

“From Hopelessness to Hope: Spaces for Ethics”

Der Gedanke an den Selbstmord ist ein starkes Trostmittel:
mit ihm kommt man gut über manche böse Nacht hinweg.

La pensée du suicide est une puissante consolation : elle aide à
bien passer mainte mauvaise nuit.

The thought of suicide is a strong consolation: with it people
get through many an evil night.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse*, §157

I should like to begin today’s session with a two-part statement that Dostoyevsky’s underground man made. “[P]erhaps the goal mankind strives for on earth,” he thinks aloud, “consists just in this ceaselessness of the process of achievement alone, that is to say, life itself, and not essentially in the goal, which, of course, is bound to be nothing other than two times two is four – that is, a formula [...] For he senses that once he finds it, there will be nothing to search for.” (33) Then, a bit further, the underground man inscribes this nugget into his notebook: “Achieving he likes, but having achieved he does not quite like.” (34)¹

The underground man’s observation is altogether compatible with the conviction held by Ernst Bloch, the twentieth century’s foremost theoretician of the attitude we call hope, of the open-endedness of the world that human consciousness creates. For Bloch, this openness translates into our affinity for process, which we may even prefer over any achievement or definitive positioning.²

At the end of the concluding chapter of my last book, *Sharing Common Ground*, I floated the expression “hope from heresy.” The second half of that book culminated in a detailed account of the profound influence that the post-war poetry of René Char had on the thought of Michel Foucault. Heresy – which I will define as the decision impelled by incredulity to break with orthodoxy all the while using its language subversively, of course (cf. *SCG* 277) – is the driving force with which both René Char and Michel Foucault conducted their work. Or, as I put it then, “Michel Foucault strictly followed the spirit of René Char’s hopeful resistance” (*SCG* 291). Heresy, which installs critical space between what *claims to be* because it *has been* and what *can be*, emerges as reason for hope in an otherwise hopeless world. The seminar I’m

¹ Fyodor Dostoyevsky, *Notes from Underground*. Tr. Richard Pevear and Larissa Volokhonsky. New York: Vintage Classics, ____.

² Cf. Geoghegan 32.

proposing today will be less oriented toward the question of the *being* or *existence* of spaces otherwise than in that of their *purpose*. In order to show or suggest paths for initiating the work toward the admirably peaceful endeavor of an ethics (Dare one evoke or envision “a *natural* ethics”?), we need to interrogate hope. But such an interrogation is far from simple, since it requires equal attention to hope’s opposite in despair.

Further, I want to suggest and, in any case, simple empirical work by any of us would show that neither hopelessness nor hope proceed alone. Rather, they are enmeshed in a dependency in which principles of their workings must dwell. Earlier this year while Bregham Dalgleish and I were discussing the tenor of this seminar, I’d thought all too capaciously about how I would engage this exploration with you. I’d envisioned leading us through texts by Walter Benjamin, Ernst Bloch, and Primo Levi as well as a clip from a 1928 silent film by Georges Lacombe. We will have plenty to think about today if I limit my references primarily to Ernst Bloch, Michel Foucault, René Char, and a smattering of others. Benjamin, Lacombe and his film, Primo Levi, I will reserve for the larger work that I trust today’s seminar will help launch.

The following is a series of questions I want to propose at the outset. I cannot fully promise that I have answers, but ideally and eventually answers to them must come into view in order to complete a portrait of the hopelessness–ethics–hope nexus. Is hopelessness necessary in order for there to be hope? Does hope, which we sometimes referred to with expressions such as “a reason to hope,” develop out of despair? Can hopelessness ever become so intense, so pervasive and definitive as to nullify all possibility of hope? Is the ethical horizon, our yearning for an ethics obtained from natural causes the ultimate hope? Is the all-to-often all-too-real possibility of the impossibility of final, fully evolved ethics ever reason to lose hope altogether?

