

José Esteban Muñoz

Cruising Utopia

The Then and There of Queer Futurity



NEW YORK UNIVERSITY PRESS

New York and London

www.nyupress.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Muñoz, José Esteban

Cruising utopia : the then and there of queer futurity / José Esteban Muñoz.

p. cm. — (Sexual cultures)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8147-5727-7 (cl : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8147-5727-8 (cl : alk. paper)

ISBN-13: 978-0-8147-5728-4 (pb : alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8147-5728-6 (pb : alk. paper)

1. Queer theory. 2. Utopias. 3. Homosexuality and art. 4. Performance art. I. Title.

HQ76.25.M86 2009

306.7601—dc22 2009021714

New York University Press books are printed on acid-free paper, and their binding materials are chosen for strength and durability.

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Manufactured in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction

Feeling Utopia

A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth glancing at.

—Oscar Wilde

QUEERNESS IS NOT yet here. Queerness is an ideality. Put another way, we are not yet queer. We may never touch queerness, but we can feel it as the warm illumination of a horizon imbued with potentiality. We have never been queer, yet queerness exists for us as an ideality that can be distilled from the past and used to imagine a future. The future is queerness's domain. Queerness is a structuring and educated mode of desiring that allows us to see and feel beyond the quagmire of the present. The here and now is a prison house. We must strive, in the face of the here and now's totalizing rendering of reality, to think and feel a *then and there*. Some will say that all we have are the pleasures of this moment, but we must never settle for that minimal transport; we must dream and enact new and better pleasures, other ways of being in the world, and ultimately new worlds. Queerness is a longing that propels us onward, beyond romances of the negative and toiling in the present. Queerness is that thing that lets us feel that this world is not enough, that indeed something is missing. Often we can glimpse the worlds proposed and promised by queerness in the realm of the aesthetic. 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 the utopia that is queerness. Turning to the aesthetic in the case of queerness is nothing like an escape from the social realm, insofar as queer aesthetics map future social relations. Queerness is also a performative because it is not simply a being but a doing for and toward the future. Queerness is essentially about the rejection of a here and now and an insistence on potentiality or concrete possibility for another world.

That is the argument I make in *Cruising Utopia*, significantly influenced by the thinking and language of the German idealist tradition emanating from the work of Immanuel Kant and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. An aspect of that line of thought is concretized in the critical philosophy associated with the Frankfurt School, most notably in the work of Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, and Herbert Marcuse. Those three thinkers within the Marxist tradition have all grappled with the complexities of the utopian. Yet the voice and logic that most touches me, most animates my thinking, is that of the philosopher Ernst Bloch.

More loosely associated with the Frankfurt School than the aforementioned philosophers, Bloch's work was taken up by both liberation theology and the Parisian student movements of 1968. He was born in 1885 to an assimilated Jewish railway employee in Ludwigshafen, Germany. During World War II, Bloch fled Nazi Germany, eventually settling for a time in Cambridge, Massachusetts. After the war Bloch returned to East Germany, where his Marxian philosophy was seen as too revisionary. At the same time he was derided for his various defenses of Stalinism by left commentators throughout Europe and the United States. He participated in the intellectual circles of Georg Simmel and, later, Max Weber. His friendship and sometime rivalries with Adorno, Benjamin, and Georg Lukács are noted in European left intellectual history.¹ Bloch's political inconsistencies and style, which has been described as both elliptical and lyrical, have led Bloch to an odd and uneven reception. Using Bloch for a project that understands itself as part of queer critique is also a risky move because it has been rumored that Bloch did not hold very progressive opinions on issues of gender and sexuality.² These biographical facts are beside the point because I am using Bloch's theory not as orthodoxy but instead to create an opening in queer thought. I am using the occasion and example of Bloch's thought, along with that of Adorno, Marcuse, and other philosophers, as a portal to another mode of queer critique that deviates from dominant practices of thought existing within queer critique today. In my estimation a turn to a certain critical idealism can be an especially useful hermeneutic.

For some time now I have been working with Bloch's three-volume philosophical treatise *The Principle of Hope*.³ In his exhaustive book Bloch considers an expanded idea of the utopian that surpasses Thomas More's formulation of utopias based in fantasy. *The Principle of Hope* offers an encyclopedic approach to the phenomenon of utopia. In that text he discusses all manner of utopia including, but not limited to, social, literary,

technological, medical, and geographic utopias. Bloch has had a shakier reception in the U.S. academy than have some of his friends and acquaintances—such as Benjamin. For me, Bloch's utility has much to do with the way he theorizes utopia. He makes a critical distinction between abstract utopias and concrete utopias, valuing abstract utopias only insofar as they pose a critique function that fuels a critical and potentially transformative political imagination.⁴ Abstract utopias falter for Bloch because they are untethered from any historical consciousness. Concrete utopias are relational to historically situated struggles, a collectivity that is actualized or potential. In our everyday life abstract utopias are akin to banal optimism. (Recent calls for gay or queer optimism seem too close to elite homosexual evasion of politics.) Concrete utopias can also be daydream-like, but they are the hopes of a collective, an emergent group, or even the solitary oddball who is the one who dreams for many. Concrete utopias are the realm of educated hope. In a 1961 lecture titled "Can Hope Be Disappointed?" Bloch describes different aspects of educated hope: "Not only hope's affect (with its pendant, fear) but even more so, hope's methodology (with its pendant, memory) dwells in the region of the not-yet, a place where entrance and, above all, final content are marked by an enduring indeterminacy."⁵ This idea of indeterminacy in both affect and methodology speaks to a critical process that is attuned to what Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben describes as potentiality.⁶ Hope along with its other, fear, are affective structures that can be described as anticipatory.

