

«COMME L'ESPERANCE EST VIOLANTE». HOPE AND UTOPIA IN BENJAMIN, BLOCH, AND ADORNO

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Abstract

Benjamin's thinking on hope and utopia permeates his philosophical endeavours, from his earliest writings (*Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin: "Dichtermut" – "Blödigkeit"*, *Theologisch-politischem Fragment*, and *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*) to *Über den Begriff der Geschichte*. The fortitude of Bloch's encyclopaedic work on utopia and hope, sustained in *Geist der Utopie* and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* has been applauded by Benjamin. Adorno, who stated that everything he ever wrote was influenced by *Geist der Utopie*, presents an illuminating analysis of "the adventure story of the journey to utopia, whose radiant image Bloch would like to recapture". Bloch's exploration of diverse historical conceptions of utopia from Thomas More to Marx has prompted Adorno to observe that Bloch has «unrolled a whole series of different types of utopian consciousness» and to conclude that «there is nothing like a fixable utopian content». Tracing the convergent and the divergent conceptions of hope and utopia in Bloch, Adorno, and Benjamin enhances the polyphony of utopian endeavours.

Key words: Polyphonic Conceptions of Utopia, Badiou, Deleuze, Foucault, Heterotopia, Michel Serres

Es gibt ein Bild von Klee, das Angelus Novus heißt. Ein Engel ist darauf dargestellt, der aussieht, als wäre er im Begriff, sich von etwas zu entfernen, worauf er starrt. Seine Augen sind aufgerissen, sein Mund steht offen und seine Flügel sind ausgespannt. Der Engel der Geschichte muß so aussehen. Er hat das Antlitz der Vergangenheit zugewendet. Wo eine Kette von Begebenheiten vor uns erscheint, da sieht er eine einzige Katastrophe, die unablässig Trümmer auf Trümmer häuft und sie ihm vor die Füße schleudert. Er möchte wohl verweilen, die Toten wecken und das Zerschlagene zusammenfügen. Aber ein Sturm weht vom Paradiese her, der sich in seinen Flügeln verfangen hat und so stark ist, daß der Engel sie nicht mehr schließen kann. Dieser Sturm treibt ihn unaufhaltsam in die Zukunft, der er den

Rücken kehrt, während der Trümmerhaufen vor ihm zum Himmel wächst. Das, was wir den Fortschritt nennen, ist dieser Sturm¹.



Paul Klee, *Angelus Novus*, 1920

¹ W. BENJAMIN, *Über den Begriff der Geschichte, IX. Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by R. Tiedemann, H. Schweppenhauser, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt. Bd. I-VII, 1972-1989, Bd. I.1, p. 691. “There is a painting by Klee called *Angelus Novus*. An angel is depicted there who looks as though he were about to distance himself from something which he is staring at. His eyes are opened wide, his mouth stands open and his wings are outstretched. The Angel of History must look just so. His face is turned towards the past. Where we see the appearance of a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe, which unceasingly piles rubble on top of rubble and hurls it before his feet. He would like to pause for a moment so fair to awaken the dead and to piece together what has been smashed. But a storm is blowing from Paradise, it has caught itself up in his wings and is so strong that the Angel can no longer close them. The storm drives him irresistibly into the future, to which his back is turned, while the rubble-heap before him grows sky-high. That which we call progress, is this storm”.

1. Prologue – *L'invitation au Voyage*

Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté.²

Recognition of hope and utopia continues to be elusive in “the darkness of the lived present” (*das Dunkel des gelebten Augenblicks*), writes Bloch in *Geist der Utopie* and finds it in music:

[Hope is] the *a priori* latent theme of all the plastic arts, [and] really to all the magic of music³.

