

# The World's Ending and We're Still Making Theatre: New-Hope Dramaturgy in Contemporary Queer Performance

Master's Thesis | Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy

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(Image from *Tender Men*, 2020. Taken by Stanislav Dobak & Bart Grietens)

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## Abstract

This thesis works to establish dramaturgical procedures of new-hope, based in queer, feminist, and performance theory, to be used in the creation of performance. This thesis looks to Edelman, Muñoz, Campt, and Berlant's arguments of the pitfalls of the present and notions of futurity to establish the pillars of new-hope. I looked to these fields of knowledge as well as performance theory (Dolan, Campbell and Farrier) to establish dramaturgical procedures of new-hope. New-hope is a concept I have developed because the hope that has kept us complicit in oppressive systems has expired and we now need a new-hope to activate us in creating a present that is good to us all and not just a privileged few. Considering the crises that plague our daily lives, (such as the climate, immigration and covid-19 crises,) in order to move towards a better future, we need a new kind of hope and a place to practice it. New-hope can be found in many areas of society but these areas are restricted by reality and practicalities. Art is the realm in which new-hope can best be explored because it is not concerned directly with improving the world. More specifically, performance, thanks to its characteristics of community, embodied and affective communication, experimentation, risk, and failure is, I argue, the most fitting place to explore new-hope. The procedures I propose are four action-based gestures that can be used to create performance and which also establishes a framework to analyze performance. To test out the dramaturgical framework, I interviewed the makers of two contemporary queer performances, Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher. I investigated the decisions that were made in the creation and rehearsal processes of their pieces *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC* and used the dramaturgical framework as an analysis tool to see how those decisions manifested in the performances. Based on this, I propose that a dramaturgy of new-hope can be used as a guide to activate imagination and play in order to allow for utopian speculation, experimentation, and simulation, thus fostering and facilitating a hope that can apply to our present.

“At this moment it seems that queer visual culture needs to nourish our sense of potentiality and not reinforce our feeling of disappointment. If we are to go on, we need a critical modality of hope and not simply dramatization of loss and despair.”

- José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 111

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## Chapter 1 - Introduction

*Performance's simultaneity, its present-tenseness, uniquely suits it to probing the possibilities of utopia as a hopeful process that continually writes a different, better future. – Jill Dolan<sup>1</sup>*

In 2019 I read an article by Jonathan Franzen that summarized the state of the climate emergency and proposes two options: “You can keep on hoping that catastrophe is preventable, and feel ever more frustrated or enraged by the world’s inaction. Or you can accept that disaster is coming, and begin to rethink what it means to have hope.”<sup>2</sup> The hope we have held to leave a legacy<sup>3</sup> or attain the good life<sup>4</sup> is expired. In order to rethink hope, we need to assess our perspective on our relationship to the future.<sup>5</sup>

The covid-19 pandemic resulted in the performance world to halt creating and sharing live work. This gave theatre and dance makers the opportunity to reflect. In September 2020, NTGhent published a book called “Why Theatre?” A compilation of theatre makers, attenders, teachers, and thinkers’ perspectives on why, considering the climate crisis, pandemic, populist politics, the resurgence of right-wing extremism, and violence against LGBTQI2+ people, we still make performance. “In times when theatre and performance as live art are in a state of emergency and societies rethink necessities, we ask you: Why theatre?”<sup>6</sup> Jill Dolan has already recognized theatre as a place to find hope<sup>7</sup>. However, considering these global crises, I argue that we need a different kind of hope, a new-hope, which can be cultivated in the theatre.

As a theatre maker, I understand that the theatre is the space where we can experiment with different ways of being and thus the best place to inhabit new-hope and explore what an equitable and

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<sup>1</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 13.

<sup>2</sup> Jonathan Franzen, “What if we stopped pretending?” *New Yorker*, September 18, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cultural-comment/what-if-we-stopped-pretending>.

<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Lee Edelman’s *No Future*.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in Lauren Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism*.

<sup>5</sup> As discussed by Berlant, Edelman, José Esteban Muñoz in *Cruising Utopia*, and Tina Campt in *Listening to Images*.

<sup>6</sup> Kaatje Geest, Carmen Hornbostel, and Milo Rau, eds., *Why Theatre?* (Ghent: NTGent, 2020), 15.

<sup>7</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*.

utopian end of the world would look like. So, the questions become, what is new-hope and how can theatre be a space of new-hope? Thus, this thesis will examine hope through the lens of queer and feminist theory's notions of futurity. I will draw on Lauren Berlant's concept of cruel optimism<sup>8</sup> and Lee Edelman's concept of reproductive futurism<sup>9</sup> to develop my own concept of new-hope. I will also examine how new-hope is used to create and analyze contemporary performance in order to practice and speculate utopia and give new-hope to creators, performers, and audience members.

Utopia, for the purposes of this thesis, acts as the goal and motivation of (new-)hope. This is primarily because this is what many of the writers I look to, especially Muñoz and Dolan<sup>10</sup>, use as the way to describe a better future. So, it is useful and helpful to use utopia as the placeholder for the world that we hope for and continue to work towards. Additionally, Muñoz says that "Queerness's form is utopian"<sup>11</sup> in that we never fully reach it because it remains on the horizon as something to move towards.<sup>12</sup> This is an essential reason why it is useful to look to queer theory and queer performance. Hope and queerness are inextricably linked. When I write of queerness, I write not just about a sexuality, but a form of existence that is rooted in a resistance to heteronormativity. Feminist and queer scholar bell hooks once explained:

queer not as being about who you're having sex with (that can be a dimension of it); but  
queer as being about the self that is at odds with everything around it and has to invent,  
create and find a place to speak and to thrive and to live.<sup>13</sup>

While adjusting our perspective on hope, it is useful to use the same tool of utopia as the writers I look

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<sup>8</sup> Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Dolan writes specifically about a "utopia not stabilized by its own finished perfection, not coercive in its contained, self-reliant, self-determined system, but a utopia always in process, always only partially grasped, as it disappears before us around the corners of narrative and social experience." Dolan, *Utopia In Performance*, 6.

<sup>11</sup> José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2009), 30.

<sup>12</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

<sup>13</sup> bell hooks, "Are You Still a Slave?" (The New School, New York City, New York, May 6, 2014).

to, and it is helpful to start already from a place of queerness.

To speculate on utopia is to expand our notions of what could be, and experiment with ways of existing that are better than the present. In the introduction of his book, *Utopia for Realists*, Rutger Bregman, outlines that people have always envisioned a perfect world that does not exist, but could potentially exist somewhere else or in another time. This is how progress occurs. In many ways, people living in the world today are living in a dream world that people of the past could have hardly imagined. Thus, every present is a utopia of a past.<sup>14</sup> Utopia activates the imagination, but it also functions to critique the present. The characteristics of a dream world are often based on shortcomings of the present.<sup>15</sup> So utopia has two primary functions- to activate the imagination to be able to envision the future, and to critique the present- both of which are essential to think about hope.

The hope we have held for generations is the hope that if we work hard, we will get the things we desire and then we will be happy. Lauren Berlant recognizes that not only does this trajectory rarely occur, but that the very things we desire also ensure we remain complicit in systems that prevent us from attaining them. Their concept of 'cruel optimism' illustrates the ways in which hope has been misplaced and used against us.<sup>16</sup> Lee Edelman, approaching hope from a queer perspective with his theory of 'reproductive futurism,' recognizes that heteronormativity places hope in the figure of the child- in future generations. This ensures queer people and those functioning outside of the norm are excluded from this hope,<sup>17</sup> and thus exposes again, that this hope is misplaced and even dangerous. Additionally, with an impending climate apocalypse, a hope placed in future generations is no longer helpful. The useful utopia we can imagine now is therefore less about a faraway time and place which is

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<sup>14</sup> Rutger Bregman, "The Return of Utopia" in *Utopia for Realists: and How We Can Get There* (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 1-21.

<sup>15</sup> Bregman, *Utopia for Realists*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Berlant, "Affect in the Past" in *Cruel Optimism*, 1-21.

<sup>17</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 6.

the classic futurity of utopia, but something that is closer to us. A shift in understanding of futurity then, must occur.

I propose that theatre is one of the main engines of utopian speculating we possess, and that theatre can function as a place of new-hope for what our future can become. New-hope can be used as something to hold onto in the face of despair and something to motivate us to act in a way that brings about a better future and saves us from apathy. New-hope can be found in many areas of society: leftist politics that fight for equity and understands that people are disproportionately oppressed by governing institutions;<sup>18</sup> progressive health care that ensures equal access and inclusive treatment for trans people, neuro diverse people, and others who require it;<sup>19</sup> education that identifies the downfalls and exclusionary nature of common academic practices;<sup>20</sup> and activism that fights for a better present, not future.<sup>21</sup> However, these areas are restricted by reality and practicalities. Art is the realm in which new-hope can best be explored because it is not concerned directly with improving the world. Performance, thanks to its characteristics of community, embodied and affective communication, experimentation, risk, and failure, is the most fitting place to explore new-hope.<sup>22</sup> Thus, the aim of this thesis is to establish action-based procedures that performance makers can use to create performances that inspire new-hope and audiences can use to find new-hope in performances.

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<sup>18</sup> For example, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (AOC) and Bernie Sanders in the United States, and Jagmeet Singh and Charlie Angus in Canada.

<sup>19</sup> For example, The Trans United Clinic started by Trans United Nederland which operates out of the red light district in Amsterdam. The Trans United Clinic focuses on “depathologization of gender specific care and sexual healthcare of trans people” while providing health support for trans people, non-binary people, and sex workers. Read more at: <http://transunitedeurope.eu/>

<sup>20</sup> For example, Concordia University in Montreal’s “Indigenous Directions Action Plan.” This is a plan for the university to decolonize and Indigenize the university that itself is built on stolen land. Read more at <https://www.concordia.ca/content/dam/concordia/offices/idlc/docs/indigenous-directions-action-plan-2021.pdf>

<sup>21</sup> For example, Extinction Rebellion, (<https://rebellion.global/>).

<sup>22</sup> I will say here that I do not think theatre is the place to stop the climate crisis or stop hatred from happening, but I do believe that it gives people the opportunity to be embodied, to be communicated with affectively, and to take risks, which can alter the way they can understand the present. Like Herbert Marcuse has said, “Art cannot change the world, but it can contribute to changing the consciousness and drives of the [people] who could change the world.” (Herbert Marcuse, *The aesthetic dimension: toward a critique of Marxist aesthetics*, (Beacon, 1978). Theatre brings people together and puts them into a state of being open to being changed.

## 1.1 Methodology

New-hope exists as a reaction to the crises of the present, which are a result of a misplaced hope that is rooted in heteronormativity, the patriarchy, and colonialism. To find the antidotal new-hope, queer and feminist theory must be used to find procedures that can be used to make and understand performance. Considering the pervasiveness of crises in everyday life resulting in a societal shift of the understanding of hope and utopia, my central research question is, *what is “new-hope dramaturgy” in contemporary queer performance and how can it be used to create performance?*

To answer this question, I look to thinkers who, because of their intersecting identities, are writing from a place outside of the normative systems and structures that require and thrive off of expired hope. To establish a new-hope dramaturgy, it is imperative to bring overlooked perspectives into conversation with each other. José Esteban Muñoz and Tina Campt re-frame how we can understand the future through queer futurity and black futurity, respectively. Both concepts propose ways in which we can reject the future that is sure to occur should the status quo remain. Thus, in the second chapter of this thesis, I will explore my first research sub-question: *1) How can we define “new-hope” using the concepts of ‘queer futurity’ from Muñoz, ‘Black-futurit’y from Campt, ‘reproductive futurism’ from Edelman, and Berlant’s understanding of ‘cruel optimism’?*

Once a definition of new-hope is established, I will bring the above concepts into conversation with Dolan’s ideas of how we can find hope in the theatre,<sup>23</sup> as well as Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier’s *Queer Dramaturgies* to ground the queer and feminist theory in performance theory.<sup>24</sup> Campbell, Farrier, and Dolan illuminate how notions from Edelman, Berlant, Muñoz, and Campt need to be experienced in performance in order for them to be effective, and thus can build a framework to put new-hope into practice in performance. This will answer my second research sub-question: *2) what are*

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<sup>23</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*.

<sup>24</sup> Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies: International Perspectives on Where Performance Leads Queer* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

*the dramaturgical procedures of new-hope?*

In the third chapter, I use the framework built in the first to analyze two contemporary queer performances and their artistic processes to answer my third research sub-question: 3) *How do contemporary performances use new-hope dramaturgy to glimpse at and create Utopia?* I have chosen two dance-based queer contemporary performances that have been performed in the Netherlands in 2020 in order to answer this question and test out this dramaturgical framework: *Tender Men* by Koen De Preter and *Pilot PC* by Connor Schumacher. My primary reason for selecting these case studies was because of the “queer feeling of hope”<sup>25</sup> as described by Muñoz I felt during both performances.

In *Tender Men*, Koen De Preter asks the question, what would tenderness between men look like, if there was no homophobia in the world? The audience watches as four men with different sexualities and cultural and dance backgrounds dance together, exploring different answers to this question. They dance to Bruce Springsteen, wash in front of each other, carry one another, and blow bubbles. The audience is given an opportunity to glance at a utopia governed by systems that do not produce homophobia and to feel what it is like to witness tenderness between men.