Cruising Utopia's first move is to describe a modality of queer utopianism that I locate within a historically specific nexus of cultural production before, around, and slightly after the Stonewall rebellion of 1969. A Blochian approach to aesthetic theory is invested in describing the anticipatory illumination of art, which can be characterized as the process of identifying certain properties that can be detected in representational practices helping us to see the not-yet-conscious.⁷ This not-yet-conscious is knowable, to some extent, as a utopian feeling. When Bloch describes the anticipatory illumination of art, one can understand this illumination as a surplus of both affect and meaning within the aesthetic. I track utopian feelings throughout the work of that Stonewall period. I attempt to counteract the logic of the historical case study by following an associative mode of analysis that leaps between one historical site and the present. To that end my writing brings in my own personal experience as another way to ground historical queer sites with lived queer experience. My intention in this aspect of the writing is not simply to wax anecdotally but, instead,

to reach for other modes of associative argumentation and evidencing. Thus, when considering the work of a contemporary club performer such as Kevin Aviance, I engage a poem by Elizabeth Bishop and a personal recollection about movement and gender identity. When looking at Kevin McCarty's photographs of contemporary queer and punk bars, I consider accounts about pre-Stonewall gay bars in Ohio and my personal story about growing up queer and punk in suburban Miami. Most of this book is fixated on a cluster of sites in the New York City of the fifties and sixties that include the New York School of poetry, the Judson Memorial Church's dance theater, and Andy Warhol's Factory. *Cruising Utopia* looks to figures from those temporal maps that have been less attended to than O'Hara and Warhol have been. Yet it seems useful to open this book by briefly discussing moments in the work of both the poet and the pop artist for the purposes of illustrating the project's primary approach to the cultural and theoretical material it traverses. At the center of *Cruising Utopia* there is the idea of hope, which is both a critical affect and a methodology.

Bloch offers us hope as a hermeneutic, and from the point of view of political struggles today, such a critical optic is nothing short of necessary in order to combat the force of political pessimism. It is certainly difficult to argue for hope or critical utopianism at a moment when cultural analysis is dominated by an antiutopianism often functioning as a poor substitute for actual critical intervention. But before addressing the question of antiutopianism, it is worthwhile to sketch a portrait of a critical mode of hope that represents the concrete utopianism discussed here.

Jill Dolan offers her own partially Blochian-derived mode of performance studies critique in *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theater*.⁸ Dolan's admirable book focuses on live theater as a site for "finding hope." My approach to hope as a critical methodology can be best described as a backward glance that enacts a future vision. I see my project as resonating alongside a group of recent texts that have strategically displaced the live object of performance. Some texts that represent this aspect of the performance studies project include Gavin Butt's excellent analysis of the queer performative force of gossip in the prewar New York art world,⁹ Jennifer Doyle's powerful treatise on the formative and deforming force of "sex objects" in performance and visual studies,¹⁰ and Fred Moten's beautiful *In the Break*, with its emphasis on providing a soaring description of the resistance of the object.¹¹ I invoke those three texts in an effort to locate my own analysis in relation to the larger interdisciplinary project of performance studies.

The modern world is a thing of wonder for Bloch, who considers astonishment to be an important philosophical mode of contemplation.¹² In a way, we can see this sense of astonishment in the work of both Warhol and O'Hara. Warhol was fond of making speech acts such as "wow" and "gee." Although this aspect of Warhol's performance of self is often described as an insincere performance of naiveté, I instead argue that it is a manifestation of the utopian feeling that is integral to much of Warhol's art, speech, and writing. O'Hara, as even his casual readers know, was irrepressibly upbeat. What if we think of these modes of being in the world—Warhol's liking of things, his "wows" and "gees," and O'Hara's poetry being saturated with feelings of fun and appreciation—as a mode of utopian feeling but also as hope's methodology? This methodology is manifest in what Bloch described as a form of "astonished contemplation."¹³ Perhaps we can understand the campy fascination that both men had with celebrity as being akin to this sense of astonishment. Warhol's blue Liz Taylors or O'Hara's perfect tribute to another starlet, in the poem "Lana Turner Has Collapsed," offer, through glamour and astonishment, a kind of transport or a reprieve from what Bloch called the "darkness of the lived instant."¹⁴ Astonishment helps one surpass the limitations of an alienating presentness and allows one to see a different time and place. Much of each artist's work performs this astonishment in the world. O'Hara is constantly astonished by the city. He celebrates the city's beauty and vastness, and in his work one often finds this sense of astonishment in quotidian things. O'Hara's poems display urban landscapes of astonishment. The quotidian object has this same affective charge in Warhol's visual work. Bloch theorized that one could detect wish-landscapes in painting and poetry.¹⁵ Such landscapes extend into the territory of futurity.