[T]he sonorous present given by music can be closely affiliated to any imaginable adventure or miracle⁴. In their celebration of music as the foremost among utopian activities, Bloch and Fourier, who was an accomplished musician and also a composer, are in unison. The exaltation of music in Bloch reaches a crescendo of a station orchestra as we set off for divergent paths:

² C. BAUDELAIRE, *L'invitation au voyage, Les Fleurs du mal* (1857). Mon enfant, ma soeur, Songe à la douceur/ D'aller là-bas vivre ensemble !/ Aimer à loisir,/ Aimer et mourir/ Au pays qui te ressemble !/ Les soleils mouillés/ De ces ciels brouillés/ Pour mon esprit ont les charmes/ Si mystérieux/ De tes traîtres yeux./ Brillant à travers leurs larmes./ Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, Luxe, calme et volupté./ Des meubles luisants,/ Polis par les ans,/ Décoreraient notre chambre ;/ Les plus rares fleurs/ Mêlant leurs odeurs/ Aux vagues senteurs de l'ambre,/ Les riches plafonds,/ Les miroirs profonds,/ La splendeur orientale,/ Tout y parlerait/ À l'âme en secret/ Sa douce langue natale./ Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,/ Luxe, calme et volupté./ Vois sur ces canaux/ Dormir ces vaisseaux/ Dont l'humeur est vagabonde;/ C'est pour assouvir/ Ton moindre désir/ Qu'ils viennent du bout du monde./ Les soleils couchants/ Revêtent les champs,/ Les canaux, la ville entière./ D'hyacinthe et d'or;/ Le monde s'endort/ Dans une chaude lumière./ Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté,/ Luxe, calme et volupté.

³ E. BLOCH, *Spirit of Utopia*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2000, p. 3.

⁴ Ivi, pp. 44-45.

Music in Bloch's thought occupies more space than in almost any other philosopher, not excluding Schopenhauer and Nietzsche. It reverberates through his works like a station orchestra in your dreams⁵.

Radiating from *Spirit of Utopia*, with music as the foremost utopian activity, Bloch creates a polyphonic conception of utopia, providing a momentum for seeking a dialectical reconciliation among conflicting univocal claims regarding how to exist in the world. Bloch's insight that in all spheres of human activity utopian function and potential are never absent confirms that the realisation of utopia is immanent and empirical, and not transcendent and metaphysical.

When homophonic renditions of utopia are synchronised as "traces" leading to a possible common future, the possible meanings of "utopia", "no place" or "happy place", are transposed as "not in a particular place" and being simultaneously present within the concentric movement of an ever-expanding circle. In the polyphonic conception, our understanding of utopia itself is in the process of becoming. Utopia is not a terminus but "a horizon of anticipation" of continuous endeavours of an open and dynamic imagination celebrated by Bloch towards freedom, equality, and individuality. Bloch expands Marx's affirmation of individual life, freedom, and identity, achieving universality of common humanity without collapsing into the constricting caverns of subjectivity or dispersing in the agora of diffuse relativism of values.

Let us assume man to be man, and his relation to the world to be a human one. Then love can only be exchanged for love, trust for trust [...]. Every one of your relations to man and to nature must be a specific expression corresponding to the object of your will, of your real individual life⁶.

⁵ T. W. ADORNO, *Traces: Bloch's Philosophy of "Kitsch"*, in «New Left Review» 1, 121 (May-June 1980).

⁶ K. MARX, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, in *Early Writings*, ed. by R. Livingstone, G. Benton, Penguin Classics, New York 1992, p. 187.

The exploration of hope and utopia in Benjamin, Bloch, and Adorno is affirmative as well as interrogative. In *A Philosophy of the Future*, in response to the criticism that utopian endeavours do not conform to the existing conditions, Bloch affirms the necessity of continuous striving towards justice: «At all events, even if Utopian humanism did not accord at all with the existing world, then it may be said: the worse for that still existing world, and the more inevitable and fruitful thought about justice»⁷. In *One-Way Street* (1928) Benjamin's incisive criticism of the pervasive detrimental political and social consequences of capitalism is aligned with Marx's "ruthless criticism" of the corrosive consequences of bourgeois domination. Bloch noted in his 1929 review of Benjamin's *One-Way Street* that Benjamin strives to make philosophy surrealist⁸. Bloch applauds Benjamin's method of "micrological thinking" concentrating on the minutiae of particular occurrences to discover a macrocosmic significance:

Benjamin had what Lukács so enormously lacked: he had a unique sense for the significant detail, for the near at hand, for the fresh elements which burst forth in thinking and in the world, for singularities which are unsuitable for practical use and thus deserving of an entirely unique consideration. Benjamin possessed peerless micrological philosophical sense for such details, such significant signs of the off the beaten track⁹.