A sampling from the seemingly endless sources of hopelessness today will, I trust, convince most of you of the endless (and perhaps urgent) necessity of an ethics and the putting of that ethics to practice. Among these catalysts for despair, I count:

- the abject, crass, plutocratic political leadership
- the wanton wastefulness, unremitting destructiveness of our species
- unprecedented climate change due mainly to unregulated mindless human activity
- our near total disregard for animals other than “us”

- even within our species, our behavior that perpetually confirms Plautus’s adage that “*lupus est homo homini*”³

Space – or, as I’ve written it, *spaces* – is the element from my title thus far absent from my first remarks meant to jumpstart this seminar. Spaces for ethics, what are they? We know because we experience and observe it in ourselves, over and over again, that something in our make up causes us to get a grip, get ahold of ourselves and imagine novel strategies, to do almost anything to bootstrap ourselves when we hit rock bottom. The source of this stimulus is still a mystery to me. But I have found it occurring in a number of cases causing ordinary hopelessness, but cases of in which the work indicative of life is integrally precluded. Certainly, surviving extermination as Primo Levi did is one of those cases. So too was Nazi occupation and, as recounted in René Char’s post-Liberation poetic burst, the silence it imposes. Those words from the phoenix resonated indelibly, as I demonstrated in *Sharing Common Ground*, in a young Michel Foucault. What we in the U.S. do (or don’t do) in the coming months with our despair at being Trumped by the current presidency is, to my view, another test case for hope to rebound out of hopelessness. (On that note. In sum, the conditions of possibility for embarking on that trajectory of minimal distance from absolute hopelessness to a glimmer of hope has its obvious source in our resourcefulness, our cunning, our ruse, our wherewithal. When we read texts like those of Primo Levi or René Char, we relive those periods of despair and vicariously work the gap or space so vital to our survival.

As I hope the statements by Dostoyevsky’s underground man might suggest, there seems to be ample evidence that ethics – or that vista that we might name “true ethics” or “*the ethics*,” using as we must ever-inadequate words – ... that ethics too is not only a *process*, but is a goal that is never attainable, one that is never reachable or realizable. And that this is still just fine and actually has the potential of enabling us to live better with each other. Striving toward an ethical arrangement of ourselves to the world (which obviously includes every other member of the species) might be a ceaseless, relentless process that we enjoy. The very endlessness of the effort – as long as it remains an effort – might just be all we really ever need to expect. As long as we are ever *engaged* in that process, we are *disposing ourselves* for moral behavior and, thus, setting the grounds for an egalitarian and peaceful politics. Were evidence to lead to some degree of

³ “*Lupus est homo homini, non homo, quom qualis sit non novit*” [A man is a wolf, not a man, to another man which he hasn't met yet] (Plautus, *Asinaria*).

positive knowledge about this behavior of ours, we could then assert with near certainty that the pleasure obtained when we extend ourselves out to the ever-receding horizon of ethics is what we call hope.

An ethics unmediated by institutions is yet – if ever – to be realized. (The play of signification between “yet” and “if ever” is a fundamental temporal nexus for any discussion of ethics. An ethics unmediated by institutions – political, religious or otherwise – would consist of a set of rules for peaceful, empathic and egalitarian interaction among members of our species, between our species and all other earth-dwelling species and, hence, with this planet. Such rules would not be derived from anything already codified, but from everyday experience itself, perceived without coloration, discussed openly and collectively, analyzed critically. All institutions, as they exist today, would be renovated or rebuilt on the basis of such rules.

Space, along with the beings and objects “out there,” is our first and most fundamental collaborator in the constitution of thinking. This has been borne out by childhood psychologists and by philosophers of science such as Maxine Sheets-Johnstone in a chapter entitled “Thinking in Movement” in her 2011 book, *The Primacy of Movement*. From the intimate spaces of our infancy, we are exposed to other spaces. Some of these other spaces are also *spaces otherwise* (or “heterotopias”) in the sense that Michel Foucault tried to explain in a 1967 lecture entitled “Of Spaces Otherwise (*Des espaces autres*).” Alien yet uncannily familiar, spaces otherwise harbor the capacity to move us and put us to work at transforming hopelessness into hope, at transforming antipathy or apathy into ethical behavior.