Figure 1.<sup>26</sup>

In *Pilot PC*, Connor Schumacher uses the site and form of the rave to introduce a new way of relating to strangers’ and one’s own body to explore the potentialities of what our physical culture can look like post-pandemic. In their own circle on the floor, 1.5 meters from anyone else’s, the audience dances and thinks with their body as they are lead through rave aerobics and a simulated rave.

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<sup>25</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 28.

<sup>26</sup> Stanislav Dobak & Bart Grietens, From *Tender Men*, photograph, Koen De Preter, <https://koendepreter.com/>.



Figure 2.<sup>27</sup>

The third chapter is the result of interviews with Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher where we discussed their creation and rehearsal processes while working on the above performances. In this, I analyze the decisions both makers made during the process of creating and rehearsing their pieces in relation to new-hope and its dramaturgical procedures. Dramaturgy, while often described by its very nature of being difficult to describe, can be understood as the choice-making practices in creation. Dramaturgical procedures can be understood as actions that enable choice making to occur. Looking at the choices being made to understand how the outcomes come about is employing Maaïke Bleeker's "dramaturgical mode of looking."<sup>28</sup> Without having read Muñoz, Camp, Berlant, or Edelman,

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<sup>27</sup> Anna van Koolj, from *Pilot PC*, photograph, Eindhoven Park Theatre, [https://www.parktheater.nl/en/programma/9813/Connor\\_Schumacher/Pilot\\_PC\\_a\\_rave\\_session\\_it\\_s\\_nothing\\_wi\\_thout\\_you\\_/](https://www.parktheater.nl/en/programma/9813/Connor_Schumacher/Pilot_PC_a_rave_session_it_s_nothing_wi_thout_you_/).

<sup>28</sup> Maaïke Bleeker, draft chapter "A Dramaturgical Mode of Looking" from the forthcoming publication *Doing Dramaturgy. Thinking Through Practice*. (Palgrave, unpublished), 3.

Schumacher and De Preter made choices in line with their concepts that resulted in a new-hopeful performance but also a new-hopeful process. In this chapter we gain additional insight into specific theatrical and process-based strategies that can be used in the creation of works to speculate on utopia and foster new-hope, and how these processes manifest in performance.

The motivation to establish dramaturgical procedures of new-hope came from my background as a professional theatre maker who has also been trying to answer the question “why theatre?” by grounding my practice in performance, queer, and feminist theory. My approach to new-hope dramaturgy is inspired by Manuela Infante’s plant-based dramaturgy. Her creation process is an act of thinking, and thus the dramaturgical framework she creates guides the process and can later be used to analyze the result of said process, the performance. When she began her piece *Estado Vegetal*, Infante had the question “what of plants is in us?” She looked to knowledge fields related to plants to find action-based procedures that could be used in the creation of a performance. For example, the concept of branching, the way in which plants grow, translated to the structure in which she wrote the performance. The result was a performance process that enabled alternate forms of thinking which had guiding procedures, and a performance that affectively translated the results of this route of inquiry. In this thesis I too will look to relevant fields of knowledge to create procedures. My hope with new-hope dramaturgy is to create a malleable framework of action-based concepts that can be used to (a) facilitate a creation process that allows us to hope, and (b) find new-hope in performances through analysis.

Sonja Arsham Kufinec coined “dramaturgy of hope” to describe an approach used in some theatre surrounding trauma and conflict. This kind of theatre can often take an approach that “avoids the reality of conflicts,”<sup>29</sup> - the nuances and complexities. It instead opts for “sugarcoating” frameworks of

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<sup>29</sup> Sonja Arsham Kufinec, *Theatre, Facilitation, and Nation Formation in the Balkans and Middle East* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 29.

perseverance and overcoming adversity.<sup>30</sup> However, the principles or procedures of a dramaturgical framework of hope have never been formally established. In performance analysis, when a dramaturgy of hope is referred to it is most often used to be critical of the oversights of the effects of trauma.<sup>31</sup> As new-hope is a reaction to expired hope, new-hope dramaturgy must make good on the faults of the dramaturgy of hope Kuftinec outlines. To do so it must be intersectional, and it must pay attention to complexities.

To answer my research questions, I have used literature research, performance analysis, and interviewing as qualitative research methods. For the analysis of *Tender Men*, I relied on my personal memory and notes of the performance I saw in person, as well as a registration provided to me by the artist. For my analysis of *Pilot PC*, I watched a registration of the live performance, provided to me by the artist, as well as attending the virtually adapted “rave sessions” through Dans Atelier (Rotterdam) which I attended multiple times while writing this thesis. On top of this, I accessed the artists’ websites, ticket selling pages, and Facebook events. I have received consent form both artists to use the quotes you will read in this thesis.

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<sup>30</sup> Sonja Kuftinec, *Theatre, Facilitation, and Nation Formation*, 29.

<sup>31</sup> For example, Karen Jean Martinson “*The Way Through*”: *Social Action and the Critical Embrace of Failure* which instead argues for a dramaturgy of failure.

## Chapter 2 - Expired and New-Hope

*“The future no longer appears as a choice or a collective conscious action, but is a kind of unavoidable catastrophe that we cannot oppose in any way.” - Francisco “Bifo” Berardi<sup>32</sup>*

In this chapter we will look at what hope has meant since post-World War II and the conditions resulting in new-hope, as laid out by Lauren Berlant. Then we will define new-hope by looking at the ways Lee Edelman, José Esteban Muñoz, and Tina Campt understand futurity as the temporality of hope. Next, to understand why performance is an arena to put new-hope into action, we will look at Jill Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance*. Along with Dolan, we will bring Alison Campbell and Stephen Farrier’s *Queer Dramaturgies* into conversation with Edelman, Muñoz, and Campt to find dramaturgical procedures of new-hope.

### 2.1 Expired Hope

To better understand new-hope, it is important first to establish what expired-hope is- what it consists of, what the conditions of its existence are, and how it is failing us. Since the lens we are looking through is that of feminist and queer theory, it is key to also understand how these fields understand our present. The reason our expired hope is no longer functioning correctly is what Lauren Berlant, in *Cruel Optimism*, equates to being let down by “the social democratic promise of the post-Second World War period.”<sup>33</sup> We were promised fantasies and as we progress down this path that deviates from these fantasies, it can be helpful but hopeless to see which ideals are being squandered. Berlant illustrates that “The fantasies that are fraying include, particularly, upward mobility, job security, political and social equality, and lively, durable intimacy.”<sup>34</sup> Expired hope consists of the belief that the system will provide us with what we value: connections, success, and happiness- if only we participate.

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<sup>32</sup> Francisco “Bifo” Berardi, *After the Future*, ed. Gary Genosko and Nicholas Thoburn (Edinburgh: AK Press, 2011).

<sup>33</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.

Expired hope is dependent on a desire for breathing space. Expired hope is made up of “the sense that liberal-capitalist society will reliably provide opportunities for individuals to carve out relations of reciprocity that seem fair and that foster life as a project of adding up to something and constructing cushions for enjoyment.”<sup>35</sup> Essentially, working hard enough to make enough money to be able to attain something we are made to believe we should desire: security, home, adventure, connection, family, freedom. Berlant generalizes these desires as breathing space, a moment of rest where we can enjoy what we have worked for, and “breathing space is what the capitalist subject, in all of her ambition, is trying to attain- the good life.”<sup>36</sup>

These desires are not in and of themselves bad or misplaced, however they rarely materialize. What is most often the return on participating in the system “is merely, disappointingly, a brief episode, often with a thing as memento of the memory and not the actualization of desire.”<sup>37</sup> Capitalism is set up so that once we believe we have obtained a desire, there is more to work towards, which keeps us in a perpetual state of labour. A perpetual state of labour aids the capitalist system and the few who the system is set up to promote, not the individuals locked into this state. In aspiring to obtain these desires we fulfill our duty to capitalism and remain unfulfilled but cannot grasp the origin of our disappointment since we have the memento telling us that we got what we wanted.

On top of the disappointing and unfulfillable characteristics of expired hope, the crises that the world is in today make these desires much less attainable for many people or will not result in equal effect. Capitalism has resulted in crises in housing, family, education, and work. This is especially true for trans people, People of Colour, and queer people. What I deem as expired hope then, is sold to everyone, but can only apply to a very small amount of the population.

Lee Edelman in his text *No Future* outlines the concept of “reproductive futurism” which he explains

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<sup>35</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 42.

<sup>37</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 42.

is the dominant futurism ruling society today.<sup>38</sup> Reproductive futurism is the idea that we work to make the future better for the children.<sup>39</sup> This often removes nuance from the conversation about the future and leads us to understand that the natural way to understand the future is in this extremely heteronormative way. We can also understand this as “straight time.” Straight-time essentially means that there is a linear and non-deviating path of progress. It is the temporality that upholds heteronormative values and which the promises I outline above adhere to. In addition to reproductive futurism, straight-time works to give people a false sense of how their lives should progress and has become perceived as the “natural” time. “Straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life.”<sup>40</sup> Thus the temporality of expired hope is straight time.

## 2.2 New-Hope

So, if expired hope is desiring something in the future that we work towards that will likely not fulfill us in the way we expect, what is new-hope? If hope is future oriented, it is important to inspect futurity and the role it plays in new-hope. An effective mode to envision a better future collectively is through utopian thinking- which critiques the present by imagining different facets of an ideal future. New-hope uses the radical idea that tomorrow can be one without capitalism, discrimination, violence, and destitution; that tomorrow can be a site of prosper for all and not just a few. Below I have summarized the pillars of new-hope.

**Pillar One- A desire for better and a belief that there is another way of being that must come about.**

If hope is the belief that something better will happen in the future, then Campit brings forward two ingredients for hope: the attachment to what that something better actually is, and a motivation to act on that hope. Futurity “is an attachment to a belief in what should be true, which impels us to realize

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<sup>38</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 1-2.

<sup>39</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 1.

<sup>40</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22.

that aspiration. It is the power to imagine beyond current fact and to envision that which is not, but must be."<sup>41</sup> This is an important aspect of what new-hope is. The belief in and desire for a better existence for everyone and working towards making that future a reality.

More than this, instead of hoping for a future that should happen, Black feminist futurity, as Campt sees it, is an insistence of what needs to occur. That is to say, "that which will have had to happen. The grammar of black feminist futurity is a performance of a future that hasn't yet happened but must."<sup>42</sup> This is an important distinction because it shifts new-hope from a place of pure imagination to a way of imagining the future in an essentially positive and tactile way. It asks, "what changes *must* occur in order to achieve utopia?" The first pillar of new-hope is desire for better and the belief that there is another way of being that *must* come about.

#### **Pillar Two- A refusal of the current conditions under the present systems.**

In his text, *Cruising Utopia*, José Esteban Muñoz calls upon Edelman's reproductive futurism, to criticize our present and offer an antidote: a queer feeling of hope.<sup>43</sup> In his text, he promotes this "queer feeling of hope in the face of hopeless heteronormative maps of the present where futurity is indeed the province of normative reproduction,"<sup>44</sup> acknowledging that this is one of the best ways to refuse to accept the present in service of creating a better future. In contemplating queerness, Muñoz focuses on the future because "queerness is not yet here; thus, we must always be future bound in our desires and designs."<sup>45</sup> He understands queerness to be something on the horizon, that we are constantly working towards becoming.

However, Muñoz also recognizes that the goals of the main-stream-queer agenda or the "gay

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<sup>41</sup> Tina Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017), 17.

<sup>42</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 28.

<sup>44</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 28.

<sup>45</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 185.

pragmatic” have been primarily for queers to be able to participate in straight institutions such as marriage and child-rearing, which Muñoz calls “the erosion of the gay and lesbian political imagination.”<sup>46</sup> This is important, because it reminds us that the future Muñoz is advocating for, and the future our new-hope longs for, is not simply a neoliberal paradise where everyone gets to participate in capitalism equally, but is instead something much different, and can be something much bigger. This is something we must hold onto when defining new-hope. Muñoz makes clear that “gay pragmatic organizing is in direct opposition to the idealist thought that [he] associate[s] as endemic to a forward dawning queerness that calls on a no-longer-conscious in the service of imagining a futurity.” Not only is the future that is being hoped for different than the present, it is not straight, and we must not let an erosion of our imagination lead to us working towards just another version of the heteronormative present in straight time.

A strategy of Campt’s for futurity is the practice of refusal. Much like Muñoz’s rejection of queer futurity being related to straight time, Campt explains that more than resistance to the status quo, there must be an outright refusal of acceptance of the present conditions.<sup>47</sup> In terms of Black futurity, this means “a refusal of the very premises that have reduced the lived experience of blackness to pathology and irreconcilability in the logic of white supremacy.”<sup>48</sup> In other words, resisting while working within the current system to create change will only change the conditions of a society built on white supremacy, but cannot remove this insidious ethos. The only way to create outside of the system is to refuse the system altogether.

The goals of new-hope are to move away from straight-time and reject normativity. In the same way, queer dramaturgies are not making “gay theatre” that remains in “heteronormative dominant

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<sup>46</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 21.

<sup>47</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 32.

<sup>48</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 32.

western theatrical mode of psychological realism.”<sup>49</sup> The example that Campbell and Farrier give of queer dramaturgy that is not “gay theatre” is *Angels in America*, which “ruptures attachment to realism and psychological coherence.”<sup>50</sup> Queer dramaturgy then, ensures the subversion of the “domesticated queer”<sup>51</sup> that Muñoz so adamantly rejects: not a queer person thriving in a straight world, but a world built for queer life and expression. And so new-hope must not only resist, but refuse the current conditions and especially, the systems that control our present.