Bloch recalled Benjamin's favourable response when he gave Benjamin his review which compared Benjamin's book to a «store-opening, with the newest spring fashions in metaphysics in the display window»¹⁰. Adorno's clarification of utopia as a totality, in recognising

⁷ E. BLOCH, *A Philosophy of the Future*, Herder and Herder, New York 1970, p. 90. Original edition: *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie*, volume I, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1963.

⁸ E. BLOCH, *Erbschaft dieser Zeit*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt 1962, pp. 367-371.

⁹ Ivi, p. 17.

¹⁰ Cfr. T. W. ADORNO ET AL., *Über Walter Benjamin*, Suhrkamp Verlag,

totality as consisting of fragments, points to the possibility of a reconciliation of totality and individuality. A polyphonic conception of utopia seeks to accelerate the momentum in the present, in W. B. Yeats's words, «to discover and create [in ourselves] ... a moral radiance, a personal quality of universal meaning in action and in thought».

2. Benjamin on Hope and Utopia

Nur um der Hoffnungslosen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben¹¹.

Es gibt keinen Moment der nicht
auch ein revolutionärer sein könne
– verstanden als Chance einer ganz
neuen Lösung im Angesicht einer
ganz neuen Aufgabe¹².

The magnitude of Benjamin's thinking on hope and utopia appears to be low – Akin to the brightest star, identified by its lowest magnitude, Benjamin's understanding of hope and utopian potential illuminates a galaxy of constellations, evoking «comme l'Espérance est violente» of Apollinaire¹³ whose «purest achievement» of his «glorious verses»

Frankfurt 1968, pp. 22-23. Cfr. R. WOLIN, *Walter Benjamin, An Aesthetics of Redemption*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1994, p. 121; p. 290, note 34.

¹¹ W. BENJAMIN, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, Bd. I.1, cit., p. 202.

¹² «[T]here is not a moment that does not carry with it its revolutionary chance for a completely new resolution of a completely new problem» (W. BENJAMIN, Parlipomena to 'On the Concept of History', in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, Vol. 4, trans. By E. Jephcott, H. Eiland, ed. by H. Eiland, M.W. Jennings, The Belknap Press, Cambridge 2003, pp. 401-11.

¹³ G. APOLLINAIRE, *Le pont Mirabeau* (First published, Feb. 1912, *Alcools*, 1913): «Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine/ Et nos amours/ Faut-il qu'il m'en souviennne/ La joie venait toujours après la peine/ Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure/ Les jours s'en vont je demeure/ Les mains dans les mains restons face à face/ Tandis que sous/ Le pont de nos bras passe/ Des éternels regards l'onde si lasse/ Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure/ Les jours s'en vont je demeure/ L'amour s'en va comme cette eau

Benjamin celebrated¹⁴. Benjamin's thinking on hope and utopia permeates his philosophical endeavours, from his earliest writings, *Zwei Gedichte von Friedrich Hölderlin: "Dichtermut" – "Blödigkeit"* (1915)¹⁵, *Theologisch-politisches Fragment* (1920-1921 or 1937-1938)¹⁶, *Goethes Wabverwandtschaften* (1923), and *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* (1940) to *Das Passagenwerk* (1927-1940).

A sketch of Benjamin's extensive engagement with the utopian socialism of Charles Fourier¹⁷ builds a bridge to Bloch's Promethean endeavours and Adorno's endorsement of Bloch's work on hope and utopia. In the second version of *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* Benjamin distinguishes two kinds of technology: "[t]he first technology [which] really sought to master nature" and the second technology which "aims rather at an interplay between nature and humanity". In affirming that the primary social function of art is to practice this interplay, Benjamin commends the "phalansteries", the "self-contained agrarian collectives" of Fourier's socialist utopia¹⁸. In *Über den Begriff der Geschichte* Benjamin writes: «Compared to this positivistic conception [which takes labour as the exploitation of

courante/ Comme la vie est lente/ Et comme l'Espérance est violente/ Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure/ Les jours s'en vont je demeure./ Passent les jours et passent les semaines/ Ni temps passé/ Ni les amours reviennent/ Sous le pont Mirabeau coule la Seine/ Vienne la nuit sonne l'heure/ Les jours s'en vont je demeure».

¹⁴ W. BENJAMIN, *Surrealism: The Last Snapshot of the European Intelligentsia* (1929), in *Selected Writings*, cit., vol. 2, pp. 207-221.