By “spaces for ethics” in the subtitle of my seminar paper today, I am suggesting, by association with aspirations for an ethical horizon “we can believe in,” a relationship between certain spaces and hope. The types of spaces that come to mind first are those heterotopias or “spaces otherwise” that I took as examples for examination in *Sharing Common Ground*. The subtitle of that book is not “spaces for ethics,” but “*a space for ethics*.” A *space* is not just one of a plurality of spaces: it can mean room, leeway, margin of error, play, slight distance between two locations, and so forth. By the subtitle I propose for today’s seminar on hope and its relationship to hopelessness, although I am now emphasizing multiplicities of spaces, I want to retain the use of the term space to convey the sense of an *interstitial buffer* that both keeps hopelessness close to hope while separating them. Bloch’s treatise on hope is an extension of his

first research and reflections on utopia. The idea of (and indeed the word) *utopia* contains both space and hope.

A certain way of following Foucault's last work – I'm thinking especially of *The Use of Pleasure*, *The Care of the Self*, both published in the month he died in 1984, but also important essays of the early 1980s like the one entitled "On the Genealogy of Ethics"⁴ – these eleventh-hour pronouncements by Foucault would suggest that the space that is primordial for developing ethics is, indeed, the self. In *Sharing Common Ground*, I gestured toward these texts⁵ and this direction of thought, but it proved beyond the scope of that book. That is why I am beginning work on hope with activities like this seminar. Testing and assessing the ways in which that work may be perceived as having injected or projected a rosier picture than is justified...

The space between full-throated hope and desperate hopelessness that I am now envisioning hypothetically would be the kind of mental space or attitude that we occupy or exercise that majority of the time. If this hypothesis proves convincing, it would be altogether homologous to the space for ethics that I describe in *Sharing Common Ground* where individual subjects "cleave closely to another without encroachment or obtrusiveness, with utmost respect for her autonomy, encapsulating the dialectic nature of *partage* that would be the basis for peaceful and egalitarian society" (SCG 94). I was already anticipating that such a hope-despair dialectic might be the emotional extension of my analysis of Foucauldian heterotopias when I made such anticipatory statements as "if we are to have any chance at all of thinking death and affording hope a true grounding, this limit experience will occur in relation to a space at the limit" (SCG 122).

In that book, I was constantly pushing in the direction of hope against the pessimism and despair that moves forth as the major tone in many of the very works. Céline, Marguerite Duras, Michel Foucault, Jean-François Lyotard, and Giorgio Agamben (SCG 259, 261), for example, are not exactly known for their bright and sunny views of what our species has accomplished in its short history on the planet. Another one – Charles Baudelaire – "could perceive a glimmer of such light when reflecting on a Goya *'capricho'* whose darkness, despite 'the horror of vagueness and the indefinite' nevertheless harbors beauty and, thus, hope" (SCG 280).

⁴ In Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (2nd edition), 229-52. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983.

⁵ pp. 87,

For example, when I observe that Lyotard, despite his drift from militantism he “remained Marxian enough to seek solutions for our broken world on the fringes of ‘humanity’ and ‘humanism’” and that in *Postmodern Fables*, he “turn[s] our attention to ‘[t]he immense zone [that] rustles with billions of muted messages [where] despair is taken as disorder to be put right, never as the sign of an irremediable lack’ (31)” (*SCG* 146-47), I felt confirmed, once again, that such zones, such spaces otherwise, as Michel Foucault called, them, were fertile ground for collectivities to contemplate the future of the species. And I knew Lyotard well enough to know that through his deep irony shown a glimmer of hope.

Analyzing how such spaces for ethics can form and reform consciousness afforded me the opportunity to revisit “Foucault’s explorations of coalition building among heretical elements of society” (*SCG* 214). And this, in turn, helped me to understand why without attribution Foucault quoted these lines at the defense of his dissertation that would eventually become the *History of Madness*:

*Compagnons pathétiques qui murmurez à peine, allez la lampe éteinte et rendez les bijoux. Un mystère nouveau chante dans vos os. Développez votre étrangeté légitime.*⁶

Pathetic companions scarcely murmuring, go on with your lamp extinguished and give back the jewels. A new mystery sings in your bones. Develop your legitimate strangeness.

An exhortation to rise up, a rallying cry: these words exude eleventh-hour hope. That Foucault cited them at this particular discursive occasion without bothering to name the source attests to their supreme place in the order of his thought and his conviction that they are too well known as to require bibliographic framing. These words were written by René Char around 1940.