Let us begin by considering Warhol's *Coke Bottle* alongside O'Hara's poem "Having a Coke with You":

Having a Coke with You

is even more fun than going to San Sebastian, Irún, Hendaye, Biarritz,
Bayonne
or being sick to my stomach on the Travesera de Gracia in Barcelona
partly because in your orange shirt you look like a better happier St.
Sebastian
partly because of my love for you, partly because of your love for
yoghurt
partly because of the fluorescent orange tulips around the birches

partly because of the secrecy our smiles take on before people and
 statuary
 it is hard to believe when I'm with you that there can be anything as
 still
 as solemn as unpleasantly definitive as statuary when right in front of it
 in the warm New York 4 o'clock light we are drifting back and forth
 between each other like a tree breathing through its spectacles

and the portrait show seems to have no faces in it at all, just paint
 you suddenly wonder why in the world anyone ever did them
 I look
 at you and I would rather look at you than all the portraits in the
 world
 except possibly for the *Polish Rider* occasionally and anyway it's in the
 Frick
 which thank heavens you haven't gone to yet so we can go together
 the first time
 and the fact that you move so beautifully more or less takes care of
 Futurism
 just as at home I never think of the *Nude Descending a Staircase* or
 at a rehearsal a single drawing of Leonardo or Michelangelo that used
 to wow me
 and what good does all the research of the Impressionists do them
 when they never got the right person to stand near the tree when the
 sun sank
 or for that matter Marino Marini when he didn't pick the rider as
 carefully
 as the horse
 it seems they were all cheated of some marvellous experience
 which is not going to go wasted on me which is why I'm telling you
 about it¹⁶

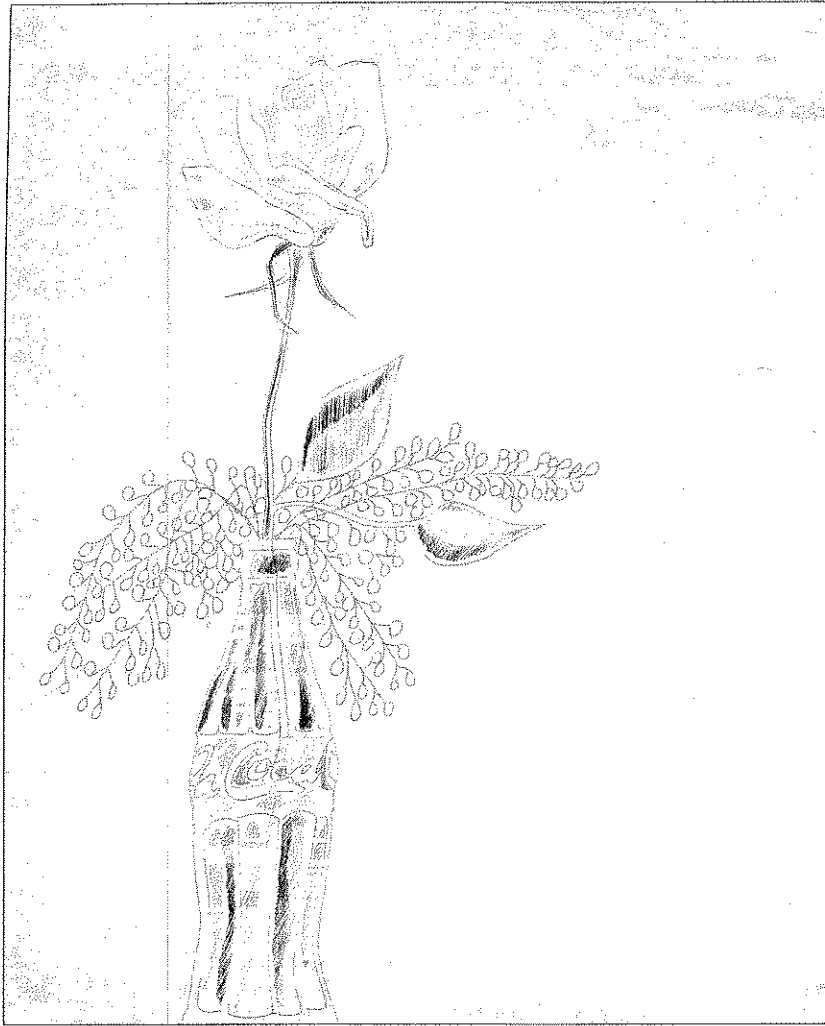
This poem tells us of a quotidian act, having a Coke with somebody, that signifies a vast lifeworld of queer relationality, an encrypted sociality, and a utopian potentiality. The quotidian act of sharing a Coke, consuming a common commodity with a beloved with whom one shares secret smiles, trumps fantastic moments in the history of art. Though the poem is clearly about the present, it is a present that is now squarely the past and in its queer relationality promises a future. The fun of having a Coke is a mode