### **Pillar Three- An understanding that this better future is for everyone.**

The dominant outlook on future that Lee Edelman recognizes and urges us to resist is what he calls reproductive futurism, or the idea that the future is the domain of children, and that they are the reason we want to make the future better. However, this removes people who will not reproduce or raise children, especially queer people, out of the domain of the future. He argues that political discourse has been set up in such a way that the one fight everyone can be on the same side of is the fight for the children. Thus, “queerness names the side of those not ‘fighting for the children,’ the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism.”<sup>52</sup> This singular foundational belief that “the future is kid stuff” ensures the continuation of the status quo.<sup>53</sup> Reproductive futurism “impose[s] an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations.”<sup>54</sup>

If this is the case, the futurity that Edelman champions is one that undermines the child being the

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<sup>49</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 13.

<sup>50</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 13.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 17.

<sup>52</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

<sup>53</sup> Edelman, *No Future*,

<sup>54</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 2.

sole inheritor of the future. The first step to make that happen according to Edelman is for queers to “withdraw our allegiance, however compulsory, from a reality based on the Ponzi scheme of reproductive futurism.”<sup>55</sup> The first step in altering the future is to alter the perspective of whom the future is for, which is an action that can be taken in the present. This idea can open up the qualifications of the recipient of new-hope, which may start with queer people for Edelman, but could extend to all those it has up until this point excluded. Thus, the third most important part of new-hope is the understanding that the future is for everyone.

### 2.3 *Why Theatre?*

Now that I have established the three pillars that make up new-hope, we can investigate performance’s role in new-hope. Choreographer Jerome Bel, in response to *Why Theatre?* concluded his essay by saying, “how can I trust a choreographer, director, dance or theatre company that contributes to global warming? These are people who do not think about the world, who don’t see what’s happening. How can their performances be of any value?”<sup>56</sup> And while his views have been widely contested,<sup>57</sup> this is an important question to consider.

The fact is that performance can do very little to stop global warming because the main contributors to global warming are large corporations, their lobbies, and politicians who care more about their economy than the health of the earth.<sup>58</sup> Yet performance makers can still be of value. Bel is still making performance- he may not be contributing to global warming thanks to his efforts to limit his carbon footprint, but he is not preventing the climate apocalypse either. Jill Dolan’s *Utopia in Performance*

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<sup>55</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

<sup>56</sup> Jerome Bel, “blah blah” from *Why Theatre* ( Berlin: Verbrecher, 2020), 38.

<sup>57</sup> Lázaro Gabino Rodríguez wrote an open letter to Jerome Bel calling out the blind spots and oversights of his arguments because of his privilege. This is an important and nuanced discussion which should be discussed in future research on new-hope. See the letter here: <https://e-tcetera.be/open-letter-to-jerome-bel/>

<sup>58</sup> Chris J. Cuomo, "Climate change, vulnerability, and responsibility." *Hypatia* 26, no. 4 (2011): 690-714.

argues that “live performance provides a place where people come together, embodied and passionate, to share experiences of meaning making and imagination that can describe or capture fleeting intimations of a better world.”<sup>59</sup> So, as expressed in the introduction, we must see how new-hope can exist and function in the theatre. It is important to investigate what the dramaturgical procedures of new-hope could be if they are rooted in the above three pillars of new-hope.

#### *2.4 Dramaturgical Procedures.*

Performances of new-hope are a way and space to come together in community. The foundational condition of creating performances of new-hope is to accept new-hope as the hope we wish to inhabit. This is the foundational action that must occur for all others to follow. Now, by identifying important characteristics of performance that facilitate hope and actions that are key to fostering hope and bringing about utopia from the thinkers above, we can find the dramaturgical procedures of new-hope.

Campbell and Farrier acknowledge that a key characteristic of theatre that makes it valuable to both queerness and hope is that “it is a way of giving access to experience, or ‘telling stories’, that offers something in excess of the logic of language.”<sup>60</sup> This is instrumental because of two reasons. The first is that, unlike utopian literature, utopian performatives as Dolan conceives of them, are non-prescriptive and affective “through the communication of an alternative experience.”<sup>61</sup> As Dolan explains, “theater and performance offer a place to scrutinize public meanings, but also to embody and, even if through fantasy, enact the affective possibilities of “doings” that gesture toward a much better world.”<sup>62</sup>

Embodiment can be taken on by performers and spectators alike. The other reason it is important to be able to move beyond the logic of language is that queerness and hope, as experiences that are largely

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<sup>59</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 2.

<sup>60</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 13.

<sup>61</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 6.

affective, cannot be fully communicated by language alone and have historically been misunderstood due to language. We could say that language is the straight way of communication and affect and embodiment are the queer communication avenues. Moving beyond the confines of language also opens up the criteria for participants- an important barrier to be dismantled when imagining utopia.

She explains that “utopian performatives spring from a complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which take shape in moments of utopia as doings, as process, as never finished gestures toward a potentially better future.”<sup>63</sup> Dolan is emphasizing the *process* of utopian performatives and that they are not about providing a product that can be considered utopian. They instead bring about a process that can be engaged with. So, from Dolan’s work on utopia in performance, we come to know that an effective procedure of new-hope would be to engage in affective and embodied modes of communication- in a process, not with a product.

For Muñoz, temporality is central to his proposition. As Lauren Berlant summarizes it: “*Cruising Utopia* is future oriented... Muñoz sees hope as pointing from the past’s unfinished business to a future beyond the present to sustain the (queer) subject within it.”<sup>64</sup> The unfinished business she refers to is Bloch’s notion of the ‘no-longer-conscious’, or the people and their ideas of the past that are no longer focused on, that may be generally forgotten, lost or have been suppressed. Muñoz brings back this concept. He believes that “the no-longer-conscious is an essential route for the purpose of arriving at the not-yet-here.”<sup>65</sup> If we look to parts of history that have been forgotten about, overlooked, or purposefully erased, we can find inspiration for the ways in which reality could have unfolded differently. Through investigating these ideas which are no longer conscious, we may make discoveries that can alter our future. Essentially, armed with a queer feeling of hope,<sup>66</sup> Muñoz wants to look at the

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<sup>63</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 8.

<sup>64</sup> Berlant, *Cruel Optimism*, 15.

<sup>65</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 30.

<sup>66</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 28.

past in the present to move toward a better future.

Dolan also gives us a sense of how utopia works temporally. She sees utopia as “point[ing] to the future, to imaginative territories that map themselves over the real.”<sup>67</sup> In this way, she is illustrating how the future can also be understood spatially. Mapping the future over top of the present creates a depth of utopia that includes the present and the roots of the conditions of the present, while seeing how the future can exist on top of and from these roots. This gives us an alternate image of utopia that contrasts a faraway planet or island where the better future resides. This gives us a tool to see how utopian ways of being can exist exactly where we are. Muñoz and Dolan give us two actions that can be imbued with new-hope and are necessary procedures to enact new-hope: to look at the overlooked past in the present, and to map new territories over the present.

Instead of telling stories of gay characters living in a straight world, queer dramaturgy offers a “queerly transitory suspension of the regular rules of sociality;”<sup>68</sup> an important tool in enacting utopia. An important step in imagining a different future is to question the present. An effective way to do that is to step out of the constriction of mores and values. This is an important thing to be at play in both the creators and performers, but also with the audience who will be able to experiment with new ways of being and interacting, a fundamental action in imagining and enacting utopia.

In *Queer Dramaturgies*, Campbell and Farrier say that theatre is a “place where we are able to play out other possibilities and experiment with modes of being in ways that may not be so easily played with outside the bounded space of performance.”<sup>69</sup> More specifically they point to Jill Dolan’s ideas to point out two characteristics of theatre that makes it a key medium for hope. The first is that “theatre creates a space of danger without the same consequences” and the second is that it is “a space of play

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<sup>67</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 38.

<sup>68</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 3.

<sup>69</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 9.

and potential.”<sup>70</sup> These are foundational to utopia creating and prefigurativism (which I will discuss below). A safe space to experiment and make mistakes and use our imagination- something Muñoz believes, if you remember, is central to creating a future that is truly different from the present one. A dramaturgy of new-hope then would include the acts of suspending the rules of sociality and engaging in play, potential, and danger.

If futurity is a performance of a future, then that means that it is an action that one does in the present, making it prefigurative. Prefiguration politics, as coined by Carl Boggs, is “the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal.”<sup>71</sup> Campt’s futurity is “a politics of pre-figuration that involves living the future now—as imperative rather than subjunctive—as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.”<sup>72</sup> In this way, Campt is on the same page as Muñoz, in that to create the future we want, we need to try to live it now. He calls for an enactment of “a future in the present.”<sup>73</sup> Of which he says, “to call for this notion of the future in the present is to summon a refunctioned notion of utopia in the service of subaltern politics.”<sup>74</sup> He sees the potential of utopia and attempting to create a utopia in the present as a way to benefit those that are not living in the utopias we are living in presently. The final action we can do in performance in the service of new-hope then, is to live the future we want now.

To conclude this chapter, I will summarize what we have learned about expired hope, what new-hope is, why performance is important in the act of hoping and utopia building, and the dramaturgical procedures of new-hope, as gleaned from Muñoz, Edelman, Dolan, Campt, and Campbell and Farrier.

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<sup>70</sup> Jill Dolan, *Presence and Desire: Essays on Gender, Sexuality, and Performance* (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 158.

<sup>71</sup> Carl Boggs, “Marxism, prefigurative communism and the problem of workers’ control,” *Radical America*, Winter, 100.

<sup>72</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 17.

<sup>73</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 49.

<sup>74</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 49.

Expired hope is ruled by neoliberalist capitalism, which ensures our continued participation in a system that does not benefit many of us as we desire and strive to obtain “the good life.” Expired hope is unsustainable and progressively more disappointing. It feels more and more obsolete as right-wing extremism and climate change threatens to harm more and more of the population. Because of the way the systems are set up, expired hope can only apply to the few.

New-hope then understands that the neoliberalist and capitalistic conditions of the present should not be the subject of our desire, nor should we try to adapt within this system to create a better future. New-hope refuses to accept the aspects of the present that disenfranchise the many, specifically anyone outside of the wealthy, white, heterosexual, cis male identity. New-hope understands the inheritors of the future to be everyone. It is not a desire for what should occur, but what must. Two needs of new-hope is an attachment to the desired better future and motivation to act on this desire. New-hope uses the practice of refusal over resistance. New-hope is a desire for better and a belief that there is another way of being that *must* come about; a refusal of the current conditions under the present systems, and; an understanding that this better future is for everyone.

Performance is important to create a better future. It is a way to come together in community and to reinvest our energies in a hope-filled future. Utopian performatives allow us to realize there is another possibility of being. Performance also offers additional ways of communicating other than language, which effectively opens the criteria of participants who can participate in imagining, experimenting, and hoping. Performance also puts us into a mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present.

By identifying important characteristics of performance that facilitate hope and actions that are key to fostering hope and bringing about utopia, I propose the following dramaturgical procedures, which are centered around the actions of engaging, investigating, suspending and living. After accepting new-hope as the kind of hope to be inhabited, the first procedure is to *engage* in affective and embodied

modes of communication, in moments of utopian doings and processes, never finished gestures. The next procedure is to *investigate* the overlooked past (or the no-longer-conscious) in the present and to map imaginative territories over the real. The third is to *suspend* the rules of sociality in order to engage in play, potential, and danger. Finally, one of the most important procedures is to *live* the future we desire, in the present.

In the next chapter we will investigate the new-hope-informed choices Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher made when creating and rehearsing *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC* as well as how these decisions led to the manifestation of the procedures in the performances. Although these procedures were likely not consciously present during the creation of these two pieces, both performances provide solid examples of how these procedures surface in queer contemporary performance when they are created from a hopeful place.

### Chapter 3 - Finding New-Hope in Queer Dance

*“Queer performance is a tool, an identity, a gasp, a sigh, a loss, a riot, a vindication, and an embrace.”*  
-Moynan King<sup>75</sup>

In this chapter I will first describe the performances *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC*. Then, based on the interviews I had with Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher, I will outline how each maker accepted each of the three pillars of new-hope during their creation and rehearsal process, as well as analyze how their acceptance of new-hope manifested in the performance by relating to my own experience of viewing each piece. Next, I will look at each dramaturgical procedure outlined in chapter two of this thesis. For each procedure I will look at the findings from my interviews with the makers to see how they fulfilled the procedures in the creation and rehearsal of their piece, as well as my reading of new-hope in each performance through dramaturgical analysis of specific moments.

#### *3.1 Descriptions of performances*

*Tender Men* is a dance piece where four men are always visible on stage. They move through different kinds of dancing, moving, and relating to each other with a musical score that spans many genres, evoking a range of feelings and associations. Each performer’s specific dance background is highlighted and creates interesting tensions and relations between the men. There are surprising moments of tenderness expressed through kissing, hugging, witnessing, and carrying. Moments of violence are also investigated through the lens of tenderness. The performance ends with the performers in fun costumes, blowing bubbles and

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<sup>75</sup> Moynan King, *Queer/Play: An Anthology of Queer Women’s Performance and Plays* (Ontario: Playwrights Canada Press, 2017), vi.

doing jazzy choreography inspired by Tina Turner in unison.

