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 QUEER POP MUSIC
 VIDEO: FANTASY
 AESTHETIC IN HALEY
 KİYOKO'S 'SLEEPOVER'

A projector whirs while a camera pans across orange floral wallpaper, past a lamp, to reveal an ornate gilded headboard. The camera turns to show a woman lying on her side, dressed in a long-sleeve Henley T-shirt and underwear, her bare brown legs taking up the frame as the shot progresses.

Then the camera turns again, as music starts, to reveal a woman sitting on the edge of the bed—the singer Hayley Kiyoko. The scene cuts to the corner of the room, where a vase holds a bouquet of wilting roses and a hydrangea. When the shot returns to Kiyoko in the same spot on the bed, we see the other woman kissing her neck. The first half minute of *Sleepover*, a music video that premiered on YouTube on March 2, 2017,¹ presents a mysterious love affair in which Kiyoko and Rose—the name of the character played by the video's other star, Christina Santini—flirt, dance, kiss, and embrace each other, alternately cut with shots of Kiyoko in the same spaces, alone.

Sleepover is directed by its star, Hayley Kiyoko, who worked as a child actor before turning to pop music.² She's known for featuring female love interests in her songs and videos, and does not shy away from using pronouns such as "she" or "her," rather than defaulting to heterosexual conventions common in the music video industry. *Sleepover* shows an example of Kiyoko's directing style, and through a captivating visual setting, remains grounded in a particular narrative of queer self-discovery.

In this piece, I examine Kiyoko's portrayal of queer desire and the way it challenges heteronormative conventions in music videos, but also present a critique of the way in which she comes up short by reinforcing some of the genre's shortcomings, such as the persistence of female objectification, queerness notwithstanding. *Sleepover* employs a vision of queer fantasy through an aesthetic that disorients ambiguous desire. This desire becomes a space of utopia, joy, and intimacy coexisting with alienation, loneliness, and uncertainty. This aesthetic comprises visual cues from the spatial

1. Hayley Kiyoko, *SLEEPOVER*, YouTube, March 2, 2017, accessed May 03, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFt1Anw>.

2. Katie Heaney, "Hayley Kiyoko Is Living Her Queer Teenage Dream," *BuzzFeed*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.buzzfeed.com/katieheaney/hayley-kiyoko-great-gay-pop-music-takeover>.

manipulation of the camera, the domestic setting and quotidian objects within the video, and the displacement of the two women between shots. The song lyrics also contribute to the video's aesthetic by providing a narrative that emphasizes uncertainty and speaks to elements of fantasy. *Sleepover* presents a vision of queerness through fantasy, inviting the viewer into a liminal space that pushes the narrative beyond the normative by challenging ideals of what a romance or attraction might look like.

For my purposes, queerness is a turning away from the normative or a subversion of the expected toward the elusive or the desired—that which is wanted and possibly attainable. José Esteban Muñoz describes queerness as being “primarily about futurity and hope...always in the horizon.”³ Here, queerness involves a yearning beyond the prescriptive and beyond the present to imagine a new future. In *Sleepover*, the figure of Kiyoko expresses hope and desire through the narrative of the video and its lyrics, but it is not ultimately clear whether she attains what she seeks. Therefore, the hope portrayed in the video lies within the horizon of what the video introduces.

Sarah Ahmed's concept of queer orientation particularly interests me when applied to the ways in which the camera moves throughout the space of the video in order to build a sense of fantasy. The camera moves over and around the figures, turning to create motion and instability. In this context, fantasy is a projection of desire that generates imagined actions. In *Sleepover*, fantasy blurs the difference between real and imagined by employing a sense of queer orientation⁴—that is, what seems to belong to a space may not only be stable but may also transgress in more ways than one (fig. 1).

The music video opens with a shot of a delicate floral pattern, wallpaper in a rich shade of orange. The camera pans and the first title appears center screen while the top of a lamp shows up on the right side of the screen. This lamp indicates the orientation of the room: The camera is turned on its side. However, the title text that appears horizontally must be read left to right, counter to the lampshade's top-to-bottom orientation. This tension between the orientations of the room and the text creates a sense of being “out of place.” Sara Ahmed explains that instead of “making the strange familiar,”⁵ “[bodies] feel ‘out of place’” and this creates a “[pointing] toward other places, even ones that have yet to be inhabited.”⁶ This queer

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

4. Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 11.