of exhilaration in which one views a restructured sociality. The poem tells us that mere beauty is insufficient for the aesthete speaker, which echoes Bloch's own aesthetic theories concerning the utopian function of art. If art's limit were beauty—according to Bloch—it is simply not enough.¹⁷ The utopian function is enacted by a certain surplus in the work that promises a futurity, something that is not quite here. O'Hara first mentions being wowed by a high-art object before he describes being wowed by the lover with whom he shares a Coke. Here, through queer-aesthete art consumption and queer relationality the writer describes moments imbued with a feeling of forward-dawning futurity.

The anticipatory illumination of certain objects is a kind of potentiality that is open, indeterminate, like the affective contours of hope itself. This illumination seems to radiate from Warhol's own depiction of Coke bottles. Those silk screens, which I discuss in chapter 7, emphasize the product's stylish design line. Potentiality for Bloch is often located in the ornamental. The ornament can be seen as a proto-pop phenomenon. Bloch warns us that mechanical reproduction, at first glance, voids the ornamental. But he then suggests that the ornamental and the potentiality he associates with it cannot be seen as directly oppositional to technology or mass production.¹⁸ The philosopher proposes the example of a modern bathroom as this age's exemplary site to see a utopian potentiality, the site where nonfunctionality and total functionality merge.¹⁹ Part of what Warhol's study of the Coke bottle and other mass-produced objects helps one to see is this particular tension between functionality and nonfunctionality, the promise and potentiality of the ornament. In the *Philosophy of Andy Warhol* the artist muses on the radically democratic potentiality he detects in Coca-Cola.

What's great about this country is that America started the tradition where the richest consumers buy essentially the same things as the poorest. You can be watching TV and see Coca-Cola, and you know that the President drinks Coke, Liz Taylor drinks Coke, and just think, you can drink Coke, too. A Coke is a Coke and no amount of money can get you a better Coke than the one the bum on the corner is drinking. All the Cokes are the same and all the Cokes are good. Liz Taylor knows it, the President knows it, the bum knows it, and you know it.²⁰

This is the point where Warhol's particular version of the queer utopian impulse crosses over with O'Hara's. The Coke bottle is the everyday



Drawings, 1950s, *Still-Life (Flowers)*, ballpoint ink on Manila paper, 16 3/4 × 13 7/8 in. (42.5 × 35.2 cm), Andy Warhol (artist), The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh; Founding Collection, Contribution, The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc., © 2008 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, New York.

material that is represented in a different frame, laying bare its aesthetic dimension and the potentiality that it represents. In its everyday manifestation such an object would represent alienated production and consumption. But Warhol and O'Hara both detect something else in the object of a Coke bottle and in the act of drinking a Coke with someone. What we glean from Warhol's philosophy is the understanding that utopia exists in the quotidian. Both queer cultural workers are able to detect an opening and indeterminacy in what for many people is a locked-down dead commodity.

Agamben's reading of Aristotle's *De Anima* makes the crucial point that the opposition between potentiality and actuality is a structuring binarism in Western metaphysics.²¹ Unlike a possibility, a thing that simply might happen, a potentiality is a certain mode of nonbeing that is eminent, a thing that is present but not actually existing in the present tense. Looking at a poem written in the 1960s, I see a certain potentiality, which at that point had not been fully manifested, a relational field where men could love each other outside the institutions of heterosexuality and share a world through the act of drinking a beverage with each other. Using Warhol's musing on Coca-Cola in tandem with O'Hara's words, I see the past and the potentiality imbued within an object, the ways it might represent a mode of being and feeling that was then not quite there but nonetheless an opening. Bloch would posit that such utopian feelings can and regularly will be disappointed.²² They are nonetheless indispensable to the act of imaging transformation.

This fear of both hope and utopia, as affective structures and approaches to challenges within the social, has been prone to disappointment, making this critical approach difficult. As Bloch would insist, hope can be disappointed. But such disappointment needs to be risked if certain impasses are to be resisted. A certain affective reanimation needs to transpire if a disabling political pessimism is to be displaced. Another way of understanding Bloch's notion of hope is briefly to invoke the work of J. L. Austin. In *How to Do Things with Words* Austin displaces the true/false dichotomy that structures Western metaphysics with the much more conceptually supple distinction between the felicitous and infelicitous.²³ Austin's terms are derived from understanding the everyday speech act. Felicitous speech acts are linguistic articulations that *do* something as well as say something. But as Austin maps out the life of the felicitous speech act we see all the things that eventually go wrong and the failure or infelicity that is built into the speech act. Bloch's hope resonates with Austin's

notion of the felicitous insofar as it is always eventually disappointed. The eventual disappointment of hope is not a reason to forsake it as a critical thought process, in the same way that even though we can know in advance that felicity of language ultimately falters, it is nonetheless essential.

