorbeeld buiten vallen. Maar misschien hebben we een atmosferisch moment met elkaar. En zou dat eigenlijk de tijd op een bepaalde manier of de ervaring daarvan op een andere manier veranderen? Omdat we inzoomen op iets anders dan op gebeurtenissen. Oeh, ik weet niet of ik dit heel goed uitleg. Kun je het volgen in ieder geval?

Beaudine: Ik kan het altijd even terugluisteren, haha.

Gerben: Maar dat doet iets met de beleving van tijd? Dat doet iets met de beleving van werkelijkheid? In welk universum dansen wij door met elkaar eigenlijk? Maar, we mogen ook terugkomen.

We mogen terugkomen op de waarheid van dit moment. Door weer hier op een volgende moment een andere kant op te mogen gaan. Conclusies hebben geen vastheid, ze zijn constant een soort van door fladderend.

En ik moet daarbij een beetje denken aan Peter Verheils, dat is een schrijver die ik heel goed vind. En hij schrijft in het boek Lichamen. Is een soort dystopische plek, of een utopische plek, dat weet ik niet. Een vervallen, post-apocalyptische wereld. En in zijn schrijven doet hij dit af en toe. Dan schrijft hij zo, dit en dit en dit gebeurt.

Dan schrijft hij: nee! Dit en dit en dit gebeurt. Nee! Dit en dit en dit gebeurt. Nee! Dit gebeurt.

Dus op die moment gaat hij alle paden af die je zou kunnen gaan als schrijver. En dan kiest hij. Maar doordat hij dat doet, heb je als lezer al met hem, als schrijver, al die kanten op gezocht. En dat is ook zo'n breking van de straight time eigenlijk. In plaats van dat alles rechtdoor moet lopen, besluit hij eigenlijk afslagje te nemen en soms weer terug te gaan.

En dat is denk ik hetzelfde met zo'n zero ervaring.

Beaudine: Ja. En dat lijkt ook wel heel erg weer op waar je het de vorige keer over had, met Deleuze.

Gerben: Ik ben blij dat ik niet zo incoherent ben als ik dacht.

Beaudine: Nee, ik zie de connecties allemaal wel.

Gerben: Oh, godzijdank. Maar ja, misschien is mijn incoherentie ook wel een vorm van zero die normaal gebruikt wordt.

Beaudine: Ja, het spreken is 'in itself' een vorm van Zero.

Gerben: Oké, gelukkig dan maar.

Beaudine: Oké, de laatste vraag alweer: "Looking ahead, how do you see the role of mime and the Zero evolving in contemporary performance art?"

Gerben: Als een training in gevoeligheid naar in welk instrument we moeten luisteren naar wat er aan de hand is. Zonder preconceptie, dat is de hoop. En als training hoe je omgaat met ambiguïteit. Maar daadwerkelijk, naar mijn mening, heeft de toekomst van mime en Zero niet een goed beeld. Ik voel me op dit moment ver weg van mime.

## **Notes of conversation with Suzan Boogaerdt**

In this part of the appendix, I share my notes of the personal conversation held with mime performer Suzan Boogaerdt, graduated from the Mime Opleiding at the Academy of Theatre and Dance in Amsterdam in 1999 and part of performance collective Boogaerdt/Van der Schoot.

Boogaerdt: “Door menselijk handelen, gaat de sfeer van een voorstelling kapot. We vragen ons altijd af: hoe kunnen we de mensen uit het centrum halen en hoe kun je dat doen mét mensen? We behandelen daarom objecten en mensen op dezelfde wijze. We transformeren het menselijke figuur en halen het weg. We moeten consequent blijven in ons werk.”

Beaudine: “Zijn jullie wel eens bezig met de term utopie?”

Boogaerdt: “Wat wij ons proberen voor te stellen (door menselijkheid uit het centrum te halen) blijft een utopie. We kunnen nooit helemaal bij het complete anti anthropocene komen.”

Beaudine: “Hoe verhouden jullie je tot objectiviteit in mime?”

Boogaerdt: “Elke generatie heeft een andere blik op objectiviteit. Die van ons is positief omdat we het gebruiken om een universaliteit te bereiken in onze voorstellingen. De Zero gebruiken we op een klassieke, objectieve wijze in onze repetities om zo tot een non-binariteit te komen.”