If those deemed abnormal by orthodoxy are marginalized to the point of desperation, those forced to the brink of death have even more reason to despair. Yet hope is a constant in accounts of surviving dire circumstances. Primo Levi and Robert Antelme both tell of sharing among prisoners of concentration or extermination camps – a sort of “hope against all hope” (*SCG* 263). This evidence further fueled my curiosity about the nature of the interrelationship between hopelessness and hope. The transgression of logic in Foucault’s historical concept of the *episteme* has led me to clarify what he borrowed from Georges Bataille in order to alter it in a

⁶ “Préface” in *Folie et déraison. Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique*. Paris: Plon, 1961, pp. i-xi; in *DE I* 187-195, p. 195. The editors of *DE* note that “*Cette préface ne figure dans son intégralité que dans l’édition originale. À partir de 1972, elle disparaît des trois rééditions*” (187).

direction that would pave the way for Gilles Deleuze's work carried out in tandem with Félix Guattari. "Whereas Bataille's transgression brings the subject to exclusive disjunction, Foucault's transgression, modeled after his use of *partage*, dares to face inclusiveness in separateness." Foucault uses the term *partage*, in the special sense of a sort of cleft that allows for cleaving, as synonym to improve on what he means by the episteme. "It is in Foucault's insistence on an [inclusive disjunction operating at several levels of existence] that, despite all, a modicum of optimism can be heard to murmur even in the darkest of archaeological explorations" (SCG 218). Thinking this function of inclusiveness that "respects" as it were, discreteness or individuality opens transgression to a promise, in René Char's words, of a future *common presence* among the living.⁷ (SCG 224).

In *Sharing Common Ground*, I also argued that while biopolitics – as Foucault, then Agamben in *Homo sacer*, have forcefully demonstrated – is the bane of our existence, a condition that drives us to despair, *biopower* can afford us hope to overcome institutionalized repression. In the work on hope before me, I will need to continue to carefully map out the convergences and divergences between biopower and biopolitics – these two closely related, but ultimately different, concepts hatched by Foucault. I can say in a nutshell today that while biopolitics received generous development, biopower was left in its conceptual infancy and Agamben, who claims to think in Foucault's wake, has apparently forgotten the distinctions which, to be fair, were unclearly made by Foucault himself.

René Char's *Furor and Mystery* is shot through with hope. René Char, whose writings Michel Foucault cherished, had chosen to confront a world transformed by totalitarianism and its minions into a pervasive *Lager* and death machine by engaging full force in Resistance and struggling for a new dawn. "*Résistance n'est qu'espérance*" "Resistance is but hopefulness" (FH, 168). Turning against his youthful dalliance with Surrealism, René Char would have willingly agreed with Ernst Bloch's contention – in *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* – that the concept of the Unconscious, unduly laden in and thus turned toward the past as it is, can and should be replaced by *das Noch-Nicht-Bewußte*, the Not-Yet-Conscious.⁸ Thus, hope incongruously lingered among the ruins of a Europe at its most abject: no more than Malraux in his 1937 novel, *L'Espoir*, did Bloch repudiate his *Principle of Hope* in face of the hopelessness. It wouldn't even

⁷ René Char lent the title, *Commune présence*, to a vast anthology that he assembled in 1964 for Éditions Gallimard.

⁸ Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (1938-1947), translated as *The Principle of Hope*.

take Theodor Adorno long to revise his initial contention that poetry could no longer be written after Auschwitz (cf. *SCG* 245). Writing as if he has conversed with Ernst Bloch and come to full agreement with him, René Char writes prophetically that “What was, no longer is. What isn’t must become.” (Char *OC* 766; 47).