The moment in which I write this book the critical imagination is in peril. The dominant academic climate into which this book is attempting to intervene is dominated by a dismissal of political idealism. Shouting down utopia is an easy move. It is perhaps even easier than smearing psychoanalytic or deconstructive reading practices with the charge of nihilism. The antiutopian critic of today has a well-worn war chest of post-structuralist pieties at her or his disposal to shut down lines of thought that delineate the concept of critical utopianism. Social theory that invokes the concept of utopia has always been vulnerable to charges of naiveté, impracticality, or lack of rigor. While participating on the Modern Language Association panel titled “The Anti-Social Thesis in Queer Theory,” I argued for replacing a faltering antirelational mode of queer theory with a queer utopianism that highlights a renewed investment in social theory (one that calls on not only relationality but also futurity). One of my co-panelists responded to my argument by exclaiming that there was nothing new or radical about utopia. To some degree that is true, insofar as I am calling on a well-established tradition of critical idealism. I am also not interested in a notion of the radical that merely connotes some notion of extremity, righteousness, or affirmation of newness. My investment in utopia and hope is my response to queer thinking that embraces a politics of the here and now that is underlined by what I consider to be today’s hamstrung pragmatic gay agenda. Some critics would call this cryptopragmatic approach tarrying with the negative. I would not. To some degree this book’s argument is a response to the polemic of the “antirelation.” Although the antirelational approach assisted in dismantling an anticritical understanding of queer community, it nonetheless quickly replaced the romance of community with the romance of singularity and negativity. The version of queer social relations that this book attempts to envision is critical of the communitarian as an absolute value and of its negation as an alternative all-encompassing value. In this sense the work of contemporary French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy and his notion of “being singular plural”²⁴ seems especially important. For Nancy the post-phenomenological category of being singular plural addresses the way in which the singularity that marks a singular existence is always coterminously plural—which is to say that an entity registers as both particular

in its difference but at the same time always relational to other singularities. Thus, if one attempts to render the ontological signature of queerness through Nancy’s critical apparatus, it needs to be grasped as both antirelational and relational.

Antisocial queer theories are inspired by Leo Bersani’s book *Homos*, in which he first theorized the so-called thesis of antirelationality.²⁵ I have long believed that the antirelational turn in queer studies was a partial response to critical approaches to a mode of queer studies that argued for the relational and contingent value of sexuality as a category. Many critics have followed Bersani’s antirelational turn, but arguably none as successfully as Lee Edelman in his book *No Future*.²⁶ I have great respect for *No Future*, and Edelman’s earlier book offers an adroit reading of James Baldwin’s *Just Above My Head*.²⁷ *No Future* is a brilliant and nothing short of inspiring polemic. Edelman clearly announces his mode of argumentation as being in the realm of the ethical, and this introduction is an anticipation of a reanimated political critique and should be read as an idiosyncratic allegiance to the polemical force of his argument and nothing like an easy dismissal. His argument and the seductive sway of the antirelational thesis energizes my argument in key ways.

Yet I nonetheless contend that most of the work with which I disagree under the provisional title of “antirelational thesis” moves to imagine an escape or denouncement of relationality as first and foremost a distancing of queerness from what some theorists seem to think of as the contamination of race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference. In other words, antirelational approaches to queer theory are romances of the negative, wishful thinking, and investments in deferring various dreams of difference.

To some extent *Cruising Utopia* is a polemic that argues against antirelationality by insisting on the essential need for an understanding of queerness as collectivity. I respond to Edelman’s assertion that the future is the province of the child and therefore not for the queers by arguing that queerness is primarily about futurity and hope. That is to say that queerness is always in the horizon. I contend that if queerness is to have any value whatsoever, it must be viewed as being visible only in the horizon. My argument is therefore interested in critiquing the ontological certitude that I understand to be partnered with the politics of presentist and pragmatic contemporary gay identity. This mode of ontological certitude is often represented through a narration of disappearance and negativity that boils down to another game of fort-da.

What then does a Blochian approach offer instead of a powerful critical impulse toward negation? Bloch found solid grounds for a critique of a totalizing and naturalizing idea of the present in his concept of the no-longer-conscious.²⁸ A turn to the no-longer-conscious enabled a critical hermeneutics attuned to comprehending the not-yet-here. This temporal calculus performed and utilized the past and the future as armaments to combat the devastating logic of the world of the here and now, a notion of nothing existing outside the sphere of the current moment, a version of reality that naturalizes cultural logics such as capitalism and heteronormativity. Concomitantly, Bloch also sharpens our critical imagination with his emphasis on hope. An antiutopian might understand himself as being critical in rejecting hope, but in the rush to denounce it, he would be missing the point that hope is spawned of a critical investment in utopia, which is nothing like naive but, instead, profoundly resistant to the stultifying temporal logic of a broken-down present. My turn to Bloch, hope, and utopia is a challenge to theoretical insights that have been stunted by the lull of presentness and various romances of negativity and have thus become routine and resoundingly anticritical. This antiutopian theoretical faltering is often nothing more than rote invocation of poststructuralist pieties. The critical practices often summarized as poststructuralism inform my analysis as much as any other source from which I draw. The corrective I wish to make by turning to utopia is attuned to Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's critique of the way in which paranoid reading practices have become so nearly automatic in queer studies that they have, in many ways, ceased to be critical.²⁹ Antiutopianism in queer studies, which is more often than not intertwined with antirelationality, has led many scholars to an impasse wherein they cannot see futurity for the life of them.³⁰ Utopian readings are aligned with what Sedgwick would call reparative hermeneutics.³¹

