

Just Like Heaven

Queer Utopian Art and the Aesthetic Dimension

MY FATHER HATES the color green. He will not dress in green, nor will he furnish his home in the color. I grew up knowing this but not really thinking about it. Once, in the midst of my self-absorbed adolescence, I bought him a green sport shirt for Father's Day, and he reacted badly. Noticing my disappointment in his reaction to the present he quickly explained that the color green reminds him of the military, and specifically of the forced agricultural labor camp to which he was sent after he applied to move with his family from Cuba to the United States. The rest of my family immigrated in 1968, a year or two after my father had worked in that camp for seven months. He never really talks about that experience except to say that it was very difficult to be separated from his family. He will also speak of his hatred of the soldiers who oversaw him, the green of their uniform, and the general world of green that stood for the Cuban revolution. My forgetfulness on that Father's Day and my father's reaction to it foreshadowed the years of arguments that followed as my burgeoning politics became avowedly leftist and, to some relational degree, as the queer way I had chosen to live my life became undeniable.

In a way similar to my father's rejection of the color green, I have always had a strong resistance to camouflage and all it represented. I had a resistance to camouflage in art that resonated with my association of camouflage with militarism and, more specifically, U.S. foreign policy. In the same way that my father rejected the color green for its ideological connotations I could not move past my association of camouflage when I saw some hipster on the street wearing camouflage pants as part of her postpunk outfit. I felt similarly about Andy Warhol's use of camouflage. I did not like it. It was not so much that I did not get it; it was, more nearly, that I simply refused to get it. In this way I am strangely like my father. He refused to see green as a color that represented quite a few things, including, most prominently, the natural world of plants and animals. And whereas his aversion to a color is rooted in what for him is a personal and historical sense of trauma, my problems with camouflage are less grounded in experience and more about my sense of self as a political person. Camouflage, like the color green, is more than its ideologically representative uses.

Upon reading an interview with Jim Hodges I began to reconsider my position on this particular aesthetic. When Hodges is asked about the use of camouflage in his work he responds by meditating on his use of the form:

Camouflage is a rendering of nature. This is what attracted me to it and still does. It is a manmade depiction of nature by the artist Abbott Thayer. He made this observation about animal concealment and goes on to render nature in this simple reduced pattern of shadows—light and dark. I enjoy working with its source, which is nature, and then the issues that have been layered on it politically and culturally. I like loaded materials.¹

Hodges's mention of Thayer and the origins of camouflage separate it from militarism. Thayer's book, *Concealing—Coloration in the Animal Kingdom: An Exposition of the Laws of Disguise through Color and Pattern; Being a Summary of Abbot H. Thayer's Disclosures*, had a widespread influence on the use of military camouflage during World War I.² Hodges's invocation of artistic and naturalist origins to what later became a technology of warfare helps us consider the way in which the form is indeed "loaded." Its meaning is also

related to the next question Hodges fields about a lyric from the Laura Nyro song “Emmie.” The line “you ornament the earth” speaks of the relation of art to nature in much the same way that camouflage is an artistic form that attempts to approximate nature. Hodges’s interest in the way in which art touches nature helps me to reconsider my initial rejection of camouflage as a form. The linkage between nature and the ornament is compelling when considering the refusal of a certain natural order.

In this chapter I am interested in outlining a queer aesthetic dimension. Intrinsic to this discussion is a discussion of camouflage and ornament as modes of a queer aesthetic dimension. To that end I call on two sources, the artistic work of Andy Warhol and Jim Hodges and a line of German idealist thought manifest in the work of Marcuse and Bloch. Both these writers were invested in the power of the aesthetic dimension and, specifically, the utopian force of aesthetics. Utopia, in the way in which Bloch and Marcuse employ the term, is decidedly different from the dismissive invocation of naive utopianism that we encounter nowadays. Utopia in the German idealist usage is a critique of a present order, and of the overarching dictate of how things are and will always be in an unyielding status quo. I then consider the work of Warhol and Hodges as glimpses of a queer utopianism, which is to say a great refusal of an overarching here and now.