In a theatre space (or in your living room if you are participating in *Pilot PC* from home over zoom,) the Fool, Schumacher's character who is host of the evening, takes the audience through three phases in order to learn the soft skills that are typically cultivated during a rave. The first phase is a "Ted Talk" where The Fool explains different aspects of the rave but reminds us that we are in the theatre. He asks us questions like "what is dominant? What is visible? What is given space? What is repressed?" He tries to answer some of these but must admit he cannot say what is repressed because it has been repressed. However, that is what he uses the rave for: to shake loose what might have been suppressed.



Figure 3.<sup>76</sup>

Phase two is "rave aerobics" where the audience is guided through different ways of

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<sup>76</sup> Anna van Koolj, from *Pilot PC*, photograph, Eindhoven Park Theatre, [https://www.parktheater.nl/en/programma/9813/Connor\\_Schumacher/Pilot\\_PC\\_a\\_rave\\_session\\_it\\_s\\_nothing\\_wi\\_thout\\_you/](https://www.parktheater.nl/en/programma/9813/Connor_Schumacher/Pilot_PC_a_rave_session_it_s_nothing_wi_thout_you/).

moving, and through different kinds of spaces that would normally be found in a rave which dictate the way we move and reflect: the main hall, the small room, and the chill space. The Fool makes explicit the thoughts that may come up consciously, but more likely subconsciously, while we rave. He describes the ways in which the rave is used to communicate, experience, and practice ways of being while connecting these things to certain kinds of movement.

Phase three is a simulated rave practice where the Fool joins everyone in the experience and stops guiding. During this time, the combination of the fog, music, and lighting simulates a rave. The screen mainly provides visuals during this phase but reminds the participants of some important things like “DANCE IS NOT AN ANSWER ITS A TOOL TO CRAFT A WAY TO GO INTO THE UNCERTAIN PRECARIOUS WORLD.”

### *3.2 Queer, Contemporary, Utopian.*

Both *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC* are contemporary performances, made by queer makers, premiering in 2020, and both were performed in the Netherlands. This is important because it means both performances were created and received by audiences during the same era of hope. The new-hope that I am writing about is specific to this time. Hope is also greatly influenced by location. I am writing from the Netherlands and so my perspective is rooted in a location of privilege. It would be irresponsible and unhelpful to try to apply my notions of hope to performances created in vastly different contexts.

Both performances are also made by queer makers. This is important because as queer people, Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher are already living outside of straight-time and the rules pertaining to such and thus can not help but make from a place of hope. And so,

while establishing these dramaturgical procedures, it is most helpful to go directly to the source- to people who have been living and making performance outside of heteronormative constraints.

Both performances use the same kind of utopian aimed futurity and exist in a temporality that folds the past and future into the present. Both performances are also speculating, articulating, and enacting utopia. Most importantly, I have selected these two performances because a dramaturgy of new-hope can be felt by the audience, and the dramaturgical procedures of new-hope can be observed. This is because both makers made decisions during their creation and rehearsal processes rooted in new-hope, and, whether consciously or subconsciously, followed the procedures of new-hope dramaturgy.

As an audience member of *Tender Men*, I felt “lifted” in the way Dolan describes utopian performatives lifting us out of the present. The piece is also exploring a specific aspect and question of utopia. That is, “what would tenderness look like between men in a world without homophobia?” which is an effective mode of utopian speculation because it is specific but implies major structural changes.

*Pilot PC* is proposing a new way of planning for the future, and it thinks of the post-pandemic time as a possibility for utopia as opposed to a “return to normal.” This is supported by Bregman’s discussions of how major shocks and disruptions are the best time to create vast change.<sup>77</sup> *Pilot PC* also possesses an understanding that changing the way of thinking is an important way to refuse the modes of the present. It suggests that maybe what has been wrong with the present is not just what we think, but *how* we think. This is also an important

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<sup>77</sup>Bregman, *Utopia for Realists*, 238-243.

case study because it has literally been forced to adapt to the crisis of the corona pandemic in order to continue. This helps situate new-hope as a reaction to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Although being able to identify choices made is involved in a dramaturgical mode of looking,<sup>78</sup> choice making is also dramaturgy at work. While Schumacher and De Preter take approaches that vastly differ, they both used dramaturgical procedures of new-hope in the creation of the performances. Different theatrical means and strategies can be used to approach new-hope dramaturgy.

In our interview on May 5, 2021, De Preter told me that underlying all his work is his belief that “the world needs more hope-giving poetry.”<sup>79</sup> He makes the work he does because although there is value in art that provokes or makes us think, he believes that what we need is art that makes us feel. That is why he created *Tender Men* the way he did. He worked with emotions and affect instead of theory, used pop cultural references to bring about associations, and created through improvisation in order to give space to practice freedom. To create a piece that is understood not only by the mind, the process must be led by the body and heart.<sup>80</sup>

The original concept for *Pilot PC*, Schumacher told me in our first interview, was to create a social choreography<sup>81</sup> out of the no-experience-necessary movement classes he had been teaching. To “take the theatre space and make it a practice space, a place where we could practice the physical culture of dance together in the theatre.”<sup>82</sup> He had a desire to develop

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<sup>78</sup> Bleeker, *Mode of Looking*.

<sup>79</sup> Koen De Preter, interview by author, March 5, 2021.

<sup>80</sup> De Preter, interview.

<sup>81</sup> Although he did not explicitly mention who his ideas of “social choreography” come from, Schumacher uses this term in line with Bojana Cvejic, Ana Vujanovic, Andrew Hewitt, and Michael Kliën. Hewitt describes social choreography as “an attempt to think about the aesthetic as it operates at the very base of social experience.” (*Social Choreography*, page 2).

<sup>82</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

skills and plant values in people who needed it, with the goal of altering and progressing physical culture. These skills and values include self-confidence, accurate self-perception, the ability to deal with uncertainty and complexity, flexibility and adaptability, patience, resilience, persistence, and the ability to take care.<sup>83</sup> In the end, especially because of the Covid-19 pandemic, the process for creating and developing *Pilot PC* was itself about “flexibility and adaptability and the ability to deal with uncertainty and complexity.”<sup>84</sup>

In other ways too, Schumacher’s practice itself inspired creating a social choreography. He made the decision to open the performance up so that the audience fully participated. This is because of how the process of his previous works had affected the performers. In our second interview, he spoke of a previous performer who was very closed and internal, who by the end of the process opened up to the ensemble, and the ensemble fully nurtured them. The rehearsing process “and then just the repetition of the performance itself, strengthens all of these values.”<sup>85</sup> He said that it became clear that “we would be a better community or a better society if we danced every day,”<sup>86</sup> and thus he embarked on a process that could both employ dancers and allow people who needed it, to dance. Besides making his practice into a social choreography, he made many other decisions in the creation process of *Pilot PC* that I will argue, came from a place of new-hope. These choices include unlearning, equity in space giving, repetition, metaphor, looking at the archive of the body, improvisation, and progressing in all directions.

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<sup>83</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

<sup>85</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

<sup>86</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

### 3.3 Pillars of New-Hope in *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC*

In this section, I will analyze how the three pillars of new-hope exist in both performances of *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC*. The acceptance of new-hope is also the foundational condition for new-hope dramaturgy and thus, analyzing how each maker accepts new-hope is imperative before looking at the dramaturgical procedures.

#### **Pillar One: A desire for better and a belief that this better way of being must come about.**

Through our interviews, both artists discussed their desires for a better world and their attachment to why it must come about, as well as how these desires manifested in their creation and rehearsal processes. The first pillar, a desire for better and a belief that this better way of being must come about is rooted in Muñoz's declaration that "we want a society where the needs of the people come first."<sup>87</sup> The desire and insistence for better is also present in both Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher's practice. *Tender Men* originally came from the hesitation De Preter feels to hold his partner's hand while walking down the street and the noticeable lack of intimacy in public spaces between men.<sup>88</sup> With a desire for a world without homophobia, where queer people can exist in public without fear of violence, De Preter recognizes that for this to happen, tenderness between men in general must become more accepted. In this way, Koen understands the grammar of futurity Camppt espouses- not a future that can or should manifest, but one that must.<sup>89</sup> The better way of being that must come about for Koen is a masculinity that is vulnerable and sensitive.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 19.

<sup>88</sup> De Preter, interview.

<sup>89</sup> Camppt, *Listening to Images*, 17.

<sup>90</sup> Koen De Preter, "Tender Men," "koendepreter.com", 2020, <https://koendepreter.com/>.

Schumacher also possesses a desire for an improved reality that must occur. In our interview, he told me that “every project is a step in a longer project with the ambition of using dance to give hope and skills to build a better social atmosphere.”<sup>91</sup> He sees the rave space as a site where people are free to be their whole selves and interact authentically. He wants people to be fully themselves in all spaces. Thus, all the work he makes is an attempt to make this reality come about by giving people the skills and values that are needed for that to happen. This is also why he chose to include dancers from his prior project, *Funny Happy Soft and the Opposite in Pilot PC*. He did not need to choreograph them because he knew that they hold the values he stands for and that they are a good model of the skills he is trying to cultivate in the audience. The potentiality of a society Schumacher desires is possible because there are already people who dance and live this way, and they are with the audience while they too learn these skills and values. In these ways, both artists accepted the first pillar of new-hope.

This first pillar also can be perceived in the performances themselves. Campt taught us that new-hope is both the attachment to utopia and the motivation to realize it.<sup>92</sup> *Tender Men* recognizes that the inability of most men to be able to show tenderness to one another is a result of toxic masculinity and homophobia and that this inability is preventing important experiences of connection and reciprocity. The performance creates and possesses an attachment to a world without toxic masculinity and homophobia and leads the audience to understand that this is a change that must come about by showing us the beauty of what can occur when men are tender towards one another. *Tender Men's* existence in and of itself

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<sup>91</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>92</sup> Campt, *Listening to Images*, 17.

appears to be motivated by a desire for betterment in this respect.

By asking the participants of *Pilot PC* questions like “what is dominant? What is visible? What is given space? What is repressed?”<sup>93</sup> The Fool is helping us question the very foundations of the present so that we may realize that these things are not stagnant and fixed. Other questions that are contemplated while dancing are: “what does it mean to be a soft human? What does it mean to give my softness to others?”<sup>94</sup> This introduces a new way of thinking, of moving, and of communicating. The Fool reminds us that softness and strength are not opposites and encourages participants to figure out how to generate more power while holding onto softness and strength. In this way, *Pilot PC* speaks to the same ideas about masculinity as De Preter -that masculinity must not be predicated on heteronormativity or violence. Both performances show us ways to be powerful in softness, which is a proposed antidote to toxic masculinity. Both performances also present this change of perspective on masculinity and strength as imperative, should we move towards a better society.

From feminist theory, we know that in order to enact change under a patriarchal system, men need to be involved.<sup>95</sup> However, internalized misogyny, white supremacy, and homophobia exist in everyone and so in order to start changing the world for the better, men need to also be able to work on these things within themselves. This can be especially difficult when these systems are benefiting men. Being tender is both a way to combat these internalized systems as well as an expression of what can happen when they are overcome.

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<sup>93</sup> *Pilot PC*, Connor Schumacher, registration.

<sup>94</sup> *Pilot PC*, Connor Schumacher, registration.

<sup>95</sup> See Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (*We Should All Be Feminists*) and Dr Michael Flood, Dr Graeme Russell, Dr Jane O’Leary and Cathy Brown (*Men Make a Difference*).

*Tender Men* holds onto a belief that men must figure out how to be tender towards one another for their own wellbeing, but also in order to make the world a better one.



Figure 4.<sup>96</sup>

In our interview, Schumacher acknowledged that times are hard but knows the rave to be a tool to survive and get through difficult periods; to release the things that are making it hard. He also recognizes there are many soft skills that can be developed on the dance floor. He wanted to use the space of the rave to help himself survive, but he also wants to give this space to others- especially during a time you cannot go get it for yourself since raves are not happening because of the pandemic. *Pilot PC* is an effort to reframe physical culture and to find a new, better way to survive and this can be felt during the performance. Survival is essential, and the performance treats it as such through its urgency and the seriousness with which it takes this process. In this way, both performances realize the kind of utopia Muñoz advocates

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<sup>96</sup> Stanislav Dobak & Bart Grietens, From *Tender Men*, photograph, Koen De Preter, <https://koendepreter.com/>.

for, “an insistence on something else, something better, something dawning. From shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality.”<sup>97</sup> These are some of the ways the first pillar of new-hope can be read in the performances.

**Pillar Two: A refusal of the current conditions under the present systems.**

The second pillar of new-hope, the refusal of the current conditions under the present systems, is also present in both Schumacher and De Preter’s processes. In creating a universe on stage that exists without homophobia, De Preter also refused the systems that result in homophobia. He looked to other cultures for inspiration of how men can be tender with each other but understood that audiences’ minds in Europe, where the piece would be performed, are colonized and infiltrated by the patriarchy. So, a scene of men bathing together, inspired by Hammam culture, would be read through these lenses. He refused to allow these systems to affect the utopia he was creating on stage and so he chose instead to have them clean themselves, and witness each other washing up, but with no nudity.

We were thinking about more nudity, but in the end, I chose not to do that, only the change of costume. I had this idea of different cultures where it is normal for men to wash each other without sexual connotations. But then when you bring this on stage it becomes quite homo-erotic, and I didn’t want to emphasize that.<sup>98</sup>

The piece is not about eroticism, it is about vulnerability. In this way, he refuses the present systems to dictate the perception of this utopia. He also refuses present labour systems by working in a way that flattens the hierarchy of choreographer and dancers, and instead works

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<sup>97</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 189.