5. Ahmed, 11.

6. Ahmed, 12.



Figure 1: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtAnw>.

orientation suggests a dreamlike setting. Immediately, the world is turned on its side. By the time the first thirty seconds pass, the camera turns and rights itself, landing in a conventionally “correct” horizontal position. This turning disorients by changing the perspective and sense of stability within the frame, and places the video in the realm of the dream, the fantasy, the imagined, and the horizon.

According to José Esteban Muñoz, “[I]f queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon.”⁷ Muñoz introduces the concept of the horizon to encapsulate the idea that visions of the future can be glimpsed but not quite touched—that the horizon is a metaphor for a future. *Sleepover* suggests Muñoz's definition of queerness in that its camerawork, like much of contemporary music-video form, presents an especially disoriented spatiality. This spatiality is a visual presentation that works to guide the viewer along a certain line of view. Rather than conforming to an expected type of motion, the camera rotates across several

7. Muñoz, 11.



Figure 2: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtAnw>.



Figure 3: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtAnw>.

shots in a counter-clockwise direction (fig. 2). The video's perspective is inconsistent with the static, rectangular boundaries of the screen. A two-second shot features a headboard, a pillow-topped bed, the character Rose, and the lamp, all out of focus in the background, which is on a diagonal slope relative to the edges of the screen. In the foreground, Kiyoko swings to the right side of the frame as the camera zooms and rotates, complicating the viewer's sense of the scene. There is no way to get a firm grounding with this kind of motion; the room is unreachable for the viewer. Like the horizon in Muñoz's analogy, the space portrayed in *Sleepover* is unstable and presents a distance between the viewer and the scene.

In addition to the disorientation created by the camera, the aesthetics of *Sleepover* indicate another level of queerness. The frame in Figure 3 shows Kiyoko and the character Rose in a bathtub. The bathtub and bedroom continue to locate the world of *Sleepover* in the domestic, and in turn the domestic suggests familiarity and comfort, contrasting with the sense of disorientation rendered by the topsy-turvy camerawork. Muñoz says, "The aesthetic, especially the queer aesthetic, frequently contains blueprints and schemata of a forward-dawning futurity. Both the ornamental and the quotidian can contain a map of utopia that is queerness."⁸ The aesthetic of *Sleepover* creates a domestic space in which there is a kind of anachronistic and even nostalgic setting. The color palate has a subdued and aged effect, with its oranges, browns, and blues. The furniture is dated, with the ornate headboard, the old rocking chair, and in particular the wallpaper, which seems to be from another era (fig. 4). Muñoz explains that looking to the past to critique the present is an employment of queer futurity.⁹ *Sleepover* points toward a relationship that has a different future potential than exists in the present. In relation to Muñoz's explanation of the queer aesthetic, *Sleepover* performs the visualization of those blueprints and schemata through the framing of this domestic setting, coupled with the changing representations of Kiyoko and Rose together. As such, *Sleepover* presents a utopic depiction of queerness through its combination of the ornamental and the quotidian.

In the frame shown in Figure 3, the edges of another floral wallpaper, this time striped, are visible in the top of the frame. The two women sit in an old-fashioned bathtub full of milky pink water. The bath becomes an ordinary object and a representation of fantasy,

8. Muñoz, 1.

9. Muñoz, 18.

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Figure 4: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtIAnw>.



Figure 5: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtIAnw>.

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Figure 6: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtIAnw>.



Figure 7: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFtIAnw>.

both quotidian and ornamental. In contrast to the prior camera placement, this shot's perspective of the room orients us conventionally. However, the tight framing of the shot lends a feeling of confinement. Ahmed points out that "[one does not have] to leave home for things to be disoriented or reoriented: homes too can be 'giddy' places where things are not always held in place, and homes can move, as we do."¹⁰ Since this bathtub is both a familiar and fantastic object, it is a component of that type of "giddy" home within the world of *Sleepover*. The varied presentation of spaces within the home offers a queer orientation through illogical camera movement and inexplicably changing placements of objects and human figures.

Perhaps most pointedly, the queerness of this video lies with its subjects. Kiyoko and Rose are women, and their interactions range from affectionate to sexual to intimate. The frame in Figure 5, which occurs toward the end of the video, reveals a close-up of Rose and Kiyoko. Rose touches Kiyoko's mouth. Both their eyes are closed. Rose, on the left side, faces Kiyoko, who is more or less centered in the frame. The question is whether this desire is actually happening in the video's story or whether it is merely a fantasy of the video's protagonist—an indication of the fragility of the queer desire about which Kiyoko sings. The singer utters the phrase "at least I got you in my head" nine times in the song.