Queer Aesthetics as “Great Refusal”

It is interesting to consider Marcuse’s *Eros and Civilization*, a 1955 text that anticipated 1960s countercultural movements, alongside what today might be called queerness’s aesthetic. Marcuse’s text, almost a blueprint for sexual liberation, contains what can only be described as an antihomophobic moment that, within its historical parameters, seems somewhat startling. In the book’s eighth chapter, “The Images of Narcissus and Orpheus,” the Titan Prometheus is described as a representative of what Marcuse calls the “performance principle.” The performance principle, in his analysis, is a formulation that describes the conditions of alienated labor that modern man endures. Prometheus, the mythological figure who is constantly under duress and replenishing himself (a punishment for having stolen fire from the Olympian gods and delivered it to man), is juxtaposed with the images of Narcissus and Orpheus. These two kin of Dionysus stand for a different reality than that which is prescribed by the exacting rationality of the performance principle.

In mythology Narcissus was a beautiful young man who spurned “normal” sexual relations and perished. In the Ovidian telling of Narcissus’s tale, the angry goddess Nemesis avenges Narcissus’s rejection of the wood nymph Echo by having him fall in love with his own reflection. Unable to stop looking at himself, enraptured by his own image, the young man dies. Orpheus’s tale is equally tragic. After losing his wife, Eurydice, to the god of the underworld, Hades, he rejects the love of women for relations with young men. His rejection of normal loves leads him to be ripped asunder by Maenads, female devotees of Dionysus.³ For Marcuse, Narcissus and Orpheus represent “image[s] of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature.”⁴

Although both these mythological cultural heroes’ stories end in tragedy, their images—according to Marcuse—represent the potentiality of another reality. Narcissus and Orpheus are both rehabilitated from the negative connotations that have been attached to them in the age of the performance principle and the repressive order it instantiates. At the end of the chapter an important revelation is made about Orpheus and, to a lesser degree, Narcissus:

The classical tradition associates Orpheus with the introduction of homosexuality. Like Narcissus, he rejects the normal Eros, not for an aesthetic ideal, but for a fuller Eros. Like Narcissus, he

protests against the repressive order of procreative sexuality. The Orphic and narcissistic Eros is to the end of the negation of this order—The Great Refusal. In the world symbolized by the culture hero Prometheus, it is the end of all order; but in this negation Orpheus and Narcissus reveal a new reality, with an order of its own, governed by different principles. The Orphic Eros transforms being: he masters cruelty and death through liberation. His language is song, and his work is play. Narcissus' life is that of beauty, and his existence is contemplation. These images refer to the aesthetic dimension as the one in which their reality principle must be sought and validated.⁵

The linkage of the Orphic to homosexuality and Narcissism to nonprocreative sexuality aligns both mythopoetic categories with an aesthetic protocol that I would call queerness. In this instance I am describing queerness as “The Great Refusal” that Marcuse delineates, which is a refusal of what, once again, Marcuse calls the performance principle. More concretely, this refusal that I describe as queerness is not just homosexuality but the rejection of normal love that keeps a repressive social order in place.

Eros and Civilization delineates three governing principles: the pleasure principle, which represents Eros and play; the reality principle, which stands for labor; and finally the performance principle, which dominates the contemporary moment within which we strive. A quick translation of the performance principle would cast it as the way in which a repressive social order is set in place by limiting the forms and quantity of pleasure that the human is allowed. The performance principle is the way in which the dynamism between the pleasure principle and the reality principle are ordered. It most succinctly means, “Men do not live their own lives but perform preestablished functions. While they work, they do not fulfill their own needs and faculties but live in alienation.”⁶ Queerness, as I am describing it here, is more than just sexuality. It is this great refusal of a performance principle that allows the human to feel and know not only our work and our pleasure but also our selves and others.

In *Eros and Civilization* the aesthetic and the surplus it provides can potentially stand against the coercive practicality of the performance principle. A queer aesthetic can potentially function like a great refusal because art manifest itself in such a way that the political imagination can spark new ways of perceiving and acting on a reality that is itself potentially changeable. I look to two artists: one whose work is located in the past or, as philosopher Ernst Bloch would call it, the “no-longer-conscious” and the other who makes work in the present. Andy Warhol and Jim Hodges thus represent two moments in queer aesthetics that represent artistic practices that I see as being associated with the mythopoetic forces of Orpheus and Narcissus. These qualities of their work represent a joyful contemplation, a turn to the ludic and a lyrical as a response to the domination of the performance principle.