¹⁵ Cfr. H. HÖCHSMANN, *Walter Benjamin on Hölderlin's Poetic Cosmos*, in *Benjamin, Adorno and the Experience of Literature*, ed. by N. Ross, C. McCall, Routledge, London 2018, pp. 201-220.

¹⁶ W. BENJAMIN, *Gesammelte Schriften* II, cit., pp. 203-204. *Walter Benjamin, Selected writings* vol. I, cit.

¹⁷ Cfr. C. FOURIER, *Œuvres complètes de Charles Fourier*, 6 tomes, Librairie Sociétaire, Paris 1841-1848; C. FOURIER, *Theory of Social Organization*, C. P. Somerby, New York 1876.

¹⁸ W. BENJAMIN, *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 3, cit., pp. 107-8.

nature] the fantasies which provided so much ammunition for the ridicule of Fourier exhibit a surprisingly healthy sensibility» (Thesis IX).

In the *Arcades Project*, Benjamin's study of Fourier begins with the first topic, "Fourier, or the Arcades" and is expanded in the Convolute W: «Fourier saw, in the Arcades, the architectural canon of the phalanstery ... The phalanstery becomes a city of arcades»¹⁹. Benjamin expands his references to Fourier by citing "Zola, who takes up Fourier's ideas in his book, *Travail*", Marx (who referred to Fourier as a "utopian socialist") who emphasises Fourier's "colossal conception of man" and "directed attention to Fourier's humour", and Jean Paul, (in his *Levana: Or the Doctrine of Education*) who is "allied to Fourier the pedagogue".

Benjamin opens the Convolute W with Victor Hugo's encomium of Fourier, as "a seeker" who takes "an infinity on his wing" and "soars"²⁰. Immediately following this, Benjamin reinforces his esteem for Fourier with a citation from Jean Paul: «Of the fibers that vibrated in the human soul, he cut away none but harmonised all». Benjamin's compendium on Fourier in Convolute W ranges from Marx's endorsement of Fourier's ideas on education to the widely divergent assessment of his work. Given Benjamin's extensive reference to André Breton in the *Arcades Project*, ranging from art to political topics, we can wonder how he might have responded to Breton's high esteem of Fourier as the "tout debout parmi les grand visionnaires" in his *Ode à Charles Fourier* (1945)²¹. Benjamin, Breton, and Bloch converge on their esteem of Fourier.

¹⁹ W. BENJAMIN, *The Arcades Project*, Belknap Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 5.

²⁰ *Ivi*, p. 621.

²¹ A. BRETON, *Ode à Charles Fourier*, in ID., *Ceuvres complètes*, vol. III, *Bibliothèque de la Pléiade*, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 1999, p. 354.

3. *Bloch on Hope and Utopia*

Indefatigably, the philosophical moth flutters against the pane of glass between itself and the light²².

Bloch's encyclopedic work on utopia and hope, sustained in *Geist der Utopie* and *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* has been applauded by Benjamin in the first paragraph of the *Theologisch-politisches Fragment*: «To have repudiated the political meaning of theocracy with all intensity is the greatest service of Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*»²³. In *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, a monumental work of over 880 pages in 3 volumes, Bloch draws upon Fourier's "critique of existing social conditions" extensively, referring to him as "einer der größten Utopisten"²⁴. In *A Philosophy of the Future*, Bloch cites Engels's esteem for Fourier: «We delight in the inspired ideas and germs of ideas which everywhere emerge through their covering of phantasy». Bloch agrees with Engels that in Fourier's «critique of existing social conditions ... almost all the ideas of the later socialists which are not strictly economic can be found in embryo»²⁵.

Bloch's spirited exploration of diverse historical conceptions of utopia from Thomas More to Marx has prompted Adorno to observe that Bloch has "unrolled a whole series of different types of consciousness" and to conclude that "there is nothing like a fixable utopian content". Is utopia then an "open concept" (à la Wittgenstein) whose boundaries

²² T. W. ADORNO, *Traces: Bloch's Philosophy of "Kitsch"*, cit.