Although *Cruising Utopia* routinely rejects what I describe as a "certain romance of negativity," I do not want to dismiss the negative *tout court*. Indeed I find some theories of the negative to be important resources for the thinking of a critical utopianism. For example, Paolo Virno elegantly describes the negation of the negation in *Multitude: Between Innovation and Negation*. Virno resists an oppositional logic that clouds certain deployments of negativity³² and instead speaks to what he calls a negation that functions as a "modality of the possible," "a regression to the infinite."³³ Virno sees a potentiality in negative affects that can be reshaped by negation and made to work in the service of enacting a mode of critical possibility. Virno's theory of the negation of negation productively lines up

with Shoshana Felman's theory of radical negativity: "Radical negativity (or saying 'no') belongs neither to negation, nor to opposition nor to correction ('normalization'), nor to contradiction (of positive and negative, normal and abnormal, 'serious' and 'unserious,' 'clarity' and 'obscurity')—it belongs precisely to scandal: to the scandal of their nonopposition."³⁴ Again, my argument with the celebration of negation in antirelational queer critique is its participation in what can only be seen as a binary logic of opposition. Radical negativity, like the negation of negation, offers us a mode of understanding negativity that is starkly different from the version of the negative proposed by the queer antirelationist. Here the negative becomes the resource for a certain mode of queer utopianism.

Once again I turn to a literary example with the hope of describing the performative force of that particular queer utopian writing project. A paragraph from Eileen Myles's extraordinary memoir of coming into queer consciousness in the 1960s and '70s is especially salient for my purposes. *Chelsea Girls* is a ribald text full of fucking, drinking, and other modes of potentially lyrical self-destruction. Near the end of this testament to the aching madness of lesbian desire, a powerful yet diminished figure briefly enters the frame. At this point the young poet has become the part-time caretaker for the great queer voice of the New York School of poetry—James Schuyler. Myles attended to the old and infirmed Schuyler in his residential room at the legendary Chelsea Hotel.

From his bed he ran the show. It's a talent a few people I know have, mostly Scorpios which he was. You'd be hesitatingly starting your story, or like a cartoon character running right in when you realized the long wharf you were taking a short run on, his attention was not there. It was hopeless. The yellow in his room became brighter, the air became crinkly your throat became parched—you felt you had simply become a jerk. The presence of his attention was so strong, so deeply passive—such a thing to bathe your tiny desperate words in that when it was gone you had to stop and hover in silence again. Then he might begin, or perhaps you could come up with something else once the brittleness, the void passed. You had to stay silent for a very long time someday. He was like music, Jimmy was, and you had to be like music too to be with him, but understand in his room he was conductor. He directed the yellow air in room 625. It was marvelous to be around. It was huge and impassive. What emerged in the silence was a strong picture, more akin to a child or a beautiful animal.³⁵

In the spirit of the counterpolemical swerve that this introduction has been taking I want to suggest that this passage could be seen as representing an anti-antirelationality that is both weirdly reparative and a prime example of the queer utopianism for which I am arguing. Anti-antiutopianism is a phrase that I borrow from Fredric Jameson and index when marking this passage in Myles as anti-antirelational.³⁶ Anti-antiutopianism is not about a merely affirmative or positive investment in utopia. Gay and lesbian studies can too easily snap into the basically reactionary posture of denouncing a critical imagination that is not locked down by a short-sighted denial of anything but the here and now of this moment. This is the antiutopian stance that characterizes the antirelational turn. The prime examples of queer antirelationality in Bersani's *Homos*, Edelman's *No Future*, and all the other proponents of this turn in queer criticism are scenes of jouissance, which are always described as shattering orgasmic ruptures often associated with gay male sexual abandon or self-styled risky behavior. Maybe the best example of an anti-antirelational scene that I could invoke would be another spectacular instance of sexual transgression. The moments of pornographic communal rapture in Samuel Delany's work come most immediately to mind.³⁷ But instead I choose to focus on this relational line between a young white lesbian and an older gay white man because it does the kind of crossing that antirelational theorists are so keen on eschewing or ignoring.