Ernst Bloch is fundamental to any reflection on hope. When it comes to utopic musings, realized daydreams, and other forms of forward thinking, Bloch’s magnum opus, *The Principle of Hope* is replete and complete. With “breathtaking élan” (Geoghegan 1), as one scholar put it, Bloch juggles his vast knowledge of history and culture both contemporary and medieval. From Antiquity through the Enlightenment and beyond, no artistic or analytic manifestation of hopefulness – music, literature, theology, commodity capital, theatre, mime, film – goes unmentioned or unanalyzed. His tongue can be sharp and his criticism of figures with whom he disagrees or phenomena he disdains is withering and devoid of the decorum of his contemporary, Theodor Adorno, who too had his axes to grind. Thus, when Bloch expounds pitilessly about Jung (rightly) or Bergson (unjustifiably), he reminds the reader that he is Karl Kraus’s near contemporary. While committed to the most radical experiments in music of his time – Schoenberg, Stravinsky, etc. – he was violently repulsed by jazz.

However, I hold a fundamentally different view than Ernst Bloch of process in the deployment of hope. Hopelessness is not part of the formula that makes up hope, but rather the enemy to be combatted. Near the end of *The Principle of Hope*, he goes as far as to write that “there is more possible pleasure in the idea of a converted Nazi than from all the cynics and nihilists. That is why the most dogged enemy of socialism is not only, as is understandable, great capital, but equally the load of indifference, hopelessness (*PH I*, 446). My view is far more closely aligned with that of Hannah Arendt who in her late lectures on Kant convincingly demonstrated that she was following Kant’s intentions, unrealized before his death, when she advocated for “a politics that would honor our most ineradicable hope and would be built on an ethics built on judgement built on reason, all built on the ruins of religion, myth, and blind fear. René Char held out just such a hope” (*SCG* 274) and he called it “the inextinguishable uncreated real” (Char *PF* i; 106).

“Survival – the survival of individuals as well as of the species – sets and ever resets the groundwork for establishing borderless commonality, thus stirring and spurring hope. Going forth toward the other, becoming a guest in the house of his being, receiving his hospitality, I

cleave not despite the cleft, but *respecting* the cleft. This is the foundation of the social, of society worthy of that name. Any politics not erected on this foundation is illusion, delusion, deception, and ultimately mortiferous. Survival, on the other hand, and the hope that it generates is biopower resisting biopolitics.” (SCG 273-74)

The loss of truth, the oppression of this managed ignominy which calls itself *good* (evil – fantastic, inspired, not depraved – is useful) has opened a wound in man’s side which only the hope of the vast unformulated remoteness (unexpected life) attenuates. (FH, 174; 191*; Char’s emphasis) (SCG 282)

In the aftermath of *Sharing Common Ground* and in thinking about a sequel to it, it has intuitively become clearer to me that if hope does indeed, as the adage goes, “spring eternal,” it springs from something. And that something serving secretly as hope’s source may very well be its polar opposite: the absence of hope that we call despair.

It was Martin Jay, that historian of ideas who introduced Theodor Adorno but also – I would not be exaggerating to state – the Frankfurt School at large to U.S. academia ... It was this Martin Jay who once suggested to me back in the very early 1980s that I read Ernst Bloch’s *Principle of Hope*. This was at about the time that I was translating a weird and epic interview of an ailing Jean-Paul Sartre conducted by his last secretary, Benny Levy. Pierre Victor, whose real name was Benny Levy, had converted from zealous Maoism to vehemently orthodox Judaism and the interview that he conducted with a Sartre fully under his sway was entitled “*L’espoir, maintenant*” — “Hope, Now.” Under the circumstances of age, declining health, and the proximity of a relentless zealot one might legitimately wonder about the authenticity of such unabashed and newfound hope in the “pope of existentialism.” But that would be for another, much longer discussion. Suffice it to say that when Martin Jay made that recommendation to me, I was busy finishing my Ph.D. with two baby daughters and so, with time constraints to manage, I put off reading those nearly 1400 pages until quite recently.

