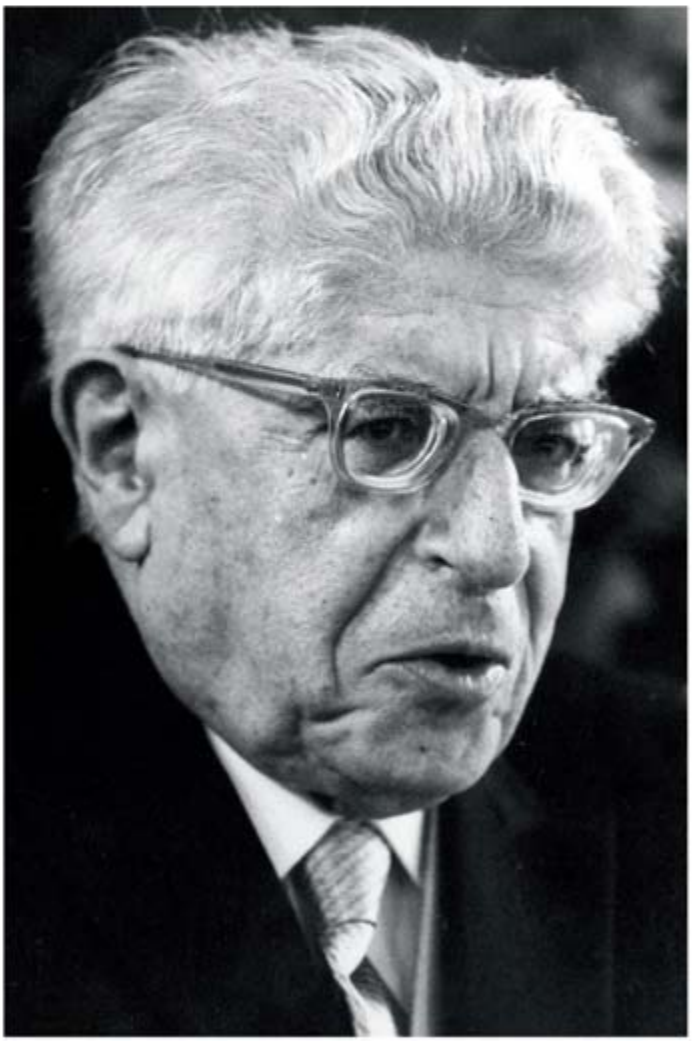
SIC 8

The Privatization of Hope : Ernst Bloch and the Future of Utopia



peter thompson and slavoj žižek, editors

The Privatization of Hope

SIC

A series edited by Slavoj Žižek

SIC stands for psychoanalytic interpretation at its most elementary: no discovery of deep, hidden meaning, just the act of drawing attention to the litterality [*sic!*] of what precedes it. A sic reminds us that what was said, inclusive of its blunders, was effectively said and cannot be undone. The series SIC thus explores different connections to the Freudian field. Each volume provides a bundle of Lacanian interventions into a specific domain of ongoing theoretical, cultural, and ideological-political battles. It is neither "pluralist" nor "socially sensitive": unabashedly avowing its exclusive Lacanian orientation, it disregards any form of correctness but the inherent correctness of theory itself.

Ernst Bloch and
the Future of Utopia

THE PRIVATIZATION OF HOPE

Peter Thompson
and Slavoj Žižek,
editors

sic **8**

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS Durham and London 2013

© 2013 Duke University Press. All rights reserved.
Printed in the United States of America on acid-free paper ∞
Typeset in Sabon by Tseng Information Systems, Inc.
Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The privatization of hope : Ernst Bloch and the future of Utopia /
Peter Thompson and Slavoj Žižek, eds.
pages cm—(SIC ; 8)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8223-5575-5 (cloth : alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8223-5589-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)
1. Bloch, Ernst, 1885–1977—Political and social views.
2. Utopias. I. Thompson, Peter, 1960 July 22– II. Žižek,
Slavoj. III. Series: SIC (Durham, N.C.) ; 8.
B3209.B754P75 2013
193—dc23
2013025251

