

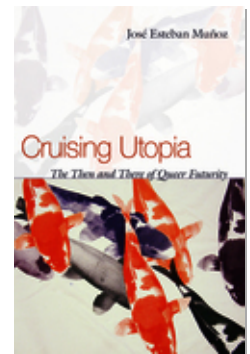


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Cruising Utopia

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Conclusion

"Take Ecstasy with Me"

WE MUST VACATE the here and now for a then and there. Individual transports are insufficient. We need to engage in a collective temporal distortion. We need to step out of the rigid conceptualization that is a straight present. In this book I have argued that queerness is not yet here; thus, we must always be future bound in our desires and designs. The future is a spatial and temporal destination. It is also another place, if we believe Heidegger, who argued that the temporal is prior to the spatial. What we need to know is that queerness is not yet here but it approaches like a crashing wave of potentiality. And we must give in to its propulsion, its status as a destination. Willingly we let ourselves feel queerness's pull, knowing it as something else that we can feel, that we must feel. We must take ecstasy.

The title of this conclusion is lifted from indie pop stars the Magnetic Fields. Sung by the wonderfully languid Stephen Merritt, the band's leader, the song and its titular request could certainly be heard as a call to submit to pleasures both pharmaceutical and carnal. And let us hope that they certainly mean at least both those things. But when I listen to this song I hear something else, or more nearly, I feel something else. A wave of lush emotions washes over me, and other meanings for the word *ecstasy* are keyed. The gender-neutral song's address resonates queerly and performs a certain kind of longing for a something else. Might it be a call for a certain kind of transcendence? Or is it in fact something more? The Magnetic Fields are asking us to perform a certain "stepping out" with them. That "stepping out" would hopefully include a night on the town, but it could and maybe should be something more. Going back through religion and philosophy we might think of a stepping out of time and place, leaving the here and now of straight time for a then and a there that might be queer futurity.

Saint Theresa's ecstasy, most memorably signaled in Lorenzo Bernini's marble sculpture, has served as the visual sign of ecstasy for many

Christians. The affective transport chiseled in her face connotes a kind of rapture that has enthralled countless spectators. It represents a leaving of self for something larger in the form of divinity. Plotinus described this form of ecstasy as God's help to reach God and possess him. In Plotinus, God reaches man beyond all reason and gives him a kind of happiness that is ecstasy.¹ In seminar XX, Lacan looks to Bernini's sculpture as the most compelling example of what he calls the Other or feminine jouissance.² Ecstasy and jouissance thus both represent an individualistic move outside of the self. These usages resonates with the life of the term *ecstasy* in the history of philosophy. *Ekstasis*, in the ancient Greek (*exstare* in the Latin), means "to stand" or "to be out outside of oneself," *ex* meaning "out" and *stasis* meaning "stand." Generally the term has meant a mode of contemplation or consciousness that is not self-enclosed, particularly in regard to being conscious of the other. By the time we get to phenomenology, especially Heidegger, we encounter a version of being outside of oneself in time. In *Being and Time* Heidegger reflects on the activity of timeliness and its relation to *ekstatisch*.³ Knowing ecstasy is having a sense of timeliness's motion, comprehending a temporal unity, which includes the past (having-been), the future (the not-yet), and the present (the making-present). This temporally calibrated idea of ecstasy contains the potential to help us encounter a queer temporality, a thing that is not the linearity that many of us have been calling straight time. While discussing the Montreal-based band Lesbians on Ecstasy, Halberstam points to their mobilization of queer temporality through their thought experiment of imagining lesbian history as if it were on ecstasy. Here they certainly mean the drug MDMA, but they also mean an ecstatic temporality. As Halberstam explicates, their electronic covers of earnest lesbian anthems remake the past to reimagine a new temporality.⁴

The "stepping out" that the Magnetic Fields song's title requests, this plaintive "Take Ecstasy with Me," is a request to step out of the here and now of straight time. Let us briefly consider the song's invitation, located in its lyrics. It begins with a having-been: "You used to slide down the carpeted stairs / Or down the banister / You stuttered like a Kaleidoscope / 'Cause you knew too many words / You used to make ginger bread houses / We used to have taffy pulls." After this having-been in the form of fecund romanticized childhood is rendered, we here the song's chorus, which contains this invitation to step out of time with the speaker/singer: "Take ecstasy with me, baby / Take ecstasy with me." When we