²³ W. BENJAMIN, *Reflections: Aphorisms, Essays and Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by P. Demetz, Harcourt, New York 1978, p. 312. Cfr. R. WOLIN, *Walter Benjamin. An Aesthetics of Redemption*, cit., p. 57. It would be meaningful to discuss whether Benjamin might have been thinking of Bloch as a counterpoint to Kant's discussion of hope in connection with religion.

²⁴ E. BLOCH, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1985, p. 336. We might say for Bloch, "Comme l'esperance est forte".

²⁵ E. BLOCH, *A Philosophy of the Future*, Herder and Herder, New York 1970, p. 90. Original edition: *Tübinger Einleitung in die Philosophie*, vol. I, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1963.

cannot be precisely delineated by essential properties? Benjamin's articulation of a "limit-concept" in his Hölderlin essay is applicable to the plurality of perspectives on utopia. A "limit-concept" in place of drawing the external boundaries of its application, configures the potential features which are inherent within²⁶.

4. "Something is missing..."

In his discussions with Bloch on the topic of utopia, Adorno affirms Bloch's quotation from Brecht, "something is missing", as an accurate perception of the perennial utopian endeavour which is a critique of the present in the sense of recognising what is missing and searching for ways to discover and bring forth what should exist. Adorno recognises in Bloch's conception of utopia as that which is not yet here, that which is missing, and still to be created, the appearances of utopian inclination even in illusory pursuits.

Because he does not conceive of utopia as a metaphysical absolute... he is forced to think of it as something which manifests itself. It is neither true, nor is it non-existent: "Even the most blatant mirage at least mimics, infamously and mendaciously, a splendour which nevertheless must be inherent in the tendency of life, in its bare, but real possibilities..."²⁷.

Adorno, who stated that everything he ever wrote was influenced by Bloch's *Spirit of Utopia*, presents an illuminating analysis of "the adventure story of the journey to utopia, whose radiant image Bloch would like to recapture".

²⁶ W. BENJAMIN, *Benjamin: Selected Writings*, vol. 1, cit., p. 19. Cfr. H. HÖCHSMANN, *Walter Benjamin on Hölderlin's "Poetic Cosmos"*, cit.

²⁷ T.W. ADORNO, *Traces: Bloch's Philosophy of "Kitsch"*, cit., p. 53. Adorno's principle of charity. The same said about the possibility of freedom even in the most deluded moments, ie. fascism: an awareness of how things might be different.

[H]e wants the spirit of utopia to create the moment in which nature, assuaged and at peace, would be free from domination, would cease to be dependent on it and could clear the way for some alternative mode of being²⁸.

Adorno's rendering of Bloch's view of utopia as nature becoming free of domination and at peace resonates with Benjamin's appraisal of Fourier's understanding utopia and nature.

The critical functions of utopia do not only consolidate and celebrate what has been accomplished but also continues to critically evaluate, expand, and develop what has been achieved in a continuous endeavour towards creating what is missing in the present by transcending the boundaries of the orthodoxy of the present.

[T]he essential function of utopia is a critique of what is present. If we had not already gone beyond the barriers, we could not even perceive them as barriers²⁹.

From Adorno's observation that Hegel's criticism of Kant is implicit in Bloch's emphasis on transcending the boundaries we can derive a possible explanation of why it is difficult to go beyond the limits.

Hegel's criticism of Kant is still tacitly presupposed, the criticism, namely, that to set limits is already to transcend them; and that if reason is going to confine itself to the finite, it must already be master of the infinite in whose name the limits are imposed³⁰.

Unless reason is already a "master of the infinite", it cannot go beyond the finite. If we cannot transcend the limits, we are restricted to

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ E. BLOCH, *Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor W. Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing*, in ID., *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature*, MIT Press, Cambridge 1988, p. 12.

³⁰ T.W. ADORNO, *Traces: Bloch's Philosophy of 'Kitsch'*, cit., p. 55.

the confines of the Inferno: «Heaven and Hell, however, hang together»³¹. In the late essay, *Why Still Philosophy?* Adorno writes:

Philosophy must come to know, without any mitigation, why the world – which could be paradise here and now – can become hell itself tomorrow. Such knowledge would indeed truly be philosophy³².