Rose disappears from the screen at certain moments, indicating that the narrative sequencing of the video is nonlinear and fragmented, and that some sequences are constructs of Kiyoko's imagination (fig. 6). Here, Rose is under the covers. Kiyoko is touching her own mouth with her own hand, rather than Rose touching Kiyoko. Rose's disappearances are unaccounted for in the narrative. She is there and then she is gone; she vanishes and reappears so often that it creates discomfort, which is almost familiar in its recurrence. For example, we later see Kiyoko alone in the bathtub after she and Rose are pictured there together (fig. 8). Muñoz argues that "the negative becomes the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism."¹¹ The disappearance in this sequence indicates a negative, which establishes the sense of queer utopianism Muñoz suggests. Once Rose's presence becomes inconsistent, Kiyoko's desire for her to remain stable becomes palatable for the viewer. The possibility of Rose being consistently present is the utopia that *Sleepover* suggests but never fully actualizes.

10. Ahmed, 9.

11. Muñoz, 13.



Figure 8: Hayley Kiyoko, *Sleepover*, still from video, directed by Hayley Kiyoko (2017; YouTube), last modified March 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6jxPFt1Anw>.

12. Ahmed, 20.

13. Ahmed, 24.

The fantasy of Rose's touch is firmly planted within the space of the home, which represents the site of traditionally accepted heterosexual desire. As Ahmed points out, "The lesbian body does not extend the shape of this world, as a world organized around the form of the heterosexual couple."¹² Kiyoko's presentation of fantasy troubles the convention of the bedroom as a space of straight love and sex. Whether she and Rose actually embrace does not matter, as the psychic representation of this desire is sufficient to indicate queerness. Additionally, the racialized bodies of both women—Kiyoko being white and Japanese American, and Rose a light-skinned Black woman—represent a further complication. According to Ahmed, "Being mixed might also involve a queer departure from the lines of conventional genealogy."¹³ This subversion of white, straight desire locates this video as queer. Still, we cannot avoid taking into account Kiyoko's and Rose's appearance as conventionally attractive and palatable for mass-media consumption, which somewhat impedes the total subversion of hegemonic desire.

While there is doubt in *Sleepover*, there is also clearly expressed delight and pleasure in many scenes. In Figure 7, Rose and Kiyoko dance in front of a television screen flickering with static, the slightly anachronistic CRT model indicating the fantasy mode. As the television does not show any "real" images, there is no point of reference to the outside world. The television plays static, a kind of nothingness. It is a queer object. Queer objects mean something specific for Ahmed, who states, "A queer phenomenology...might start by redirecting our attention toward different objects, those that are 'less proximate' or even those that deviate or are deviant."¹⁴ The television deviates from what a television is supposed to do, instead orienting the scene away from any expected or anticipated presentation.

Kiyoko does not sing along when she dances with Rose; in contrast, when she faces the camera, her mouth moves. Rose's back is close to Kiyoko's front. Rose smiles and dances close to Kiyoko, who also smiles and stretches her arms out in a happy and relaxed gesture. While Kiyoko shows sadness and fear in shots in which Rose has disappeared or moved away, there is a palpable enjoyment in dancing. Ahmed suggests that "if we stay with...[queer] moments then we might achieve a different orientation toward them; such moments may be the source of vitality as well as giddiness. We might even find

14. Ahmed, 3.
15. Ahmed, 4.

16. Muñoz, 10.
17. Ahmed, 20.

joy and excitement in the horror."¹⁵ In the video, queerness lies precisely in that tension between joy and horror, doubt and delight.

Muñoz posits that "the felicitous...is always eventually disappointed."¹⁶ Kiyoko oscillates between the felicitous and the disappointing, ultimately landing squarely in the realm of the disappointed. There is a contrast between the moments when Rose and Kiyoko are together and the ones when Kiyoko is alone. Kiyoko shows emotions through her body language and expressions, suggesting her disappointment. Situating the disappointment of *Sleepover's* fantasy is key to understanding its queerness. Negativity is a disorientation. Ahmed states that "disorientation is a way of describing the feelings that gather when we lose our sense of who it is that we are. Such losses can be converted into the joy of a future that has been opened up."¹⁷ The undulating emotionality, the frequent disorientation, the aesthetic choices, and the dizzying sense of space within *Sleepover* extend beyond relying on the representation of same-gender affection between the women. There are more layers. The video's strangeness is not only about the lesbian narrative. There is a tension that expands upon the tropes and cues of the music-video genre as established in the 1980s. While the premise of the story and song—unrequited or uncertain love—is broad and universal, the specific ways in which *Sleepover* presents its story create something different: a vision of queerness and the future.