My primary preoccupation over the past thirty or more years has been to attempt to figure out why ethics appears to be both at the same time and without respite the most necessary concern of our species and the most elusive (and sometimes denigrated) concern of philosophy. So, as I’ve just said, I’m finally acquainted with Bloch’s *Principle of Hope* – that “vast compendium of [...] day-dreams, from little private reveries, through formal utopias to the most sublime visions of art and religion.” (Geoghegan 145). It was written between 1938 and 1947,

revised in 1953 and 1959 (*PH I*, 11). In Ernst Bloch's own words, "the book deals with nothing other than hoping beyond the day which has become" (*PH I*, 10). Over that long period of time, Bloch assembled a seemingly inexhaustible panoply of notions, all keyed to the "radiant future" that his beloved communism persistently promised. The "anticipatory consciousness" that gives rise to hope "does not take place in the cellar of consciousness, but on its Front" (*PH I*, 11), the part that faces forward which, in addition to the front line of an army, may mean, in German, the forehead, an outward appearance. Related, of course, to "striving, craving, longing, goal-directed driving [...] wanting, wishing" (*PH I*, 45, 46) ("there can be no wanting that is not preceded by wishing, writes Bloch" [*PH I*, 47]), hope is the quintessential "expectant emotion" (*PH I*, 74ff). Hope is *the most human of all mental feelings* (*PH I*, 75) and, perhaps most importantly for the work I have ahead of me, it "drowns anxiety" (*PH I*, 112). "The expectant emotions, writes Bloch, essentially imply a real future; in fact that of the Not-Yet, of what has objectively not yet been there" (*PH I*, 75). Never, however, in his exhaustive analysis and illustration of hope at work, does Bloch argue that it relates to despair other than as an irrepressible force that "wreck" it (*PH I*, 111).

Before further examining what I consider to be a flaw in Bloch's design, let's return for a moment to the conceptual function he attributes to the Not-Yet (*Noch-Nicht*) and the several dynamics regulated by it. If by the time he elaborated his *magnum opus*, he could speak with total confidence of building "an ontology of the Not-Yet" (*PH I*, 13), the concept had already been present in 1918, in his foundational book, *Geist der Utopie* or Spirit of Utopia. Indeed, he had already been discussing it in his entourage 1907, at the age of 22, and thus "persuaded an initially reluctant Georg Simmel to invite Bloch to become a member of his prestigious colloquium" (Geoghegan 15) along with Lukács. The category of that which *is not yet* spawned its spatial correlate, also used to speak about hopeful times: the "Not-there, wrote Bloch in *The Principle of Hope*, is the condition of the Now" (*PH I*, 295). Bloch used the category to identify a cast of mentality propitious to the realization of a better world "the *Noch-Nicht-Bewusste* Not-Yet-Conscious as a whole, he wrote, is the psychological representation of the Not-Yet-Become [*Noch-Nicht-Gewordene*] in an age and its world, on the Front of the world" (*PH I*, 127). Once again, we see that altogether forward-oriented image of the front, that avant-garde of hope, as it were, applied to the world as perceived and affected by homo sapiens.

Throughout his analysis of myriad manifestations of hope, Bloch remains consistently, doggedly hopeful: “the defeated man must try the outside world again” (*PH I*, 198), the natural tendency of the species is “[t]o think oneself into what is better” (*PH I*, 195). But this unremitting commitment to hope tied exclusively to the communist project as it was carried out in the U.S.S.R. and, later, in the D.D.R. (German Democratic Republic)⁹, is highly problematic. The subject experienced with and versed not only in Marxism and its concrete manifestations since 1917, but also in contemporary competing approaches like existentialism or psychoanalysis, to name only two, might rightly experience skepticism vis-à-vis Bloch’s claim of Marxism’s unique and exclusive compatibility with our natural tendency to be hopeful.

And unusual too, for a Marxist, Ernst Bloch prioritized a dialectics of nature as much as he did socio-economic conditions. Were the adage whereby the “crooked seeks to be straight, half to be full” (*PH I*, 336) to turn out to be a first principle then, by analogy, we might have obtained from Ernst Bloch the secret of hope’s ground and rebounding from hopelessness. But we do not. Instead, *The Principle of Hope* feeds us a steady stream of optimism to be had from the late Stalinism of the 1950s or what he persists on seeing as “the *warm stream* of Marxism” (*PH I*, 209)¹⁰ – a Marxism that had already shown itself to be morally and, thus, politically bankrupt by dissident leftists across Europe and in other continents as well. How was it possible after Stalin’s purges, after the brutal repression of the Hungarian uprising of 1956, for a brilliant and, supposedly, independent soul to write such nonsense as this declaration at the very end of Volume One: “Precisely socialism has room for voluntary-humorous wishful images of a genuine, future kind; in fact they will be able to form a separate amusing genre of writing within it, that of *effervescing projects*” (*PH I*, 441).