5. “*Lasciate ogni speranza, voi ch’intrate*”

We know when we are in the Inferno: with Dante we shudder at the inscription over the entrance, “Forsake all hope, all you that enter here” and Lucifer’s declamation, “Evil, be thou my good”, in Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, until once again, we are guided by the voice of the poet. «Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst/ Das Rettende auch»³³. Hölderlin affirms our creative capacity in what we search: “Wir sind nichts; was wir suchen, ist alles”. Benjamin affirms hope in his essay, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*: «Nur um der Hoffnungslosen ist uns die Hoffnung gegeben»³⁴. «Die Hoffnung ist der Regenbogen über den herabstürzend jähren Bach des Lebens», writes Nietzsche³⁵.

Bloch conceives hope as a positive “expectant emotion” (*Erwartungsaffect*) which relate to something not yet available³⁶. In contrast to the

³¹ T.W. ADORNO, M. HORKHEIMER, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. by E. Jephcott, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2022.

³² T.W. ADORNO, *Why Still Philosophy?*, in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords*, trans. by Henry W. Pickford, Columbia University Press, New York 1998, pp. 5-17, p. 132.

³³ F. HÖLDERLIN, “Patmos”: “Where the danger is, also grows the saving power”.

³⁴ W. BENJAMIN, *Goethes Wahlverwandtschaften*, cit., p. 75.

³⁵ Nietzsche alludes to hope with the metaphor of a rainbow: «Hope is the rainbow over the cascading stream of life». Cited in A. BIDMON, *Denkmodelle der Hoffnung in Philosophie und Literatur: Eine typologische Annäherung*. De Gruyter, Berlin 2016, p. 188.

³⁶ E. BLOCH [1954-59], *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, cit., vol. I, p. 111.

negative affects, to which we are subject involuntarily, Bloch regards hope as a free, future-directed form of anticipation and the most human of all affects³⁷. Bloch's philosophy of hope provides a momentum to embark on the search for the ways of working towards utopia.

5. *Bloch and Benjamin on Tradition and History*

[L]et knowledge of the past work on the experience of the present³⁸.

In *Art and Society*, in his elucidation of a «productive cultural heritage» as «the successive continuation of the implications in the constellations of the past gathered around us as non-past» Bloch refers to Benjamin's understanding of what we have learned and preserved from tradition. (Here we might say that Benjamin has the inspiration and Bloch the power for expanding the horizon of anticipation for hope and utopia)³⁹. We will save Benjamin's affirmation of the simultaneous vitality of tradition, individuality, and freedom for the finale – as it is a very beautiful manifestation of Benjamin's fortitude.

For Bloch and Benjamin all works from tradition are fragmented and stand in need of continuous revitalisation. Bloch calls for a “productive cultural heritage”, which is «the successive continuation of the implications in the constellations of the past gathered around us as non-past»⁴⁰. Bloch's analysis of the connection between the past, present, and future clarifies the significance of understanding and re-examining the place of history and tradition in creating the future. Bloch describes

³⁷ E. BLOCH, [1954-1959] 1986, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 volumes, N. Plaice, S. Plaice, and P. Knight, trans. MIT Press, Cambridge 1986, vol. I, p. 74. Cfr., *Stanford Encyclopedia*, “Hope”.

³⁸ M. FOUCAULT [1979], *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008, p. 130.

³⁹ Paraphrasing Teodor Currentzis's concise and insightful remark on the violins and the violas during the rehearsal of Sergei Prokofiev's Fifth Symphony on 7 September 2021. <http://www.SWRClassic.de/konzertvideos>

⁴⁰ E. BLOCH, *Spirit of Utopia*, cit., p. 48.

heritage as a chariot which “carries only that which has an order to be sealed”.

[G]enuine heritage is and remains precise and progressive transformation, and to be sure, a transformation of that immanent material in the material of heritage intended for completion without ideology, with implication. The genuine agent of cultural heritage reaches into the past, and in this very same act the past itself anticipates him, involves and needs him⁴¹.

Bloch emphasises a “rectification of heritage” and not a “reification of heritage” which can take place when there is a “cultural surplus beyond any ideology” resulting from “utopian function”.

6. *Benjamin's affirmation of Freedom*

Benjamin likens tradition and the freedom it offers to the sea and a wave:

Theory is like a surging sea, but the only thing that matters to the wave (understood as a metaphor for the person) is to surrender itself to its motion in such a way that it crests and breaks. This enormous freedom of the breaking wave is education in its actual sense: instruction – tradition becoming visible and free, tradition emerging precipitously like a wave from living substance⁴².