first hear this invitation it seems like it is merely a beckoning to go back to this idealized having-been. But then the present (the making-present) is invoked in the song's next few lines, lines that first seem to be about further describing the mythic past but on closer listening telegraph a painful instant from the present: "You had a black snow mobile / We drove out under the northern lights / A vodka bottle gave you those raccoon eyes / We got beat up just for holding hands." Did the vodka give the song's addressee raccoon eyes? Or was it the bottle deployed in an act of violence? Certainly we know that the present being described in the song is one in which we are "beat up just for holding hands." At this point we hear the lyrical refrain differently "Take ecstasy with me, baby / Take ecstasy with me." The weird, quirky pop song takes on the affective cadence of a stirring queer anthem. (A cover of this song by the electronic dance act *chk chk chk* did briefly become a dance-floor anthem.) Take ecstasy with me thus becomes a request to stand out of time together, to resist the stultifying temporality and time that is not ours, that is saturated with violence both visceral and emotional, a time that is not queerness. Queerness's time is the time of ecstasy. Ecstasy is queerness's way. We know time through the field of the affective, and affect is tightly bound to temporality. But let us take ecstasy together, as the Magnetic Fields request. That means going beyond the singular shattering that a version of *jouissance* suggests or the transport of Christian rapture. Taking ecstasy with one another, in as many ways as possible, can perhaps be our best way of enacting a queer time that is not yet here but nonetheless always potentially dawning.

Taking ecstasy with one another is an invitation, a call, to a then-and-there, a not-yet-here. Following this book's rhythm of cross-temporal comparison, I offer lesbian poet Elizabeth Bishop's invitation to her staunch spinster mentor Marianne Moore to "come flying":

Invitation to Miss Marianne Moore

From Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,
 please come flying.
 In a cloud of fiery pale chemicals,
 please come flying,
 to the rapid rolling of thousands of small blue drums
 descending out of the mackerel sky
 over the glittering grandstand of harbor-water,
 please come flying.⁵

The next few lines describe the river that the two poets would traverse, the multitude of flags they would behold on ships. Bishop refers to Moore's signature three-cornered Paul Revere hat and her pointy black shoes, making the address all the more personal and highlighting Moore's own queer extravagance. They would "mount" the magical sky with what Bishop calls a natural heroism. Our queer dynamic duo would then fly over "the accidents, above the malignant movies, the taxicabs and injustices at large." This flight is a spectacle of queer transport made lyric. Each stanza closes with the invitation to come flying. The last two stanzas are especially poignant for my thesis:

With dynasties of negative constructions
darkening and dying around you,
with grammar that suddenly turns and shines
like flocks of sandpipers flying,
please come flying.

Come like a light in the white mackerel sky,
come like a daytime comet
with a long unnebulous train of words,
from Brooklyn, over the Brooklyn Bridge, on this fine morning,
please come flying.⁶

It is important to note that the poem's last few lines announce the flight's destination as not determinedly spatial but instead as temporal: "this fine morning." Kathryn R. Kent has written carefully about the complicated cross-generational bond between the two women that eventually led to a sort of disappointment when Moore's mother (with whom she lived) became an overarching influence in her life and overwhelmed the identificatory erotics between the two great poets.⁷ (As I have maintained, disappointment is a big part of utopian longing.) Kent explains the ways in which Bishop's work signaled a queer discourse of invitation that did not subsume the other but was instead additive. Two other queer ghosts who float over the bridge are Walt Whitman and Hart Crane, both of whom wrote monumental poems about the bridge and what it represented. Bishop and Moore were both conversant about that work and the queer intertext that was being rendered. One can perhaps also decipher the living presence of writer Samuel R. Delany hovering. He is the author of "Atlantis: A Model 1924," a haunting story that meditates on his own family

history as it is interlaced with Crane's biography and his relationship with the Brooklyn Bridge.⁸ The point is that the poem itself is poised at a dense connective site in the North American queer imagination. The Brooklyn Bridge and crossing the river, arguably both ways, represents the possibility of queer transport, leaving the here and now for a then and there. Thus, I look at Bishop's poem as being illustrative of a queer utopianism that is by its very nature additive, like the convergence of past, present, and future that I have discussed throughout this book. This convergence is the very meaning of the ecstatic.

The poem, like the pop song, is also a unique example of the concrete utopianism for which I am calling. Bishop does not overly sugarcoat the invitation; she clearly states that there are "dynasties of negative constructions / darkening and dying around you." But this invitation, this plea, is made despite the crushing force of the dynasty of the here and now. It is an invitation to desire differently, to desire more, to desire better.

Cruising Utopia can ultimately be read as an invitation, a performative provocation. Manifesto-like and ardent, it is a call to think about our lives and times differently, to look beyond a narrow version of the here and now on which so many around us who are bent on the normative count. Utopia in this book has been about an insistence on something else, something better, something dawning. I offer this book as a resource for the political imagination. This text is meant to serve as something of a flight plan for a collective political becoming. These pages have described aesthetic and political practices that need to be seen as necessary modes of stepping out of this place and time to something fuller, vaster, more sensual, and brighter. From shared critical dissatisfaction we arrive at collective potentiality.