The Dance of Silver Clouds

Andy Warhol's *Sliver Clouds* were first created as a set design for Merce Cunningham's *RainForest*. That dance was first staged in 1968, a year that is best known to many people as the pinnacle of political unrest and activist zeal. Cunningham's companion, the composer John Cage, was involved with the music for the piece, and Jasper Johns worked on costumes. At the time of this collaboration none of these avant-garde luminaries was “out”; some of them never came out and refused to comment on their private lives. They are all cultural producers of aesthetic projects that I nonetheless associate with Marcuse's “Great Refusal” and what, after Marcuse's theory, I am describing as queer utopian aesthetics.

The production included six dancers in ripped leotards that represent animal-like avatars of another world, and the floating clouds standing in for trees represent the forest itself. Both Warhol and Cunningham are artists known for the reappropriation and refunctioning of the commonplace. That is to say that in the same fashion that everyday movement becomes dance in Cunningham, a pillow becomes a floating silver

icon in Warhol's art practice. And within the nexus of their collaboration a floating silver pillow becomes a cloud in the enchanted *RainForest*. In this way there is something both Orphic and Narcissistic about the *RainForest* and the silver pillows that compose it.

Marcuse values both the Narcissus and Orpheus experience of the world because they both negate that which sustains the alienating life models presented by the performance principle. The pleasure principle can certainly envelop gay identities—especially those that are content to ape heterosexual social conventions and modes of being in the world. But there is a certain liberation of Eros that I am describing as not only queerness but also a queer utopianism that again, though not exclusively about gay or lesbian sexuality, certainly embraces experimental modes of love, sex, and relationality. This queer utopianism is a great refusal, and it is emblemized in the figures of Narcissus and Orpheus. Marcuse writes,

They have not become the cultural heroes of the Western World: theirs is the image of joy and fulfillment; the voice which does not command but sings; the gesture which offers and receives; the deed which is peace and ends the labor of conquest; the liberation from time which unites man with god, man with nature.⁷

Marcuse takes the image of Narcissus not from Freudian libido theory, in which he stands in for pathologic perversion, but from mythology, in which “his silence is not of dead rigidity; and when he is contemptuous of love of hunters and nymphs he rejects Eros for another. He lives by an Eros of his own, and he does not love only himself.” Marcuse goes on to explain that although Narcissus loves his own image, he does not know it is himself, and that love is also mitigated by his love of nature. At myth’s end, after Narcissus’s death, he is transformed into a flower. Narcissus’s love is an interruption in the pleasure principle. He represents what Marcuse calls a Nirvana principle, which consists of “the redemption of pleasure, the halt of time, the absorption of death; silence, sleep, night, paradise.”⁸ This Nirvana principle, which represents transformative life in the face of controlled and repressed life, invokes the concept of Nirvana, the highest happiness in Buddhist thought, for the purpose of describing an ideality that is akin to the utopian in German idealist thought. The aesthetic projects of Warhol and Hodges aim to envision a Nirvana principle, which is queer and utopian, and stages a great interruption.

We can thus consider Warhol’s silver pillows, which are also trees in Cunningham’s *RainForest*, as components in a Narcissistic scene: to gaze into the pillows’ reflective surface is to participate in the modality of contemplation that is an interruption in the mandates to labor, toil, and sacrifice that the performance principle prescribes. Narcissism in Warhol’s cosmology would also reject a strictly Freudian condemnation of the practice. Warhol’s practice of portraiture was vast and expansive. His list of “portraits” includes countless celebrity portraits, such as those of Jackie Kennedy, and the screen tests of his army of superstars and friends, as well as various self-portraits, with wigs or through the screen of camouflage. I would add the silver pillows to this list of experiments in portraiture. Onstage during Cunningham’s *RainForest* they represent reflective pools to all the dancers who interact with them. In a similar fashion they offer museum visitors their very own portraits of self and their own private pools of contemplation, thus allowing the audience to enter the “stage” themselves.