<sup>98</sup> De Preter, interview.

to facilitate creation and listens to the performers and to everything they bring.

Schumacher also refuses the present systems of white supremacy, heteronormativity, the patriarchy, and colonialism. He sees this as starting with refusing the conditions these systems create within himself. This was the reason for the creation of the Fool, the character he plays while performing in *Pilot PC*. This, he explained, is an embodied character he takes on to get rid of learned behavior so that he is just left with himself, Connor.<sup>99</sup> However, he cannot escape from the fact that he has a white, cis-male body in a world that is run by the concept that these identities are most dominant and valued. So then, he must challenge all the concepts that



Figure 5.<sup>101</sup>

underpin these social systems. He asked, “What if all of these concepts that we have lived by for so long were different?”<sup>100</sup> In many ways, this is the same question that underpins the work of Muñoz , Campt, Berlant, Bregman, and Edelman.

This refusal also led Schumacher to “focus on expanding the values of the process in all directions. Towards my own organization, towards the public, and who we partner with and the spaces that we share it in.”<sup>102</sup> He inspects how these values are regarded in all of these contexts. Thus, the values affect the dramaturgy of the context of the performance. The second pillar of new-hope, a refusal of the current conditions under the present systems, as we

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<sup>99</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>100</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>101</sup> Anna van Koolj, from *Pilot PC*, photograph, Eindhoven Park Theatre, [https://www.parktheater.nl/en/programma/9813/Connor\\_Schumacher/Pilot\\_PC\\_a\\_rave\\_session\\_it\\_s\\_nothing\\_wi\\_thout\\_you/](https://www.parktheater.nl/en/programma/9813/Connor_Schumacher/Pilot_PC_a_rave_session_it_s_nothing_wi_thout_you/).

<sup>102</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

have seen, was accepted by both artists during their creation and rehearsal processes.

In the performance, the second pillar of new-hope is also present. This pillar comes from Camp't's argument not for resistance to the dangerous systems that rule our society, but a complete refusal to adhere to them.<sup>103</sup> In *Tender Men*, the context of the performance is one in which homophobia is insidious and influences much more than just same-sex romantic relationships. Homophobia is a condition that is rooted in and results from colonialism and the patriarchy. To imagine a world without homophobia is to imagine a decolonized world where the patriarchy has been dismantled. The conditions of toxic masculinity and homophobia simply do not exist on the stage, in the world of *Tender Men*. In this way, the performance is doing as Muñoz and Camp't suggest. Instead of just resisting, completely refuse the overruling systems of colonization and the patriarchy, not just the resulting effects of the systems.<sup>104 105</sup>

The creation of *Pilot PC* is a reaction to the life during a pandemic that causes us to feel sad, isolated, angry, helpless, and lost. The act of engaging in the rave is an attempt to refuse these conditions by gaining agency, control, and renegotiating these conditions for ourselves. The performance's first lines are "Welcome to *Pilot PC*. I am going to push this space. I want it to shake... until everything in this space vibrates and is rearranged." There is a recognition that it all needs to be changed; to be shaken loose. The site of the rave in and of itself places the audience under control of new systems. It does not ask the audience to explore physical culture in the outside world where things like capitalism and white supremacy dictate how we connect with other people. It is giving the opportunity to explore within completely different systems.

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<sup>103</sup> Camp't, *Listening to Images*, 32.

<sup>104</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 65, 133, 134.

<sup>105</sup> Camp't, *Listening to Images*, 32.

This is the realization of Muñoz hope. Not a queer person thriving in a straight world, but a world built for queer life and expression.<sup>106</sup> As audience of both *Pilot PC* and *Tender Men*, the second pillar of new-hope dictates the ways in which we interact with the performance.

**Pillar Three: An understanding that this better future is for everyone.**

The third and final pillar of new-hope that has been accepted by De Preter and Schumacher in their making processes is the understanding that this better future is for everyone, especially those who have not had the desired agency and freedom in the past and present. As Dolan understands utopia to be a place where we are connected by our similarities,<sup>107</sup> Muñoz sees “the field of utopian possibility [as] one in which multiple forms of belonging in difference adhere to a belonging in collectivity.”<sup>108</sup> Schumacher and De Preter both see the importance of difference when working towards a future that is better for all. De Preter chose to work with dancers of different dance and cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations. Utopia would not be filled only with people who look like each other or dance the same, so neither would the universe De Preter created on stage. While Jill Dolan would like to see a utopia where, we are united by our commonalities, De Preter recognized the importance of difference of perspective in the making of the piece. Discussions about everyone’s experience with the different topics being explored were often had throughout the process. Although he is a queer artist, he knows that a utopia where men are tender with each other has just as much to do with heterosexual men as it does with queer men and so he worked with dancers with a variety of sexualities and ensured sexuality was not the most important part of

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<sup>106</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 29, 121.

<sup>107</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*, 8.

<sup>108</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 20.

the piece.<sup>109</sup> “In the back of my mind, I didn’t want it to be all queer performers, it was really important that they came from different backgrounds because everyone brings their own experiences of life into the creation process.”<sup>110</sup> Throughout the creation and rehearsal process, De Preter was guided by the third characteristic of new-hope: an understanding that this better future is for everyone.



Figure 6.<sup>111</sup>

A guiding inquiry in Schumacher’s artistic practice surrounds who he is making for. He knows that the people who have most access to theatrical spaces in the Netherlands are privileged white people. His work originally was meant to “knock people out of their normative experience and make space for (him)self in the field,”<sup>112</sup> but now that he has the space, he is rethinking who his practice is for and who really needs it.<sup>113</sup> He accepts that the people who need his practice and new-hope the most are people with “marginalized intersectional identities that could use some essential skills that you get from dance.”<sup>114</sup> In his work he has chosen to hold space for communities that need empowering above changing the perspective

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<sup>109</sup> De Preter, interview.

<sup>110</sup> De Preter, interview.

<sup>111</sup> Stanislav Dobak & Bart Grietens, From *Tender Men*, photograph, Koen De Preter, <https://koendepreter.com/>.

<sup>112</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

<sup>113</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

<sup>114</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

of people who have never encountered the values he is sharing.<sup>115</sup> “It would be exponentially more beneficial because it is empowering their own cultures while they feel pressed. It would bring some relief, some feeling, some activation to the culture we already want to support.”<sup>116</sup> In order to explore utopia, there needs to be equity in the access to the performance. Equity in access to performance, target audience and diversity of perspectives in the making process are just some of the ways that the third pillar of new-hope was present in Schumacher and De Preter’s processes.

The third pillar of new-hope can also be seen by the audience of both performances. This pillar is especially rooted in *Cruising Utopia*. In the text, the demand Muñoz makes for a society where the needs of the people are priority, insists that *all* people’s needs need to be considered and held to the highest importance.<sup>117</sup> Both performances present the same understanding- that the utopia we are working towards needs to benefit everyone. *Tender Men* suggests that when men can be tender to one another, they can communicate more truthfully, support each other without restriction, and be authentically themselves. In addition to this, *Tender Men* is enacting a future in the present where the criterion for tenderness is not dependent on race or sexuality. This relates to Edelman’s insistence on opening the criteria of who the future is for.<sup>118</sup> If we change our perspective on who is allowed to show and receive tenderness, we also open perception on who can be authentically themselves.

The rave in *Pilot PC* is framed as a space for everyone, implying that everyone can engage in

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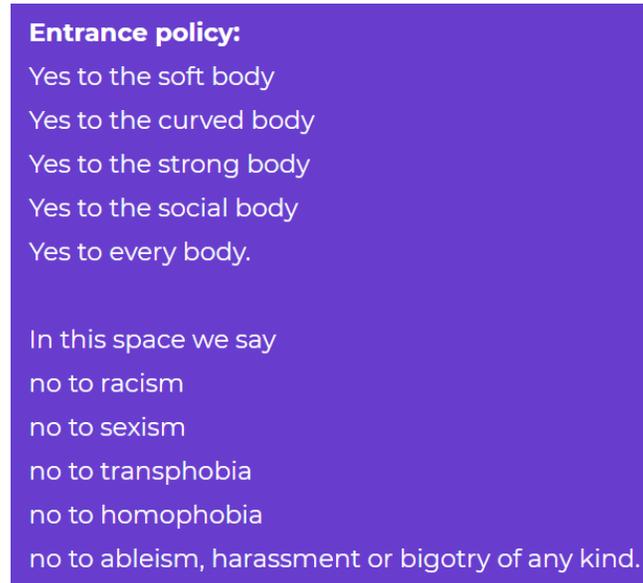
<sup>115</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

<sup>116</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

<sup>117</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 19.

<sup>118</sup> Edelman, *No Future*.

this process of renegotiating their physical reality. However, it is important to note the framing of the performance, which not only invites everyone in, but ensures a safe space for everyone. On the ticket purchasing websites for the performances, a door policy is posted that states:



**Entrance policy:**  
Yes to the soft body  
Yes to the curved body  
Yes to the strong body  
Yes to the social body  
Yes to every body.

In this space we say  
no to racism  
no to sexism  
no to transphobia  
no to homophobia  
no to ableism, harassment or bigotry of any kind.

Figure 7.<sup>119</sup>

This creates an inclusive space, already establishing that the future being worked on is truly for everyone. In these ways, the third pillar of new-hope, that this better future we are working towards is for everyone, can be felt in both *Pilot PC* and *Tender Men*.

### 3.4 New-hope dramaturgical procedures in *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC*.

I have just outlined the ways in which both *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC* accept new-hope. In the following section we will explore the ways in which the dramaturgical procedures of new-hope were present in the creation and rehearsal processes as well as how the procedures can

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<sup>119</sup> Connor Schumacher, "Entrance Policy," Connor Schumacher, screenshot, <http://www.connorschumacher.com/pilot-pc.html>.

be perceived in the performances. We will look at how both performances provide a way and space to come together in community where we: engage in affective and embodied modes of communication- in a process, not with a product; look at the overlooked past in the present and map new territories over the present; suspend rules of sociality and engage in play, potential, and danger; and live the future we want in the present.

**Procedure One: Engage in embodied and affective modes of communication- in a process, not with a product.**

During the creation process of both performances, Schumacher and De Preter decided to engage in embodied and affective modes of communication- in a process and not with a product. As his goal is to touch people, to give them hope and comfort, De Preter works firstly with emotions. "I want dancers to perform with their soul, from their soul."<sup>120</sup> In this way, he fully embraces the second procedure of new-hope dramaturgy. This, I would argue, also attributes to why De Preter has chosen to work with dance. He told me that:

when we look at dance, there is no language. There is the language of the body, or our minds creating stories, but it can allow us to read things or communicate on an emotional level, or on an intuitive level. I think sometimes we forget that there is something beyond the words.<sup>121</sup>

By choosing to communicate affectively, he allows the performers and the audience to seed new-hope in a way that is non-intellectual, because looking at the state of the world and thinking about these things intellectually may not be a hopeful endeavor.

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<sup>120</sup> De Preter, interview.

<sup>121</sup> De Preter, interview.

A central belief that Schumacher holds is that “the most potent thing that dance can do is to be done. Not watched.”<sup>122</sup> This influenced his creation process, and this is why *Pilot PC* was the same practice as his last performance, *Funny Happy Soft and the Opposite*, but opened up into a social choreography where the audience would perform. A large part of our interviews was spent discussing the importance of the first procedure of new-hope dramaturgy: to engage in affective and embodied modes of communication- in a process, not with a product. There were four specific aspects of the embodied process of *Pilot PC* that are helpful for our purposes: repetition, metaphor, the senses, and collaboration.

Repetition and metaphor are used in the rehearsal process and in the performance itself, as I will discuss later. In addition to metaphor, he considers the senses during the creation process because “if I want to plant seeds of progressive values through metaphor in the body, then I had to have it come in through as many senses as possible.”<sup>123</sup> Thus, in creating the piece he is attending to the music being played, the visuals being seen, and the way we are (not) in contact with others. Words play across the screen that remind us to breathe and we hear queer coded-nostalgic remixes while we are focused on opening and closing parts of our body. Both artists, without knowing it explicitly, performed the first procedure of new-hope dramaturgy while creating their respective works.

Both artists used the first procedure in rehearsal, but I would like to focus on how Schumacher used repetition and metaphor in the rehearsal process as a way to engage in affective and embodied modes of communication. Outside of dance, Schumacher’s research is

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<sup>122</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>123</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

based primarily in neuroscience and linguistics. One of the main learnings he has taken from these fields is that “the brain and the body need repetition to make things land, to become a staple of the mind.”<sup>124</sup> This means that repetition is a strategy he uses with the performers of his work, for himself, and for the audience. The actions are done repetitively, ideas are brought back, and the more a performance is repeated, the stronger the affects.