Notwithstanding the comprehensive and exhaustive documentation in Bloch’s analysis of hope – an encyclopedism that is invaluable and unavoidable in any approach to the phenomenon –, there are two fundamental problems with it: first, it is far too bound (one might say “hopelessly” bound) to orthodox Marxism. The second problem with Bloch’s theory of hope is his relentless insistence on the persistence of hope to the exclusion of despair as a reality of our

⁹ Returning to Europe in 1948, after his exile in the U.S., Bloch took up a position at Universität Leipzig. He remained in the D.D.R. until the Berlin Wall was built in 1961 and went on to Tübingen.

¹⁰ “Marxism as a doctrine of warmth is thus solely related to that positive Being-in-possibility, not subject to any disenchantment, which embraces the growing realization of the realizing element, primarily in the human sphere. [...] that homeland of identity, in which neither man behaves towards the world, nor the world behaves towards man, as if towards a stranger.” (*PH I*, 209)

condition. As to the first, we have just seen how embarrassingly cheerful, and anachronistically wide-eyed Bloch was about the promise of communism. Simply put, Bloch's expectations seem too great to be convincing. As to my first caveat regarding Bloch, as Martin Jay put it with bluntness and absolute accuracy, "Bloch was politically deluded for much of his career" (*MT* 193). It is more than disturbing, Jay continues, that "as in Heidegger's case, there has been a tendency to defend Bloch by uncoupling his political mistakes, which are excused as the product of naiveté, from his philosophy." (*MT* 192). As to my second reservation, I find it somewhat surprising and ironic that for a Marxist, Ernst Bloch discusses very little if at all the hope-despair nexus in dialectical fashion. He seems to willfully ignore a dynamic tension that should, a priori, impel the object of his fascination. I am tempted to see these two reasons for reticence as linked one to the other: it may well be that Bloch's stubborn refusal to level any criticism against incarnated Marxism blinded him to what I see as the need for despair in any dynamics that might lead to hope for something truly realizable by the species that experiences these dispositions. To put it another way, Bloch's persistent orthodoxy inoculated him against the heretic conditions of possibility for a future in ethics.

In *Sharing Common Ground*, the spaces to which I mainly refer are those heterotopias in the Foucauldian sense which call out to us, beckoning us forth, taking us outside our self-centeredness into a disposition to empathy vis-à-vis others associated in some way or another with such "spaces otherwise." In addition, I apply the concept to describing the shared interstice, the differential between discrete subjectivities between "I and thou" (Buber, Levinas) where ethics may take hold. Now, as I embark on a sequel to *Sharing Common Ground*, and extend that book's final chapter suggesting a heretical dimension in the disposition we call hope, I am thinking of space, yet again as a metaphor for the interval or play between the opposite poles of hope and hopelessness. My working hypothesis is based on experiential and textual evidence that has come to me and consists in this: that these two polar temperaments or inclinations are intrinsically codependent and that, as such, it is impossible to understand hope – especially in its emergence, resurgence, waning & waxing, and so forth – without taking into full account the dynamics of despair.

Although amusing (almost, but not quite, always amusing...) and frequently accurate in his canny analyses, Slavoj Žižek, in his recent book entitled *The Courage of Hopelessness*, fails to lift the veil mystery over the space the both separates and links hopelessness to hope. For one

thing, notwithstanding the attractive chapter titles – “capitalism and its discontents,” “religion and its contents,” and so on – titles in this 2017 collection, Žižek never bothers to tell us what a courage harbored by and made possible within hopelessness could or would be! And so, Žižek does little better than Cioran, who could have been the forger of that title: *The Courage of Hopelessness*. Most importantly, Žižek’s own abiding practice of “acting dangerously” which the book’s subtitle features, precludes hopelessness: no one in a state of utter despair is really capable of action, let alone action of the dangerous variety. Action only resumes – assuming a mere momentary lapse into hopelessness – when we reenter the nether-space separating (and, as I insist, *linking*) despair from hope.