Benjamin's metaphor of the sea of theory celebrates the dynamic re-actualisation of tradition in the fortitude of creative individual endeavours⁴³. Adorno's tribute to Benjamin comes to mind: «Despite extreme

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² In a letter to Gershom Scholem dated September 1917, Benjamin responded to two lines from an essay Scholem had written on Jewish education: “All work whose goal is not to set an example is non-sense.” “If we wish to be serious: ... then today, as always, the most profound way – as well as the only way – to influence the souls of future generations is: through example.”

⁴³ «We are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without

individuation [...] Benjamin seems empirically hardly to have been a person at all, rather an arena of movement in which content forced its way, through him, into language.» Benjamin, Bloch, and Adorno configure utopia as a critique of the present with the aim of fostering “productive cultural heritage” and the integration of divergent goals of utopia, ranging from the commitment to creating the future with the affirmation of the strength of freedom to the readiness for exploring ways of rectifying the present with the resilience of hope.

Benjamin’s understanding of the unity of subject and object, provides a possible common centre among distinctive approaches to utopia. In the essay, *Two Poems of Hölderlin* Benjamin explains that “life as the ultimate unity” and “life of the whole” are at the basis of the poetic task set forth in the opening line of *Poet’s Courage*: «Are then to you not related all that are alive?» (*Bist denn du nicht verwandt allen Lebendigen?*) Benjamin’s articulation of “the ideal goals” of the poetic task to envisage the configuration of the unities of life (conceived as the dynamic correlation between the subjective and the objective domains of striving) resonates with Hölderlin’s affirmation of approaching unity: “The unity of subject and object is possible by means of theory only through an infinite approximation (*eine unendliche Annäherung*)”.

ever being able to dismount it in dry-dock and reconstruct it from the best components» (O. NEURATH, [1921], *Anti-Spengler*, in ID., *Empiricism and Sociology. Vienna Circle Collection*, vol. 1, D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 1973, pp. 158-213). While Neurath’s metaphor of rebuilding the *ship* of theory describes the necessity of continuous reconstruction, Neurath’s metaphor of the ship of theory is set afloat in Benjamin symbolism of the sea in his conception of theory in relation to hope and utopia.

7. Epilogue – “Reservoir of Imagination”⁴⁴

Ich lebe mein leben im wachsenden Ringen,/ die sich über die Dingen ziehen./ Ich werde
den letzen vielleicht nicht volbringen,/ aber versuchen will ich ihn⁴⁵.

An epic imagination is needed to explore new forms of knowledge to fulfil the political, social, and economical requirements of the complex world community. Here are some possible approaches for working towards approximations towards utopia.

Alain Badiou’s understanding of hope as «a figure of the present subject” having “nothing to do with the future»⁴⁶, augments Bloch’s approach to the resilience and autonomy of hope. Badiou amplifies the actuality and efficacy of hope in the present:

One could say that hope is not the imaginary of an ideal justice dispensed at last, but what accompanies the patience of truth, or the practical universality of love, through the ordeal of the real⁴⁷.

Michel Foucault’s archaeology of knowledge and audacious expeditions for heterotopias have contributed to the ever widening “reservoir of imagination”. The “transdisciplinary” approach of Michel Serres

⁴⁴ M. FOUCAULT, *Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias*, trans. by J. Miskowiec, in ID., *Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. by J.D. Faubion, vol. 2. Penguin, London 1998, p. 185.

⁴⁵ R.M. RILKE, *Das Stunden-Buch*. Insel-Verlag, Leipzig 1918. »Ich kreise um Gott, um den uralten Turm,/ und ich kreise jahrh/ ich weiß nocht nicht: bin ich ein Falke, ein Sturm/ oder ein großer Gesang./ I live my life in growing circles/ which ring out over the things around me./ Perhaps I will never finish the last,/ but that is what I am going to try./ I am circling around God, around the ancient tower,/ and I have been circling for thousands of years;/ and I still do not know: am I a falcon, a storm/ or a great song».