Schumacher uses metaphors of the body to warm up the body to progressive ideas of hope.<sup>125</sup> Tied to the notion that a better future is for everybody, he uses metaphors of the body over, say metaphors of a queer rave space, because everybody has a body, and not everyone understands the queer rave space.<sup>126</sup> He uses metaphor because it is a way to communicate a lot by saying very little. For example, in *Pilot PC*, the Fool tells the audience that everyone has their own mountain to climb. He explained to me that this is a physical metaphor of the body-to struggle, push, exert, and work hard to transgress the comfortable and known or to overcome a personal challenge. It also implies that after the hard work is done, there is a moment of clarity, insight, peace, and where there is change in perspective. All of this is subconsciously understood by most people when they hear this metaphor, but they understand it with their body just as much as with their mind.<sup>127</sup> So, metaphors become a way to communicate linguistically but to be understood by the body. He also noted that he is inspired by the metaphor that “love is a collaborative work of art” from George Lakoff and Mark

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<sup>124</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>125</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>126</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>127</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

Johnson,<sup>128</sup> and everything that this metaphor implies.<sup>129</sup> This is foundational for why it is important that this practice be a social choreography that is worked on together. Throughout the rehearsal process, publics are brought in to try out the performance so that everyone, in a way, creates the piece together. Metaphor and repetition are two strategies of communicating in an embodied and affective way during the rehearsal process and are beneficial to have as we come to understand how new-hope dramaturgical procedures can be used in a rehearsal process.

The procedure of engaging in an affective and embodied mode of communication, in a process and not with a product is also what the audience does during each performance. *Tender Men* uses embodiment and affective modes of communication both between the dancers themselves, and between the dancers and the audience. Among others, throughout the performance the modes of communication being explored are synchronized movement, contact, weight, tension, seeing, being seen, hurting, wrestling, dancing, hugging, washing, paying attention, kissing, consenting, and playing. The piece is exploring a physical way of being in the world and we see how this manifests between the dancers, but as audience members, we are also feeling the effects on our bodies while we acclimatize to this radical way of being together. The main crux of toxic masculinity and homophobia is how we perceive others and how we are perceived. Being an audience member of *Tender Men* allows us to practice what it

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<sup>128</sup> George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago, Illinois: University of Chicago Press, 2017) 139-140.

<sup>129</sup> At 44:46 during our interview on May 13, 2021, reading me the passage from *Metaphors We Live By*, Schumacher added that “everyone can understand that metaphor instinctively, but it is much more complicated than you think it is. BUT if we could start to comprehend our experience of love or our experience of collaborative works of art in terms of this metaphor it could become a deeper reality as we practice it, and we begin to make actions in terms of it.”

feels like in our bodies to witness tenderness between men; to dissolve preconceived notions of how men are supposed to act towards and around each other. This is an example of Dolan's utopian performative. The audience is lifted "slightly above the present"<sup>130</sup> and out of the constraints of the present to affectively understand a different way of witnessing, communicating, and being with others.

*Pilot PC's* central form is this embodied mode of communication. In this piece, participants connect, give, receive, shake loose, surrender, think with the body, and ask for forgiveness. Through literally embodying the prompts given by the Fool, the practice of renegotiating physical culture and all the lessons within it are communicated affectively between the maker and the audience members, as well as between the audience members.

The second part of this dramaturgical procedure of new-hope is concerned with engaging with process over product. These performances do not set up an experience of spectators consuming a product, but an audience engaging with a process. *Pilot PC* is an excellent example of this because in its essence it is a process that the audience is invited into. Schumacher wants to provide a space and a framework of a practice for the audience to engage in. Watching a registration of the performance cannot bring you close to the effects of being present and participating. That is why, since the theatres have closed, Schumacher has been sharing this practice digitally, with people raving in their bedrooms. This version of the performance may not contain as many levels as the in-person one, but a similar process occurs.

In *Tender Men*, the process being engaged with is a process of being tender, but also of witnessing tenderness. The audience is not being supplied with instructions of how to be tender

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<sup>130</sup> Dolan, *Utopia in Performance*. 5.

but are bearing witness to a process in which tenderness is happening in different kinds of moments- from concrete moments of a hug, playing with bubbles, or while the dancers wash and change their clothes in front of one another, to more abstract instances of being weak and being held up by each other, of supporting one another, and fighting with one another. They are engaging in a practice of confronting their own perceptions and existing in this utopian zone of tenderness. This first procedure of new-hope dramaturgy exists in the creation and rehearsal processes of these two performances, but also in the performance itself.

**Procedure Two- Look at the overlooked past in the present and map new territories over the present.**

The second dramaturgical procedure of new-hope, to look at the overlooked past in the present and map new territories over the present, plays with futurity and was present for both Schumacher and De Preter while they were creating and rehearsing their performances. In his practice and in the performance of *Pilot PC* itself, Schumacher is interested in investigating the archive of the body. This is another way we can understand how Muñoz uses Bloch's no-longer-conscious.<sup>131</sup> Schumacher sees humans as being made up of all their experiences, even the ones that may have been repressed or forgotten, "or the ones you don't know are there because they are a part of your epigenetics."<sup>132</sup><sup>133</sup> By exploring the archive of your body, you become aware of your no-longer-conscious personal history, and are able to see better how this may affect your present. This allows you to look to alternative things that are archived in our bodies

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<sup>131</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 27, 30.

<sup>132</sup> The CDC defines epigenetics as "the study of how your behaviors and environment can cause changes that affect the way your genes work."

<sup>133</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021.

to create a different future.

Also, connected to his use of metaphor, Schumacher wants to map new territories over the present by “bringing the audience’s perception to a different metaphor to understand our physical experience in a new way. From there we just have to practice.”<sup>134</sup>

The re-conceptualization of the temporality of the present that Muñoz argues for with queer futurity is present in the creative process of Schumacher’s practice. In our interview, he spoke of progress in terms of spatiality instead of temporality. He said that he wants “to redefine the idea that progress is about forward moving...you are a three-dimensional body, and you can progress in all directions.”<sup>135</sup> Moving backwards or sideways can be just as valuable as moving forwards. The direction is not as important as the fact that you move towards a better state or condition.<sup>136</sup>

To look at overlooked pasts, De Preter works differently. Using pop culture references, he hopes to tap into the expansive well of memory and associations each audience member has. Bringing in recognizable music not only adds to the environment but allows people to bring in their history to read the performance. However, this is also part of the creation process. He created a playlist intuitively, with the concept of tender men in mind. De Preter is using music to access memory and bring it into the present. The fact that a lot of queer-coded songs emerged as part of this process is telling, considering De Preter also invited the performers to bring in music that spoke to them as well. By bringing non-normative associations into the present, De Preter was able to explore tenderness in ways that have often been covered up.

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<sup>134</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>135</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>136</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

During rehearsal, for example he guided improvisations with the performers and the music. This allows the performers to bring in their own associations and history, doing what Muñoz suggests with the “no-longer conscious.”<sup>137</sup> For example, in our interview, De Preter told me that one of the performers brought in “Proud Mary” by Tina Turner for a rehearsal.<sup>138</sup> This resulted in the creation of images and ways of being together that are rooted in associations. The performers blow bubbles, wear fun costumes, and dance in unison while colourful string lights light up against the back wall. These are just some of the ways Schumacher and De Preter looked at overlooked pasts in the present and mapped new territories over the present in their creation and rehearsal processes.

In the performance, this procedure allows the audience members to re-examine their own past and present. As an audience member, the scene with bubble blowing and Tina Turner brought something important to light for me. It reminded me in many ways of slumber parties I would have with my friends as a girl. The slumber party is a site where girls learn tenderness and can be in touch with their femininity. My friends and I would turn on artists like Tina Turner and just play. Blowing bubbles, making up dances together, and putting on costumes and being silly with your friends is a practice in freedom and exploration that young girls in my culture experience many times over years of their childhood. Staging this experience with grown men does two important things: firstly, it gives the performers the opportunity to experience a formative practice that they missed out on because they were not raised as girls in a society that encourages tender practices only between girls. Secondly, it allows us all to ask what

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<sup>137</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 21.

<sup>138</sup> De Preter, interview.

moments of our past have shaped our relationship to tenderness and what might we have missed out on because of barriers inflicted on us by the patriarchy?

At the same time, the construction of this scene is a strong example of queer futurity.<sup>139</sup>

The choreographer and performers brought an overlooked past into the present and altered it in a way that brought a desired future also into the present. The overlooked past of a childhood for boys where sensitivity, expression, and tenderness are valued and encouraged is performed and practiced by the dancers. In doing so, they help the audience imagine, and practice for themselves, a future where boys are not restricted by patriarchal values and thus can grow up to blow bubbles and dance to Tina Turner with each other, free from toxic masculinity.

This procedure allows new-hope to be fostered in many ways because of its roots in queer dramaturgy. “A queer dramaturgy allows us to engage with an identity – to present the queer history – of a person from another era, from the past, without pinning down the intricacies of that life, or claiming some kind of stability or fixity.”<sup>140</sup> This freedom of borrowing from the past is explored in *Tender Men*. This is done through music, although differently than explained above. The performance brings forth history, and through using the music differently than it might have before, shows us the ways in which the past perhaps was not as straight as we had believed, and therefore making our future more open than we might have envisioned. An example of this is the scene that features Bruce Springsteen’s “I’m on Fire.” The dancers inhibit this gentle floating kind of dance where they are dancing on their own, but very much together, weaving around each other, seeing each other, and reacting to one another.

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<sup>139</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*.

<sup>140</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 153.

Springsteen's nickname is "the Boss." He inhabits a very particular kind of masculinity, and his songs are known to be especially popular with nationalist type American Dads with hit songs like "Born in the USA" and "The Promised Land." However, he is also strangely loved by many queer people. One writer wrote of him,

Bruce is far from gay; some might argue he is one of the straightest men alive. But... it is easy to see why he has long been if not a queer icon, then at least a straight icon who is disproportionately beloved by many queers.<sup>141</sup>

This is for many reasons, including that his songs have themes of longing, alienation, and contradictions of identity- all very queer themes. Taking a Springsteen song and placing it on stage to be danced to by four men who are not at a fourth of July barbeque but instead dancing gently together, reminds us that there have always been people connecting with artists like the Boss in a different way than the ones who got to do it in the open. Straight white Americans have been able to worship these songs out in the open, but perhaps they have always been best understood by queers in the dark. By placing "I'm on Fire" in this new context, Koen De Preter has destabilized our understanding of the past enough for us to engage in a process of re-imagining the future.

Schumacher does something similar with space. By bringing the rave into the theatre, he brings attention to a cultural event that is not typically contemplated beyond being a place to dance. However, the rave has always been a place where all these questions have been engaged with. This is especially true for the queer community who has historically found refuge

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<sup>141</sup> Naomi Gordon-Loebl, "The Queerness of Bruce Springsteen," *The Nation*, November 7, 2019, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/bruce-springsteen-queerness-essay/>.

at the rave because it is a space to experiment and redefine one's own physical culture outside of the "real" world, where doing these things can result in violence. By paying close attention to this past that has been often overlooked, Schumacher invites new readings and therefore new possibilities for the future.

*Pilot PC* is also engaging in a mapping of new territory over the present by placing an event in a context in which it should not exist. Raves are a bad idea right now, during the Covid-19 pandemic, because it requires a lot of people to be close together and breathing heavily. Schumacher has abstracted the rave into a simulation that is safe (and legal) during the time it was performed and by doing this, shows the ways in which the rave can be used as a tool for much more than what was generally believed before. This new territory of embodiment and communication is being mapped onto the present so that we can see the ways in which the future might be different: how we may think differently, how we may dance differently, and how we may communicate differently.

**Procedure Three: Suspend the rules of sociality and engage in play, potentiality and danger.**

Engaging in play, potentiality and danger by suspending the rules of sociality was a big part of the creation of both performances, and was a procedure used during the rehearsal processes. From the beginning, De Preter's desire to create a world on stage without homophobia allows many of the rules of sociality to be suspended. This is the first part of the third dramaturgical procedure, inspired by Campbell and Farrier.<sup>142</sup> The strategy he used to allow the performers to engage in play, potential and danger, was primarily improvisation. His two biggest inspirations are people and music and so giving a framework of the topic to explore

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<sup>142</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 3.

without the consequences and barriers of reality, the performers were encouraged to play and see what would happen.<sup>143</sup> He explained to me that the result of this can be seen in the performance, specifically in the scene that was inspired by a gay bashing in Belgium.

Vulnerability and masculinity, two of De Preter's interests with *Tender Men*, are also implicit in violence. Here is where the performers play with danger. Violence can be investigated in a creative process like this because of the discussions and actions that take place around it. In our interview, De Preter told me that they discussed and experimented with who could best handle the punches, slaps, and kicks given by the other performers. They also thought about which zones were to be avoided because of the performers' boundaries and limits of pain. There is a tenderness in discussing safety just as much as it is technically important. When playing with danger in a process like this you must counterbalance it with taking care, and "afterwards you have to hug each other."<sup>144</sup>

For Schumacher, in the rave space and in the rehearsal space, "the values of society are completely rearranged."<sup>145</sup> He too uses structured improvisation as a making tool, but also as the form of the performance. He thinks it is important to discuss however, that "you can enact a space where you practice different rules than society, but that doesn't mean society is not there." This is an important reminder when we suspend the rules of sociality to engage in play, potential, and danger, because as much as it would be incredible to get to step into a reality where misogyny, racism, ableism, etc. do not exist, people who deal with the violence and danger of these systems in reality are still aware of this in the performance space. Schumacher

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<sup>143</sup> De Preter, interview.

<sup>144</sup> De Preter, interview 53:07

<sup>145</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

notes that as a white cis-male holding the space of *Pilot PC*, the power he holds in reality still gets translated into the simulated rave space.<sup>146</sup> When playing with danger and potentiality, it is important to remember that we can never be completely removed from the world in which we are making. Yet, suspending the rules of sociality and engaging in this play is a key procedure used in the creation and rehearsal processes of the performances.