So, exploring what hope can come or be born of hopelessness is not just a stimulating challenge, it’s indicative (or as Žižek might say, “symptomatic”) of a penchant native to our species for going against the grain of time, for resisting the Now as we envision what Bloch called the Not-Yet. We have cause to lapse repeatedly and often into despair, we may even be chronically hopeless and have very good reason to be, and yet, as Michel Deguy writes, “the believer is he who desires *just a bit more* coherence, meaning, hope ... a bit more than there is! For there’s *almost enough* ... almost enough to believe that things will get better. —What, everything? The *just-a-bit-more*: sounds like one of Jankélévitch’s notions! Almost, just about, very nearly; yes, always; and I was very nearly happy, ingenious, immortal; we’ll do better next time ...”¹¹

Another literary example: “The afternoon air, the distant song of a mockingbird, the setting sun, all bestowed a touch of melancholy on their presence among the ruins of the future.”¹² This atmospheric if not spatial description by Guillermo Cabrera Infante of life in an oppressive Cuba reminds me of the final seven minutes of Antonioni’s *L’Eclisse* and of universities in ruins the way in which this situation was envisioned and foreseen by Bill Readings in his premonitory final essay, *The University in Ruins*: these are all scenes and situations of minimal hope. We fall asleep with such scenes as diurnal material for our dreams, we rest restlessly, but sleep a bit nonetheless, then wake up refreshed enough to do something about it. Cabrera Infante will flee Cuba, awaiting a better day; the empty space of their final

¹¹ *To That Which Ends Not*, 76; *À ce qui n’en finit pas*, p. 147.

¹² Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Map Drawn by a Spy*, tr. Mark Fried. New York: Archipelago Books, 2017, p. 244.

meeting means that Monica Vitti's "Vittoria" will abandon Alain Delon's "Piero"; something greater will arise in the place of Humboldtian universities become corporate entities.

Hopelessness is required – at least minimally – in order to rekindle the drive for hope and strive to grasp it. An example with understated power from a piece of literature will, I think, adumbrate this claim. Kermeur is the narrator of Tanguy Viel's 2017 novel, *Article 353 du code pénal*. He is a murderer whom we are meant to excuse, as does the committing (or examining) magistrate who patiently listens to all details of Kermeur's story as we read it. A great part of what endears Kermeur to us is the absence of irony in his plodding and repetitive representation of events and feelings. This is why in his truly hopeless situation (hopeless because nothing indicates until the very end that the judge will decide to officially declare the killing an accident) – this is why we believe Kermeur actually knows the meaning of hope when he says: "It wasn't pride. You don't know that feeling when it hangs about deep inside you, a strange thing, unfathomable and, you might say, absurd, of course, absurd, but worse, because for this absurd thing that hangs about deep inside you and prevents you from letting go of everything, we've invented a pretty word, and that pretty word is 'hope'."¹³

¹³ Tanguy Viel, *Article 353 du code pénal*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2017. This is my translation. I think there's an English edition. This quote is on p. 141 of the French.

Waste (scories)

Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. *The Primacy of Movement*, 2nd edition. Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2011.

...something on p. 432 to relate to Bloch

Lee McIntyre, *Post-Truth*.

there is hope in the fight against deniers of fact in “a wonderful book by Daniel J. Levitin entitled *Weaponized Lies: How to Think Critically in the Post-Truth Era*.” McIntyre rhetorically asks “What about those ‘digital natives’ who are still too young for college, but will grow up in a world of fake news and deception that they must learn to navigate?” (120) then tells of an example of an exercise in critical thinking that a fifth-grade teacher in Irvine, California has such success with that some of them skipped recess to work through more examples spotting fake news.

Michel Foucault admits to a surge of hope in himself at reading and rereading, of all things, a Duras novel of 1970: *Abahn Sabana David*. In a personal letter, he wrote her this: “I’ve fallen into your work, find myself caught in it, and I move about within it in every direction, my head in a fog, feeling my way, full of disquiet and yet, despite all, hope, as if it seemed to me that if I keep moving back and forth, haphazardly, some inevitable figure would finally appear to me.” (SCG 192)