Myles is paid to take care of Schuyler. On the level of political economy this relationship is easy to account for. But if we think of Delany's championing of interclass contact within a service economy and the affective surplus it offers, the passage opens up quite beautifully.³⁸ The younger poet notes a sense of "hopelessness" and feeling like a jerk as she works to take care of the older man, whose attention waxes and wanes. The relationality is not about simple positivity or affirmation. It is filled with all sorts of bad feelings, moments of silence and brittleness. But beyond the void that stands between the two poets, there is something else, a surplus that is manifest in the complexity of their moments of contact. Through quotidian service-economy interactions of care and simple conversation the solitary scene of an old man and his young assistant is transformed. A rhythm that is not simple relationality or routine antirelationality is established. This is the music that is Jimmy, this is the music of Eileen, this is the hum of their contact. This is Jimmy directing "the yellow air in room 625." It is Eileen watching, listening. It is the sense of contemplative awe that I have identified in Warhol's "wows" and O'Hara manic upbeat poetic cadence.

It is the mood of reception in which Bloch asks us to participate. It is the being singular plural of queerness. It is like the radical negativity that Shoshana Felman invokes when trying to describe the failure that is intrinsic in J. L. Austin's mapping of the performative. There is a becoming both animal and child that Myles ultimately glimpses in an infirmed Schuyler. In this passage we see the anticipatory illumination of the utopian canceling the relentless shadow play of absence and presence on which the antirelational thesis rests. The affective tone of this passage lights the way to the reparative.

This book has been written in nothing like a vacuum. I have written beside many beloved collaborators, interlocutors, and comrades. And while these friends have been a source of propulsion for me, they have expressed qualms about some of the theoretical moves I make in *Cruising Utopia*. For example, some friends have asked me why I have chosen to work with the more eccentric corpus of Bloch and not Benjamin's more familiar takes on time, history, or loss. I have also been asked how I could turn to a text such as Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* after Michel Foucault famously critiqued that work in *History of Sexuality, Volume 1*. One reader of an earlier draft expressed concern that I take time to talk about Bloch in the context of Marxian thought but do not contextualize Heidegger in relation to Nazism. I have not had any simple or direct answers for these thoughtful readers. Their concerns have made me aware of a need to further situate this project. I have resisted Foucault and Benjamin because their thought has been well mined in the field of queer critique, so much so that these two thinkers' paradigms now feel almost tailor-made for queer studies. I have wanted to look to other sites of theoretical traction. Bloch was noted as not being especially progressive about gender and sexuality, Heidegger's eventual political turn was of course horrific, and Marcuse's insistence on avowedly liberationist rhetoric may seem like something of a throwback. A fairly obvious reading of Foucault's writing on the repressive hypothesis³⁹ would perceive it as a direct response to *Eros and Civilization*. Although Marcuse's version of surplus repression may potentially make reprehension the basic constitutive element for thinking about sex, it nonetheless offers a liberationist and critically utopian take on subjugation. Marcuse and Heidegger were not radical homosexuals like Foucault or romantic melancholics like Benjamin, with whom queers today can easily identify, but my turn to a certain modality of Marxian and phenomenological thought is calibrated to offer new thought images for queer critique, different paths to queerness.

Let me momentarily leave Bloch aside and instead look to the problematic figures of Marcuse and his onetime mentor Heidegger. My interest in their work (and Bloch's, for that matter) pivots from their relationship to the tradition of German idealism. Marcuse's Marxism sought out a philosophical concreteness that, in a provisional fashion, resonated with phenomenology and specifically with the interest of the Heidegger of *Being and Time* in pursuing a concrete philosophy. Both strains of thought rejected German idealism's turn to abstraction and inwardness. Both craved a practical philosophy that described the world in historically salient fashion. Marcuse turned to Heidegger as a philosophical influence and a source during what was described as the crisis in Marxism in Germany during the 1920s. At that point a mode of scientism dominated Marxism and led to an antiphilosophical and mechanistic approach to Marx. Marcuse and Heidegger's relationship famously faltered as Marcuse joined the Frankfurt School and Heidegger eventually joined the Nazi Party on May 1, 1933. Although we can now look at 1928's *Being and Time* and locate philosophical models that were perhaps even then politically right-wing, it is precisely this relational and political failure on which I nonetheless want to dwell. Marcuse saw in Heidegger's ontology a new route to better describe human existence. He was taken with his mentor's notion of historicity and what it could potentially do for what was then a Marxism in duress. Much later, Marx's 1844 manuscripts were discovered, and the concrete philosophical approach understood as historical materialism became fully manifest. Marcuse looked back and realized that the phenomenological version of historicity was not necessary. Although I too have a great disdain for what Heidegger's writing became, I nonetheless look on it as failure worth knowing, a potential that faltered but can be nonetheless reworked in the service of a different politics and understanding of the world. The queer utopianism I am espousing would even look back on Heidegger's notion of futurity in *Being and Time* and attach itself to aspects of that theory of temporality. In Heidegger's version of historicity, historical existence in the past allowed for subjects to act with a mind toward "future possibilities." Thus, futurity becomes history's dominant principle. In a similar fashion I think of queerness as a temporal arrangement in which the past is a field of possibility in which subjects can act in the present in the service of a new futurity. Is my thesis ultimately corrupted because it finds some kind of historical resonance with the now politically reprehensible Heidegger? Readers can clearly glimpse the trace of Marcuse's renounced mentor in his later writing, and indeed that

problematic influence is part of the theoretical force of his left philosophy. To draw from such sources and ultimately make them serve another project, one that the author himself would have quickly denounced, serves as a critical engagement—critique as willful disloyalty to the master. Heidegger is therefore not the theoretical protagonist of my argument; more nearly, he is an opportunity and occasion to think queerness or queerly. Heidegger is then philosophical master and abject political failure. Thus, we see the thematic of virtuosity and failure that I describe in chapter 10 as queerness's way.