For an audience to engage in a process of re-imagining the future, it is important to cut ties with the strings of reality that ensure we stay tied to the present.<sup>147</sup> These strings are the rules and social mores we follow in our day-to-day life, often subconsciously, but are nonetheless ones that ensure the continuation of the status quo. In both performances, these rules are suspended so that the performers and spectators may engage in danger, potential, and play.

*Tender Men* has created an alternate world where homophobia and racism do not dictate the ways in which men communicate and physically exist around each other. By doing this, the dancers bring the audience along on an exploration of what may occur when these strings are cut. Once this is done, there is a freedom for the dancers to play with each other in ways they might not dare in the context of our present reality. This allows them to experiment with things that might normally be dangerous, for example kissing one another platonically or kicking and punching each other. In experimenting with these things and not having the negative repercussions, *Tender Men* is enacting a potentiality of interaction that must occur for the future to be the utopian.

The space of the rave already cuts the strings of the rules to experiment and play, yet *Pilot*

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<sup>146</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>147</sup> Campbell and Farrier, *Queer Dramaturgies*, 3.

*PC* goes one step further by explicitly inviting experimentation. The Fool says that “everything can exist in the rave space, and it is up to me how to live in that space together, alone, with others.” Everything is possible and each person has agency- in a way this is already a utopian concept, but it also makes this performance an excellent tool to move toward utopia. Because of this suspension of rules and space of potential, there is also more chances of utopian performatives to occur.

**Procedure four- Live the future we want now.**

In some ways, the very act of creating *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC* was the enactment of the fourth and final procedure of new-hope dramaturgy. Both De Preter and Schumacher were living the future they wanted in the present- creating a world without homophobia and new physical culture respectively. In *Tender Men*, freedom is a notion of the future that the dancers are living in the present. De Preter believes life should be more about play. “The feeling of freedom is in all of my work. The childlike freedom- to just goof around a little, to drop the seriousness, the attitude, the brainy part of dancing, and just enjoy and play.”<sup>148</sup> He understands that freedom to play is an act of hope that every space could be a safe space.

As discussed earlier, the door policy of *Pilot PC* is important to understanding Schumacher’s practice in relation to new-hope dramaturgy. For the fourth procedure, to live the future we want now, the door policy represents the kinds of framing that events, especially in performance spaces, must have in utopia and thus should have today. In our interview, we discussed how queer events almost always have a door policy to create a safe space, but it is

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<sup>148</sup> De Preter, interview.

rare to come across one in a normative space.<sup>149</sup> By using the door policy for a theatre event, Schumacher is creating the future he wants in the present. He believes that joy manifests as a safe space because a safe space amounts to more agency that people have over their experience.<sup>150</sup>

The restrictions surrounding the performance of *Pilot PC* because of the pandemic added an additional layer of dramaturgy to the piece. A choice that was made on this level of the performance's dramaturgy was how conflict or disregard for rules would be dealt with.<sup>151</sup> The dancers he hired would have a conversation with someone if they moved outside of their circle on the floor.<sup>152</sup> If that one-on-one conversation did not work, the entire performance would shut down and there would be a discussion as a community.<sup>153</sup> This is a practice of justice and conflict resolution that takes on a different shape than the criminal justice system we have in the present to deal with rule breaking. By deciding to implement a community conversation-based strategy of keeping people safe, *Pilot PC* practices a future, non-normative justice practice, in the present.

So too were possible future practices used during the rehearsal processes of both performances. De Preter's centralization of consent and freedom in the process of creating and

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<sup>149</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>150</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, April 16, 2021.

<sup>151</sup> From our interview on May 13, 2021: "We wanted to make sure we had enough people to take care of the space in case people would not take responsibility for themselves. They were the floor angels. If they saw someone not being aware enough of their body in space, they would be able to begin this conversation with them. Of course, people make mistakes, but if you are consciously overstepping the boundaries of the space, then we are going to have a conversation about it. First, they will have a conversation with you but if it goes too far, everything will stop and **we** will have a conversation about it as a community."

<sup>152</sup> Which ensured a 1.5 meter distance was maintained between participants.

<sup>153</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021. 39:30ish

rehearsing *Tender Men* is the kind of prefigurativism Camppt urges,<sup>154</sup> and Muñoz understands as living the future we want in the present.<sup>155</sup> The way consent would exist in utopia can be argued,<sup>156</sup> however, it would surely be highly regarded. Consent was important to Koen De Preter in his process. He followed a course as a director and choreographer on the wheel of consent and integrated consent into the rehearsal process.<sup>157</sup> The piece was being made during the corona pandemic and so there was a lot of discussion around boundaries regarding health but also in general, questions like “on stage, what would be the furthest you would go?”<sup>158</sup> These boundaries would be consistently checked in on as the piece evolved. Once the scene with kissing became part of the piece, there was a culture of the dancers checking in with each other to see what they were comfortable with. Consent and expression of boundaries also leads to freedom because the performers know that they themselves can always express a boundary if one arises, and they know that their fellow performers will let them know if they are about to cross a line. This also allows the four performers an opportunity to practice giving and receiving consent.

For Schumacher, the most important way this fourth dramaturgical procedure manifested in the practice was when he worked with other dancers. “To see how the values we were trying to speak about in the piece also became the tools in which we worked together in the studio

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<sup>154</sup> Camppt, *Listening to images*, 17.

<sup>155</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 32.

<sup>156</sup> Differing and interesting perspective on this can be found in: Alexandra Brodsky and Rachel Kauder-Nalebuff, *The Feminist Utopia Project: Fifty-Seven Visions of a Wildly Better Future* (New York City: The Feminist Press, at the City University of New York, 2015).

<sup>157</sup> As discussed in an interview with Filip Tielens. Filip Tielens Johan Jacobs, “‘Twee Mannen Die Hand in Hand Lopen, Dat Is Bijna Een Politieke Daad Geworden’,” *De Standaard* (standaard.be, October 10, 2020).

<sup>158</sup> De Preter, interview.

was really incredible.”<sup>159</sup> Some of the metaphors that the group was trying to live by like “to curve, to be soft, to be strong, to have strength in your softness, to be open and recognize that its natural to close,”<sup>160</sup> became the tools the dancers used when conflict arose in the studio. Through practicing the way they hoped people would exist in the future, they were able to live that future in the present. Schumacher reported that they were more likely to recognize where emotions came from, took accountability when things arose, and gave others the space they needed to go through whatever it was they needed to go through. This is an example of the prefigurative politics Camppt argues for “that involves living the future now...as a striving for the future you want to see, right now, in the present.”<sup>161</sup>

To live the future we want now is also a procedure that can be seen in the performances. Muñoz argues for a queer futurity that rejects straight time because “straight time tells us that there is no future but the here and now of our everyday life.”<sup>162</sup> Queer futurism allows us to live a future that is different than the present we know. *Tender Men* is not explicitly set in the future, and it takes place in the present. It is a form of queer futurism that is enacting the desired future in the present and in doing so, disrupting the audience of expectations of the present. Four men can indeed do all these things together, and I can bear witness to it, and there is no threat of true violence or danger, and no one is being attacked. All these men, when rid of one aspect of toxic masculinity are still masculine and hold onto the identity of their gender. Perhaps we did not know this could happen, but by seeing this future

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<sup>159</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021. 52:40ish

<sup>160</sup> Connor Schumacher, interview by author, May 13, 2021, 53:30

<sup>161</sup> Camppt, *Listening to Images*, 17.

<sup>162</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 22.

being explored right in front of us in the present, we now know it can be so. This applies too to *Pilot PC*. Engaging in a practice like *Pilot PC* activates the audience to take on a prefigurative existence. In experimenting with ways of being soft, powerful, alone, together, curved, and twisted, participants are living potentialities in the future, to the same end as *Tender Men*. The very act of doing proves that it can be reality.

In this chapter I have shown how new-hope existed in both the creation of *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC*, and in the performances themselves. I have also used the interviews I conducted with Koen De Preter and Connor Schumacher to examine how the four dramaturgical procedures of new-hope can exist in creation and rehearsal processes. On top of this, I used my own reading of the performance to see how these procedures from the creative processes manifested in the performance and how they could be taken on and observed by the audience. These have been two examples of how makers can foster and cultivate new-hope through performance.

## Chapter Four – Conclusion

In this thesis, I have proven that considering the state of ever-present crises there is a need for a different kind of hope, and that the best place to foster and practice new-hope is in the theatre. I proposed the concept of *new-hope* to encapsulate an active form of hope that emancipates us from expired desires that are no longer productive or fruitful but that can nonetheless move us towards new utopias.

In order to do this, my thesis worked to answer my central research question: *what are the dramaturgical procedures of “new-hope” in contemporary queer performance?* I first looked to Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman’s notions of cruel optimism and reproductive futurism respectively, to define expired hope and understand why we needed to move away from it.

Next, I brought José Esteban Muñoz and Tina Campt’s notions of futurity into conversation with Berlant and Edelman. I did this in order to define new-hope as a tool that could be used for utopian speculation. The three pillars of new-hope that were established were: 1) a desire for better and a belief that this better way of being *must* come about, 2) a refusal of the current conditions under the present systems, and 3) an understanding that this better future is for everyone. I then grounded these ideas in performance studies, specifically using Jill Dolan, Alyson Campbell and Stephen Farrier in order to create dramaturgical procedures based in new-hope. I defined new-hope dramaturgy as a way and a space to come together in community where we accept new-hope and 1) engage in affective and embodied modes of communication- in a process, not with a product, 2) look at the overlooked past in the present and map new territories over the present, 3) suspend rules of sociality and engage in play, potential, and danger, and 4) live the future we want now. These procedures- to engage, look

and map, suspend, and live- are actionable steps that can be used to guide a process, but also analyze performance.

Once these five dramaturgical procedures were defined, I distilled over four hours of interviews to understand what choices Connor Schumacher and Koen De Preter made during their creation and rehearsal processes that may have been guided by new-hope. To understand how these choices manifested in the performances, I also used new-hope dramaturgy as an analytical framework to investigate these makers' performances, *Tender Men* and *Pilot PC* by doing a dramaturgical analysis of specific aspects of each performance. This had the aim to additionally test the framework of new-hope dramaturgy, but also to start to find creation and rehearsal strategies that can be used to create new-hope-based performances in the future. Among the many I was able to recognize, I would argue that consent, repetition, unlearning, and improvisation are four of the strongest strategies that should be attempted in future practice-based research that I hope this thesis will lead to, as these four strategies were present in both Schumacher and De Preter's practices.

Further research should be done on the ways in which hope can be harmful, as suggested by Sonja Arsham Kuftinec,<sup>163</sup> and how we can create theatrical frameworks to avoid this from happening, as this is surely an equally important side of new-hope. If given more space, a more in-depth approach to queer-specific hope would have occurred, and should in further research, as I believe new-hope is a queer hope. As mentioned throughout the thesis, but never elaborated on fully, an intersectional approach is important for new-hope dramaturgy and so an investigation on how these procedures interact with gender, race, class, ability, nationality,

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<sup>163</sup> Arsham Kuftinec, *Theatre, Facilitation, and Nation Formation*, 29-30, 37-42.

and profession should also be conducted. Remaining questions that were brought up by Schumacher and De Preter around accessibility, intended audiences, and what it means to be a person of privilege holding these processes should also be interrogated.

While writing this thesis, I came to understand how important locality is to hope and regret that my research could not cover a wider scope of geography. Hope, I discovered, can also be a dangerous and problematic occurrence, as a sedative, and as a tool for control and exploitation. While I hope that new-hope would transcend these aspects of expired hope, more thought and research needs to be given to understanding and respecting the multitude of hopes that exist. While writing, I also came to understand how connected expired hope is to systems of governance, and while Berlant gave excellent perspective on this, they were not writing about hope, but optimism. This, I am sure, created blind spots in my research, and moving forward, I will do additional research on hope's role in the systems in which we live.

On top of this, I feel that my engagement with Edelman's 'reproductive futurism' was surface level because of two reasons. The first is that Edelman's concepts around queer theory and the death drive are complex and the most basic understanding of reproductive futurism was enough to support both expired and new-hope. The second reason is because he generally rejects hope in a way that I have not yet untangled. However, I believe if I had the time and space to unpack his argument more and bring him into conversation with other thinkers, not only ones that reference him, but ones that might disagree with him more, the findings could be helpful to create additional framework around new-hope dramaturgy.

I have just evaluated the additional theoretical research I think could bolster that which exists in this thesis and bring it further. However, what I have added to the discourse with this

thesis is how to bring theory surrounding queer and Black feminist futurity, queer dramaturgy, utopia in performance, as well as the rejection of reproductive futurism and cruel optimism, into a creative practice by developing action- based procedures. In some ways, this thesis has become a manifesto of how I hope to make performance. My further research will firstly be artistic research into which specific creation techniques and rehearsal strategies I can use to integrate new-hope dramaturgy into my own artistic practice. I will bring these theories into conversation with performance practices and techniques I am familiar with, such as Viewpoints,<sup>164</sup> Somatics,<sup>165</sup> and Plastiques,<sup>166</sup> and find techniques and methodologies I am unfamiliar with, in order to use these dramaturgical procedures. I also am interested in exploring how these procedures can exist in the way I frame and conduct rehearsal processes because while making performance, we can practice utopian ideas in the community we make with.