Installation, Reprint 1994, *Silver Clouds* (Warhol Museum Series), 1994, refabricated for The Andy Warhol Museum in cooperation with The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts, Inc.; and Billy Klüver, 1994, helium-filled metalized plastic film (Scotchkpak), 36 × 51 in. (91.4 × 129.5 cm), Andy Warhol (artist), Billy Klüver (contributor), Manufactured by CTI Industries Corp., Barrington, IL, The Andy Warhol Museum, Pittsburgh, © 2008 The Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts/ARS, New York.

If we think of the silver pillows as they float in the museum space as moving pools of meditation and self-contemplation, we begin to understand that they also serve a critical function because they invite the person engaging to contemplate self and perhaps participate in a self-critique. Critique, from Kant to Marx and beyond, is described as having self-analysis as a first moment. Seeing oneself in the moving and luminous surface of the pillow is to see oneself in a different life, in a different world. It is like seeing one's imaginary reflection in a comic-book hero's silver skin or the artificial luster of painted gems that I discussed in the previous chapter.

The fact that these playful globes also take the form of pillows is worth noting. Pillows reflect rest and respite, as opposed to forced activity and work. They also represent the realm of dreams and imagination. We can then think of these silver pillows as glittering and hovering celebrations of both rest and play, of liberation from a coercive work ethic. We can also think of the kinetic nature of these pillows. They are both pools of self-contemplation and trees in a forest. In the myth of Narcissus he communes with nature to the degree that he makes the impossible happen. That dynamic is present in both the Orphic and Narcissistic, since “Eros awakens and liberates potentialities that are real in things that are animate and inanimate. In organic and inorganic nature—real but in the un-erotic reality repressed.”⁹ The sway of the airborne pillow thus represents the animating force of the unreality that is promised by the Narcissistic, an unreality that is most poignant for the way it promotes a poetic contemplation of the world that can see past the screen of a coercive performance principle that rigidly structures both our work and play.

We see nature animated in both Warhol's and Hodges's use of camouflage. For both artists camouflage is an aesthetic production that does more than duplicate nature's form. In their practice it is a form that addresses nature's relation to man. In its utilitarian usage this structure of address was limited to hunting and militarism. But once it moves to the realm of the aesthetic the form is reactivated and made to perform in ways that do not correspond to the coercive and pragmatic structures of the performance principle. Warhol's camouflage painting from 1987 utilizes the bold and decidedly unnatural day-glow colors associated with the countercultural moment in which the artist first became famous. In these images the natural world that is usually, to some degree, the thing being invoked by camouflage is rendered impossible

or utterly unnatural. Queer aesthetics attempt to call the natural into question. The Orphic and Narcissistic represent a queer potentiality within the realm of the natural that has been diminished by a certain ordering or perhaps even a hijacking of the natural. Warhol's camouflage attempts to bring out a radical impossibility in the world of the natural.



Paintings, 1986, *Self-Portrait*, acrylic and silkscreen ink on linen, 40 × 40 in. (101.6 × 101.6 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.

In Warhol's somewhat garish camouflage painting we see a desire to reproduce nature with a difference, with a desire to entertain the impossibility of another world, of a different time and place, where that natural represents a queer potentiality that is rendered unimaginable in the straight time and place of the performance principle. Jim Hodges's beautiful *Oh Great Terrain* can be seen as both a continuation of Warhol's approach to camouflage and entirely its own advancement in the aesthetic project of picturing a queer utopian "wish-landscape." This camouflage resembles what has come to be known as "urban camouflage," employing an array of blacks, whites, and various shades of gray. But Hodges's painting animates camouflage and shuttles it from the real of the pragmatic to the idealistic. The painting represents a certain kinesthesia, a swirl of movement around a centrifugal core where the components of the camouflage landscape seem to be whirling to or out of a center. The shards of blacks, whites, and grays seem to be part of a large choreography of great magnitude. The effect gives *Oh Great Terrain* a sense of perspective that is not anticipated in relation to camouflage as a mode of painting and design. The pattern becomes something else in Hodges's piece. Suddenly camouflage incorporates a sense of distance and closeness. Ernst Bloch wrote powerfully of the utopian force in painting as the rendering of what he called a wish-landscape. In Bloch's analysis he focused on more directly representational painters such as Van Eyck, Leonardo, and Rembrandt, using this notion of a wish-landscape to discuss these historical figurative

painters. Provisionally, I import this concept to describe aspects of Hodges's queer utopian aesthetic practice. Bloch describes the wish-landscape in his philosophical and lyrical parlance:

That distance, which leaves the view unobstructed, which does not hide anything, is richer in objects. Even where the painted view lies in the mists, there is not determination but, rather, a standard set particularly for the vastness. As soon as this world, instead of heaven, began to become infinite, the wish-landscape as open distance appeared in paintings.... The point where the lines of perspective meet lies an infinity; the lines running in the middle section go beyond a horizon. The figures enclose something new: a centrifugal space. Thus already at the middle ages vastness, a vastness of wish.¹⁰

In Hodges's painting the lines swirl around a centrifugal space, but they nonetheless establish both a sense of horizon and a beyond the horizon, wherein lies potentiality, hope, and utopia. A natural representational order as restrictive directive is being redeployed as dancing artifice that disrupts the tyranny of nature as a coercive mechanism. *Oh Great Terrain* offers a sense of vastness that is Orphic and Narcissistic in that the artist remakes the natural in a fashion that enables the viewer to envision a new world. Marcuse explains that "trees and animals respond to Orpheus' language; the spring and the forest respond to Narcissus' desire."¹¹

Queerness as lyric and modality are thus potentially transformative of a natural order, allowing for new horizons and a vastness of potentiality. We can now look back at Cunningham's choreography for *RainForest* to consider the ways in which the drama it staged in 1968 deployed a choreography that mimicked and animated the kinesthesia of the natural world. We can also look to Warhol's shining helium-filled sculptures as akin to the beautiful swirling choreography of gesture, color, and shade in *Oh Great Terrain*.

Landscapes of Ornamentation

Hodges's take on landscape is similar to the way in which the practice of portraiture is expanded and transformed in Warhol's art practice. Camouflage is linked to the concept of landscape, and it too is, in the terms Hodges used to describe camouflage, "loaded." The Nobel Prize-winning author J. M Coetzee has described the power of landscape writing in his native South Africa to represent the elision and degradation of an African presence in the service of propping up and justifying the white settlers' colonial endeavor.¹² Landscape art depicts a natural order, but it does not do so neutrally. Landscape art represents the ways in which the world should look, feel, and be. Hodges's take on landscape is viewed most immediately in the camouflage work I described in the preceding section. But he also uses other modes to render the natural world and the human's place in it. Take, for example, a 1998 piece titled *Landscape*. This piece links conceptually recalibrated notions of both portraiture and landscape. A seemingly starched white dress shirt is laid out on a table. Upon closer inspection the white shirt's collar contains concentric circles of different fabrics of various colors and patterns. These appear to be the collars of other shirts. The piece resembles the consolidation of a wardrobe, and through that an amalgamation of shards and pieces—both material and affective—that represent a life. In this way the work is reminiscent of the work of Hodges's friend, the deceased artist Félix González-Torres. González-Torres would use a series of dates and words, painted on the walls of a room, to represent a portrait of the person he was "painting." Words and dates render a highly subjective portrait of a subject that is nonetheless historically nuanced.

Landscape could be the discarded shirts of the artist himself or of a friend or of an acquaintance or perhaps of a lover. But the piece is called *Landscape* and not *Portrait*, and thus one needs to consider that these shards of a life represented through fabric also have a spatial connotation. The painting represents a

life as a landscape. The life of a tree is deciphered through an examination of the rings in a trunk or stump that becomes part of a landscape. Men's shirts touch other men's shirts, setting a tonality that is not only about the landscape of a person's inner life but also about the various intimacies connoted by the collision of one's wardrobe touching another's apparel.