Thinking beyond the moment and against static historicisms is a project that is deeply sympathetic to Judith Halberstam's work on queer temporality's relation to spatiality, most immediately the notion of straight time. It also draws on Carla Freccero's notion of fantasmatic historiography, Elizabeth Freeman's theory of temporal drag, Carolyn Dinshaw's approach to "touching the past," Gayatri Gopinath's theorizing of the time and place of queer diaspora as an "impossible desire," and Jill Dolan's work on the utopian in performance.⁴⁰ Along those lines, although this writing project is not always explicitly about race, it does share much political urgency with a vibrant list of scholars working on the particularities of queers of color and their politics.⁴¹ I have spent some time arguing against the antirelational move in queer theory. Queer feminist and queer of color critiques are the powerful counterweight to the antirelational. I situate my work squarely in those quarters.

Certainly Lauren Berlant's work on the politics of affect in public life has had a structuring influence on this project. In a 1994 essay, titled "'68 or Something," Berlant explained the article's project in a way that resonates with much of the powerful writing that has followed it: "This essay is written in favor of refusing to learn the lessons of history, of refusing to relinquish utopian practice, of refusing the apparently inevitable movement from tragedy to farce that has marked so much of the analysis of social movements generated post '68."⁴² The refusal of empiricist historiography and its denouncement of utopian longing has been an important cue for this project. Berlant's insistence on the refusal of normative affect reminds me of the Great Refusal for which Marcuse called years earlier. *Cruising Utopia* is a critical move that has been forged in relation to the work of Berlant and other scholars with whom I have had the luxury to work under the banner of the Public Feelings Group.⁴³ That theoretical project has had an important activist component thanks to the inspired work of the Chicago Feel Tank.⁴⁴ The very idea that we can even venture

to feel utopian in the here and now has been nourished through my fortunate association with this collegial cohort.

Ultimately, this book offers a theory of queer futurity that is attentive to the past for the purposes of critiquing a present. This mode of queer critique depends on critical practices that stave off the failures of imagination that I understand as antirelationality and antiutopianism in queer critique. The mode of “cruising” for which this book calls is not only or even primarily “cruising for sex.” I do see an unlimited potentiality in actual queer sex, but books of criticism that simply glamorize the ontology of gay male cruising are more often than not simply boring. In this book I do nonetheless distill some real theoretical energy from historical accounts of fucking and utopia, such as John Giorno’s journals (chapter 2) and Samuel Delany’s memoir, *The Motion of Light and Water* (chapter 3). That may have something to do with the historical texture those texts provide. Indeed this book asks one to cruise the fields of the visual and not so visual in an effort to see in the anticipatory illumination of the utopian. If, as indicated by the famous quotation from Oscar Wilde that appears in the epigraph, “a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at,” then affective and cognitive maps⁴⁵ of the world that a critically queer utopianism can create, maps that *do* include utopia, need to be attended to in a fashion that indeed resembles a kind of politicized cruising. In the place of various exhausted theoretical stances *Cruising Utopia* not only asks readers to reconsider ideas such as hope and utopia but also challenges them to feel hope and to feel utopia, which is to say challenges them to approach the queer critique from a renewed and newly animated sense of the social, carefully cruising for the varied potentialities that may abound within that field.

1

Queerness as Horizon

Utopian Hermeneutics in the Face of Gay Pragmatism

for John

I BEGIN THIS chapter on futurity and a desire that is utopian by turning to a text from the past—more specifically, to those words that emanate from the spatiotemporal coordinate Bloch referred to as the no-longer-conscious, a term that attempts to enact a more precise understanding of the work that the past does, what can be understood as the performative force of the past. A 1971 issue of the gay liberation journal *Gay Flames* included a manifesto by a group calling itself Third World Gay Revolution. The text, titled “What We Want, What We Believe,” offered a detailed list of demands that included the abolition of capital punishment, the abolishment of institutional religion, and the end of the bourgeois family. The entire list of sixteen demands culminated with a request that was especially radical and poignant when compared to the anemic political agenda that dominates contemporary LGBT politics in North America today.

16.) We want a new society—a revolutionary socialist society. We want liberation of humanity, free food, free shelter, free clothing, free transportation, free health care, free utilities, free education, free art for all. We want a society where the needs of the people come first.

We believe that all people should share the labor and products of society, according to each one’s needs and abilities, regardless of race, sex, age or sexual preferences. We believe the land, technology and the means of production belong to the people, and must be shared by the people collectively for the liberation of all.¹

When we consider the extremely pragmatic agenda that organizes LGBT activism in North America today, the demand “we want a new society”