Throughout writing this thesis I wrestled with the term “new-hope,” and had the privilege of discussing my terminology and concept with many people whom I respect,<sup>167</sup> including the two artists I interviewed for this thesis. I asked Connor Schumacher how he might characterize new-hope differently and he suggested “raving mad hope”<sup>168</sup> - a hope that is excited, active, loud, and might be seen as insane. This variation of new-hope has stayed present throughout the completion of this thesis and will forever be a parallel understanding of new-hope. When I asked Koen De Preter what he would call it, he thought “new-hope” was instantly

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<sup>164</sup> From Anne Bogart.

<sup>165</sup> From Erika Berland.

<sup>166</sup> From Grotowski.

<sup>167</sup> Evelyn Wan, Julian Hetzel, Miguel Angel Melgares, Tery Žeželj, Jesse van Delft, Irene van den Bosch, Maša Radi Buh, Ksenia Komoza, Eli Gale, to name a few.

<sup>168</sup> Connor Schumacher, zoom chat during interview by author, April 16, 2021.

understandable and recognizable. “It immediately enters the body.”<sup>169</sup> New-hope is embodied and so this is the affect hearing it should have. It is an accessible term, one that, although rooted in theory and academics, can be grasped without other knowledge. By choosing to call this hope “new-hope,” I am choosing to live an embodied and accessible utopia in the present.

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<sup>169</sup> De Preter, interview.

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## **Appendix**

### **SELECTED TRANSCRIPTS FROM INTERVIEW WITH KOEN De Preter**

Footnote 81: I know the fashion is to be very analytical and conceptual, but I try to bring something from the very personal. To watch from your heart and your stomach and not from your mind only. People go see theatre and they only analyze, and they never really connect. Maybe the music I use helps to create this?

Footnote 87: (22:40) "If I think about my queer life, or in a way, relationship to intimacy in public space, that most of our initiate life is in private space and what happens in public space is really never like that. Or maybe if you live in Berlin, I guess it depends where you live, or in Amsterdam it used to be much more normal to see men walking hand in hand and I think this is less and less visible in life in the last maybe ten years or something. So, it is also to think about those things."

Footnote 99: "We were thinking about more nudity, but in the end, I chose not to do that, only the change of costume. I had this idea of different cultures where it is normal and no sexual connotations where men touch each other. But then when you bring this on stage it becomes so homoerotic, and I didn't want to do that. So, bathing yourself, like a ritual...I knew if you put dancers in underwear, half of the audience is going to make sexual connotations. I want a piece that is for everyone to read into it."

Footnote 111: "The group is very different from backgrounds, so they were a perfect match on stage, but to form the group inside, that took a quite a while, to be closer together. In the end we managed to get there... Some people may expect more touch or more sexuality, but I wanted to have very diverse images and possibilities..."

Footnote 112: "The original idea to make duet, its going to become a love duet, I need to pull it open by putting more people on stage, with more variety of performers. In the back of my mind, I didn't want it to be all queer performers, it was really important that they came from different backgrounds because everyone brings their own experiences of life into the creation process. I really work from improvisation, bringing people together, with music."

Footnote 121: "I work with emotions. I want dancers to perform from their soul, with their soul...Being on stage is a spiritual place...Theatre replaces in some moments, can give you this thing where you feel connected to yourself, to others, to the universe...I try to touch people, or maybe give hope or comfort."

Footnote 139: “We have Tina in the performance because of Johanne, because he brought Tina into the rehearsal.”

Footnote 144: “People and music are my biggest inspirations, and the topic.”

Footnote 145: “We were also thinking about which zones are not hit because that would be too much. There is a tenderness and a technical thing about safety...afterwards you have to hug each other.”

Footnote 149: “The feeling of freedom is in all of my work. The childlike freedom- to just goof around a little, to drop the seriousness, the attitude, the brainy part of dancing, and just enjoy and play. It's about play. I think life should be more about play. It's something we forget when we become adults.”

Footnote 159: (Regarding consent in the process,) “Not only with covid, but consent in general. ‘On stage, what would be the furthest you would go?’”

Footnote 167: “New hope sounds really beautiful... if you say new hope, it enters. I understand it immediately, or everybody could understand it. I am not a fan of academic language because it excludes people. We live in such a changing time, in such a weird, interesting period. I think we do need hope. I try to make hope giving performances, or hope giving poetry, or comforting kind of music or images. To make work that is hard and aggressive and angry is so easy to do. It's such an easy energy to recreate on a stage while trying to give some happiness. Some people say that's naive, but I think this is something that can unite us in a certain way. And that's maybe utopia.”

## **SELECTED TRANSCRIPTS FROM INTERVIEWS WITH CONNER SCUMACHER**

Footnote 82: (Interview 2) “The beginning concept was to...take the theatre space and make it a practice space, a place where we could practice the physical culture of dance together in the theatre. Turn the movement class I had, this no experience required movement session 04:34 into a slightly more theatrical experience, staged in the theatre but as a social choreography where everyone could move together and practice all of the ideas together.”

Footnote 83 & 115: (Interview 1) “Who can really use a boost of hope? Marginalized intersectional identities that could use some essential skills that you get from dance: self-confidence, accurate self-perception, ability to deal with uncertainty and complexity, flexibility and adaptability, the ability to take care, or be patient, be resilient, or be persistent... people have been so pressed by their identity, I wish I could give it to them. But I also have to accept that maybe I'm not the right person to do that.”

Footnote 84: (Interview 2) “[The process for creating Pilot PC] very much relied on these skills of flexibility and adaptability and the ability to deal with uncertainty and complexity.”

Footnote 85: (Interview 2) “For one performer they were holding themselves internally very much in a negative space- their own perception of themselves. There were a few times when they came up to me and thought I was going to fire them because they thought they weren't doing things right and I was like uh no that's not how this works. I hope that the skills from the practice helped along the way to the person they are now. To see how they opened up to the group to see how the group then nurtured them it was really incredible. And then just the repetition of the performance itself strengthens all of these values, in us as a group in them individually, that is where the ambition of doing it publicly as a social

choreography really, where it made it clear. We would be a better community or a better society if we danced every day.”

Footnote 90: (Interview 1) “All of my work is about this at this point. *Pilot* PC is an iteration of it...It is all the same content, it is based on all the same research, it uses all the same metaphors. There are some differences I use in different contexts...Every project is just a next step in a longer project with the ambition of using dance to give hope and skills to build a better social atmosphere.”

Footnote 100 & 101: (Interview 1) The Fool is something that started in 2014 as a really dry robot that was looking to see how clear dance could be. How clear of a language you can make dance so people can read it. This constant question of ‘I don’t understand dance.’ And then during this dancing museums project, I brought the Fool back to give... a guided tour in a museum in Italy. Also kind of as a rebellious response to an assignment that I was like ‘fuck this, I’m just gonna do this.’ It was a very dry robot that tried to disengage from normal hierarchies of value and was just like ‘why this painting and not this doorknob?’ because its all just about the projection of your thoughts and values onto objects... and then maybe 2.5 years later I had gone through a host of different experiences and then I started raving. I didn’t start raving until I was 29. And then from all of the dance research projects I had been a part of and when I was learning about areas of neuroscience like embodied cognition, the way embodied cognition and the way the science of metaphor and linguistics and how much language is an expression of our embodied experience and how metaphor is like the main tool in which we use that... the Fool slowly transformed from somewhere in between a robot and a drag queen, also with this unspoken humour that I know that you know that I’m not who I say I am as I walk through these museum spaces without shame and without doubt, and with this slightly given authority by the institution but also the authority I give myself to be like ‘fuck whatever this institution says.’... people started writing about it saying it was my alter ego... in a way, it was. It was the embodied character I would take on (17:45) to get rid of learned behaviour that I had as just myself, Connor. To instate this kind of self confidence and this kind of foolishness and willingness to go into any space and be like you know what, all of these concepts we’ve lived by for so long, what if they were different?”

Footnote : (Interview 2) “Social choreography has had to make me focus on expanding the values of the process in all directions. Towards my own organization, towards the public, and who we partner with and the spaces that we share it in. How those values are regarded in all of those contexts. {I add: The dramaturgy of the concepts (these are the things we want to do in the body), the dramaturgy of form and going through the simulated rave space, and the dramaturgy of how this exists in the context of} the historical walls of the theatre, who has access to that space, who has access to that space during the pandemic?”

Footnote 113: (Interview 2) “Originally, I wanted to knock people out of their normative experience and make space for myself in the field... Now I have space, this is who it is for, who needs it, etcetera.”

Footnote 114: (Interview 2) “It is my job to make sure I am striving for the most fruitful use of hope and if I am just giving novel experiences, I am not creating hope in them. I want to provide spaces also for people to reinstate hope. That's what this "the clubs are closed come rave in the theatre" is. I know people who relied on that space for feeling alive, feeling accepted, to get out of their head and out of the mythical concepts that we live by in society. And I wanted it to be for them, but because of the systems that we live in, it is very hard to claim that space, or to get them there to open the door.”

Footnote 116: (Interview 2) "I am interested in giving this to people who need it- holding space for communities that need empowering VS changing the perspective of people who have never encountered these values. I don't need to give those people "a life changing experience."

Footnote 117: (Interview 2) "It would be exponentially more beneficial because it is empowering their own cultures while they feel pressed it would bring some relief, some feeling, some activation to the culture we already want to support. So while the state of dance always works, who can access it?"

Footnote 122: (Interview 1) "The most potent thing that dance can do is to be done. Not watching."

Footnote 124: (Interview 1) "If I want to plant seeds of progressive values through metaphor in the body, then I had to have it come in through as many senses as possible."

Footnote 125: (Interview 1) "The brain and the body need repetition to make things land, to become a staple of the mind... If I want to eat away at the heteronormative, patriarchal metaphors we love by in society now, then I need to repeat these metaphors whenever possible and I'm going to try to find these metaphors of the body and biological and physiological tools that can be seen as metaphors for how we experience life. And try to start rearranging the way people think about their physical experience in society."

Footnote 126: (Interview 1) "It worked because using the body to warm up the body to progressive ideas of hope can work anywhere."

Footnote 127 & 128: (Interview 1) "We use these physical descriptors to communicate the abstract meaning of a thing to somebody who in a way, we have little connection to. That's why I use the metaphor inside the session, I say "everybody has their own mountain to climb." The inference of that metaphor... I don't have to describe the mountain because everyone knows what a mountain is, everybody sees their own mountain, but everybody knows that it requires a lot of effort, it requires a lot of persistence, it's a long journey, there's moments of exhaustion, there's also this inference that at the top you've accomplished something. That's how metaphor has developed in such a complex way that you can infer so many meanings about an experience just by using physical descriptors. Again, this is why I try to use metaphors of the body, because if I make metaphors about a queer rave space, who has been to a queer rave space? If I make metaphors about the body, everybody has a body and so my chances of making a connection or a common ground or planting that seed in someone's mind are much much higher."

Footnote 134: (Interview 2) (I said [This is like what you said about the archive of the body- all of your experiences make up who you are, even the ones you may have forgotten, or have been repressed] "or the ones you don't know are there because they are a part of your epigenetics- that's also a thing.")

Footnote 135: (Interview 1) "All it takes is bringing your perception to a different metaphor. Then you can see your physical experience in a completely different way, you just have to practice."

Footnote 136 & 137: (Interview 1) "I want to redefine the idea that progress is about forward moving, but that you are a three-dimensional body and you can progress in all directions: that backwards is just as valuable as forwards. Or that sideways is just as beneficial as going forwards in whatever concept you're speaking of or whatever situation that you're in... When it comes into this new ideology of progressiveness. To move towards a better state or condition- that's it."

Footnote 146 & 147: (Interview 1) “The values of society are completely rearranged. This is world making... this is why I use structured improvisation... It takes a lot of framework and it depends on the body you bring into the space. Utopia is different for different people. You can enact a space where you practice different rules than society, but that doesn’t mean society is not there. It’s a practice for a better world, not that here is a better world.”

Footnote 150: (Interview 1) [I spoke about the door policy and where it is standard practice) “In the spaces I would go to, yes. In normative spaces, no. The idea that performance spaces should also be like that? Yes. I think they should be.”

Footnote 151: (Interview 1) “I see joy as a safe space and safe space is partly determined by the amount of agency people have over their own experience.”

Footnote 152: (Interview 2) “We wanted to make sure we had enough people to take care of the space in case people would not take responsibility for themselves. They were the floor angels. If they saw someone not being aware enough of their body in space, they would be able to begin this conversation with them. Of course, people make mistakes, but if you are consciously overstepping the boundaries of the space, then we are going to have a conversation about it. First, they will have a conversation with you but if it goes too far, everything will stop and we will have a conversation about it as a community. (Nobody wants to do that). If they do want to do that, I’m game, that’s also interesting context. Also, meta in a way, providing work for people that I can. If I have the budget for it, I will invite them. They know the practice all they have to do is come and be examples of the practice. Because it is an open practice in the end.”

Footnote 160 & 161: (Interview 2) “To see how the values we were trying to speak about in the piece also became the tools in which we worked together in the studio was really incredible. Conflict is unavoidable but destructive conflict is avoidable. What tools do you have when conflict arises?... The self discipline, self-perception that the group developed over the course of time and then the metaphors that we are trying to live by: to curve, to be soft, to be strong, to have strength in your softness to be open and recognize that its natural to close... When conflict arose, people had enough ability to recognize where things were coming from and take accountability for if things came out and we were able to work around it while giving people space to go through what they needed to go through.”

Footnote 166: (Interview 1, zoom chat) “12:26:18 From ARK - Connor Schumacher : Raving mad hope - world making potential”