Famously, González-Torres represented loss of the beloved, in both a personal and societal register, through a picture repeated on multiple billboards depicting an unmade bed and the indentation left by two absent bodies. In a similar fashion both co-presence and absence are the queer landscape rendered by Hodges's piece. Men's shirts swirl together in a landscape suggesting another world of intimacy that is akin to both the Orphic and the Narcissistic and the interruption of the "here and now" that they promise.

Hodges's mirror work, such as the piece *Great Event*, also promises another wish-landscape. Tiny pieces of mirror connect on canvas in the shape of a circle. One immediate connotation is the disco ball and the world of play, dance, and exuberance it represents. Here the world of salvation on the dance floor is conjured. But the mirrored orb also has other connotations. It can be understood as an aerial perspective of a great glittering landscape. It can appear to be something like a demographic or population-density map of a queer utopia. Oscar Wilde's famous quip, which I have previously cited, that "a map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth glancing at"¹³ is again relevant when considering all of Hodges's landscape and camouflage art. Like *Silver Clouds*, Hodges's work represents idealistic renderings of a natural world. The art functions as a manipulation of nature's vastness and thus a site of contemplation and critique.

The Orphic and the Narcissistic converge in Hodges's mirror camouflage piece *Into the Stream IV*. In that piece another exuberant whirl of lines connotes the effect of a reimagined and vibrant natural world. It is reminiscent of another piece by González-Torres, *Untitled (Orpheus Twice) 1991*, which consists of two large door-size mirrors placed next to each other. In that piece one glimpses a convergence of Narcissus's representative symbol par excellence—yet the title's parenthetical component indexes Orpheus's name. González-Torres, like Marcuse, seems to link directly both the Orphic and the Narcissistic. Along with Marcuse and Bloch, González-Torres was a thinker involved in the project of staging a great refusal. When discussing one of his famous stacks, this time a stack of white paper that audiences were encouraged to take with them, he wrote in a note to his gallerist, Andrea Rosen, on February 14, 1992,

The other day I was still thinking about the piece and how it fulfills me now even more. You know the title: (*Passport*) is very crucial and significant—a white empty blank uninscribed piece of paper, an untouched feeling, an undiscovered experience. A passport to another place, to another life, to a new beginning, to chance; to the chance of meeting the other who makes life a moving force, a chance to alter one's life and future, an empty passport for life: to inscribe it with the best, the most painful, the most banal, the most sublime, and yet to inscribe it with life, love, memories, fears, voids and unexpected reasons for being. A simple white object against a white wall, waiting.¹⁴

A blank white sheet of paper may seem to be the opposite of a mirror—one depicts nothing, and the other depicts whatever catches its reflection. But the idea of a passport and transport beyond the here brings to mind the world of transport that is represented in Lewis Carroll's looking glass. The looking glass in González-Torres and Hodges is thus the threshold for a certain transport. Gazing into the reflective surface is more than just self-appreciation but also a mode of contemplation that allows the spectator to be conscious of the coercive force of the performance principle. This looking at a mirror is thus an act that works like the symbolic passport; it speaks of a critical imagination that begins with self-analysis and a vaster social critique of how the world could be and indeed should be.

Laura Nyro's voice and her song are about the need to ornament the world, an impulse that resonates in the work of Félix González-Torres, Jim Hodges, and Andy Warhol. The desire to render the world as ornamented is the desire to see past the limits of the performance principle. Marcuse explained that people suffer from a surplus repression within the performance principle. He is clear that some repression is necessary, that we would perish in a hedonist avalanche if we did not let the reality principle (the need to work, to sustain the self materially) check the pleasure principal to some degree. The performance principle is a surplus of this repression that excessively mitigates the realm of pleasure in the service of societal normalization and control.

When one looks at Warhol's early works from the 1950s one grasps a gilded world of homoerotic desire that registers the unfolding of a line of utopian thought, a desire for a place and time that was not imaginable for men who desired men. The rich accentuation of hearts and gold-leaf paint render a world of ornamentation. In one picture beautiful shoes abound, each of them named after a friend, and the dedication on the bottom of the images reads, "to all my friends." Male lovers kiss. A boy painted in gold leaf looks up provocatively—he seems to be laying on his stomach. In another piece one man's hand seems to clutch his own genitals, coyly concealing them. In still another image, a line drawing, a flower and a leaf frame a cock, balls, and pubic hair. The field of one ballpoint-pen drawing depicts rows and rows of hearts that are repeated with the initials "CL" on two hearts. One is left to speculate about who CL may be. (It was the actor Charles Lisanby.) A self-portrait of the artist's face is adorned with stars, half-moons, and birds in flight. This work, which was produced years before what is touted as gay liberation, is the ornamented and gilded world of a daydreamer.