⁴⁶ A. BADIOU, *Saint Paul: The Foundation of Universalism*, ed. by R. Brassier, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003. p. 97. Cfr. S.A. KAHVECIOGLU, *Alain Badiou’s Ontology and Utopian Thought*, 201.<https://open.metu.edu.tr/handle/11511/25089>.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 96.

seeks to create a harmony of the spheres of science and art. Serres urges us to strive to be “troubadours of knowledge” and “speak all languages”, to develop “tolerant ethics”, “third instruction”, “harmonious middle/milieu of scientific culture”, “knowledge distilled from the humanities”, and an “artistic narrative”. Serres envisages a “third space” as a space of transformation, where amidst the flourishing of multiplicity of disciplines, it might be possible to become a “third-instructed” (*tiers-instruit*), whom he likens to the troubadour⁴⁸.

In *What is philosophy?* Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari clarify that “What is important is not the supposed distinction between utopian and scientific socialism but the different types of utopias.” In contrast to “authoritarian or transcendent utopias”, Deleuze and Guattari uphold the “libertarian, revolutionary, and immanent” utopias, referring specifically to Fourier and Bloch’s *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*:

...il faut distinguer les utopies autoritaires ou transcendance, et les utopies libertaires, révolutionnaires,/ immanentes. Mais justement, dire que la révolution est elle-même utopie d'immanence n'est pas dire que c'est un/rêve, quelque chose qui ne se réalise pas ou qui ne se réalise qu'en se trahissant. Au contraire, c'est poser la/ révolution comme plan d'immanence, mouvement infini, survol absolu...⁴⁹

Deleuze and Guattari’s exploration of utopia can be further illuminated by their conception of the “rhizomatic” nature of desire, knowledge, and action as multiple interconnected activities

⁴⁸ M. SERRES, *The Troubadours of Knowledge*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1997. M. SERRES, B. LATOUR, *Conversations on Science, Culture and Time*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor 1995, p. 76.

⁴⁹ «...we need to distinguish between authoritarian utopias, or utopias of transcendence, and immanent, revolutionary, libertarian utopias. But to say that revolution is itself utopia of immanence is not to say that it is a dream, something that is not realized or that is only realized by betraying itself. On the contrary, it is to posit revolution as plane of immanence, infinite movement and absolute survey...» (*Qu'est-ce que la philosophie?*, Paris, Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991, p. 96).

independently of their origins or telos. «Un rhizome ne commence et n'aboutit pas, il est toujours au milieu, entre les choses, inter-être, *intermezzo*»⁵⁰. «Un rhizome ne cesserait de connecter des chaînons sémiotiques, des organisations de pouvoir, des occurrences renvoyant aux arts, aux sciences, aux luttes sociales»⁵¹. Affirming the possibility of what may be discovered beyond the circumferences of the circles of representations, Deleuze and Guattari invite us to the widening circle of knowledge on the horizon of anticipation: «on n'ouvre pas le cercle du côté où se pressent les anciennes forces du chaos, mais dans une autre région, créé par le cercle lui-même. Comme si le cercle tendait lui-même à s'ouvrir sur un futur, en fonction des forces en œuvre qu'il abrite. Et cette fois, c'est pour rejoindre des forces de l'avenir, des forces cosmiques»⁵².

⁵⁰ G. DELEUZE, F. GUATTARI, *Mille Plateaux*, Les Editions de Minuit, Paris 1980, p. 36. «A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, inter-being, *intermezzo*» (*A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. by B. Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 1987, p. 25).

⁵¹ Ivi, p. 14. «On the contrary, not every trait in a rhizome is necessarily linked to a linguistic feature: semiotic chains of every nature are connected to very diverse modes of coding (biological, political, economic, etc.) that bring into play not only different regimes of signs but also states of things of differing status» (*A Thousand Plateaus*, cit., p. 7). Cfr., Fabrizio Desideri's research on Benjamin in *The Apokatastasis and the Messianic World in Benjamin's latest thinking*, in «Aisthesis», 9 (1), pp. 177-187.

⁵² Ivi, pp. 382-383. «One opens the circle not on the side where the old forces of chaos press against it but in another region, one created by the circle itself. As though the circle tended on its own to open onto a future, as a function of the working forces it shelters. This time, it is in order to join with the forces of the future, cosmic forces» (*A Thousand Plateaus*, cit., p. 311).



Speranza, South Door of the Baptistery of San Giovanni
Florence, Andrea Pisano, 1330-1336.