Within the ethos of the performance principle there is no time or place for lusty and romantic imaginings of the type found in these Warhol images. That is precisely why Bloch, for instance, values daydreaming and sees it doing the work of imaging another life, another time, another place—a version of heaven on earth that is not simply denial or distraction but a communicative and collective mode of transport that helps one think of another place where our Eros is not conscripted in the fashion that civilization demands. Daydreaming, like the ornament, represents a reactivation of the erotic imaginary that is not limited to sexual fantasies, though it includes them, but is more nearly about a fuller capacity for love and relationality, a capacity that is queer in its striking insistence on a great refusal. The Orphic and Narcissistic elements that are manifest throughout the work of the young Andy Warhol are his oeuvre at its most pronounced and joyfully resonant.

Along with these images of boys and hearts in Warhol's work we also have various images of flowers. Here the story of Narcissus once again comes to mind, as we consider his eventual fate, in which he is transformed into a flower. Warhol's silk-screened flowers of 1964 are lush and beautiful as the blurring of the process gives them a nebulous quality that in some way is anticipatory of the *Silver Clouds* that followed them. There are countless flowers throughout Warhol's work of the 1950s, but one is especially interesting. That is the drawing of a flower emerging from a bottle of Coca-Cola. The bottle of Coca-Cola is repeated throughout Warhol's career and is indicative of his Campbell's Soup can strategy, in which he brings to light the aesthetic dimension of everyday commodities. But in this image the Coke bottle is not an isolated mass-produced commodity; it is touched by a flower that springs forth much in the same way that a transformed Narcissus blooms as a flower. This brings to mind the moment in Andy Warhol's Philosophy that I mention in this books' introduction, in which he identifies a radically democratic and even utopian component in the mass-produced commodity. That Warholian notion of a radical idea of democracy via commodity form, taken alongside the image of the flowering Coco-Cola bottle, a natural surplus that surges forth from the apparently sterile container, illustrates Warhol's particular version of the queer utopian impulse. The Coke bottle is the everyday material that is represented in a different frame, laying bare its aesthetic dimension and the potentiality it represents. In its everyday manifestation such an object would represent the alienated

production, consumption, and labor that is the realm of the performance principle. But for Warhol, as for Cunningham, González-Torres, and Hodges, the utopian exists in the everyday, and through an aesthetic practice that I am calling queer, the aesthetic endeavor that reveals the inherent utopian possibility is always in the horizon.

Elsewhere I have discussed the ways in which Warhol and his friend and sometimes collaborator Jean-Michel Basquiat disidentified with commodity culture through the practice of Pop Art.¹⁵ In queer utopian aesthetic practice this disidentification is in the service of a project that is critically utopian.

I began this chapter by considering my father and his aversion to a color. I described this rejection of green as having to do with the rejection of a revolution that was for some people, but not all, a failure. I have spent much of my life arguing with my father about revolutions, in relation to both politics and Eros. The Cuban revolution of 1959 signaled a utopian moment that is squarely in the past. Roughly ten years later the Stonewall rebellion became the signal of contemporary gay liberation. In much the same way that many people think the Cuban socialist revolution succumbed to totalitarianism, I consider gay liberation to have strayed from its earlier idealism. From my vantage point the contemporary gay and lesbian movement has become assimilationist and content to follow the path laid out by the performance principle. It is important not to be content to let failed revolutions be merely finite moments. Instead we should consider them to be the blueprints to a better world that queer utopian aesthetics supply. Silver clouds, swirls of camouflage, mirrors, a stack of white sheets of paper, and painted flowers are passports allowing us entry to a utopian path, a route that should lead us to heaven or, better yet, to something just like it.