In memoriam
Jan Robert Bloch
1937–2010

Contents

Acknowledgments xi
Note on Editions and Translations xiii

Slavoj Žižek, Preface xv
Peter Thompson, *Introduction: The Privatization of Hope and the Crisis of Negation* 1
1 Wayne Hudson, *Bloch and a Philosophy of the Proterior* 21
2 Vincent Geoghegan, *An Anti-humanist Utopia?* 37
3 Johan Siebers, *Ernst Bloch's Dialectical Anthropology* 61
4 Peter Thompson, *Religion, Utopia, and the Metaphysics of Contingency* 82
5 Roland Boer, *The Privatization of Eschatology and Myth: Ernst Bloch vs. Rudolph Bultmann* 106
6 Catherine Moir, *The Education of Hope: On the Dialectical Potential of Speculative Materialism* 121
7 Caitríona Ní Dhúill, *Engendering the Future: Bloch's Utopian Philosophy in Dialogue with Gender Theory* 144
8 Frances Daly, *The Zero-Point: Encountering the Dark Emptiness of Nothingness* 164

9 David Miller, *A Marxist Poetics: Allegory and Reading in* The Principle of Hope 203
10 Ruth Levitas, *Singing Summons the Existence of the Fountain: Bloch, Music, and Utopia* 219
11 Rainer E. Zimmermann, *Transforming Utopian into Metopian Systems: Bloch's* Principle of Hope *Revisited* 246
12 Henk de Berg, *Unlearning How to Hope: Eleven Theses in Defense of Liberal Democracy and Consumer Culture* 269
13 Francesca Vidal and Welf Schröter, *Can We Hope to Walk Tall in a Computerized World of Work?* 288

Contributors 301
Index 305

Acknowledgments

I would first like to thank the contributors to this volume for their patience and for their promptness in responding to queries about their individual chapters. I would also like to thank Creston Davis for his support in the early stages of this project and throughout and for suggesting that I publish this volume in Slavoj Žižek's SIC series at Duke University Press. Thanks are also due to the British Academy for the three-year Research Development Award made in 2008 which allowed me to start my research on Ernst Bloch and which gave rise to this volume. I would also like to thank Nick Hodgin for his translation work, never an easy job when dealing with Blochian language. I would like to thank my colleagues in the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Sheffield for their support through difficult times and for the intellectual stimulation provided both by graduate students as well as the research culture in the department.

Above all though, my gratitude is due to Karen Leeder, whose editorial work has been without parallel and indeed has rescued the project at several points. Without her this volume would probably never have appeared.

Note on Editions and Translations

Quotations are generally given only in English, except where a particular linguistic or formal point is being made or when a reader who reads German might particularly benefit from having reference to the original. There is no standard edition of Bloch in English. Contributors have therefore used a range of the different English translations of his works available in order to best represent the particular point being made. These, and any adaptations to them, are all acknowledged in the notes to the individual contributions. Some contributors have provided new translations. Unless otherwise specified, all other translations are by the author of the contribution.

The following abbreviations have been used throughout this volume to refer to frequently cited works by Bloch in English.

Atheism	Ernst Bloch, *Atheism in Christianity: The Religion of the Exodus and the Kingdom*, trans. J. T. Swann (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972)
Essays	Ernst Bloch, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*, trans. Peter Palmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985)
Heritage	Ernst Bloch, *Heritage of Our Times*, trans. Neville and Stephen Plaice (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990)

Literary Essays	Ernst Bloch, *Literary Essays*, trans. Andrew Joron et al. (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998)
POH	Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, 3 vols., trans. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice, and Paul Knight (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, [1986] 1995)
Spirit	Ernst Bloch, *The Spirit of Utopia*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000)
Traces	Ernst Bloch, *Traces*, trans. Anthony A. Nassar (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006)

A good deal of Bloch's work has not been translated. In this case contributors reference the German edition and supply their own translations. Bloch's work is generally cited from the standard sixteen-volume edition of his works by individual volume title:

Ernst Bloch, *Gesamtausgabe in 16 Bänden, St-Werkausgabe, mit einem Ergänzungsband* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, Insel, 1959–85).

The following abbreviation has been used for the most frequently cited work.

PH	Ernst Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985)

Preface: Bloch's Ontology of Not-Yet-Being

Slavoj Žižek

In his *Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin quotes the French historian André Monglond: "The past has left images of itself in literary texts, images comparable to those which are imprinted by light on a photosensitive plate. The future alone possesses developers active enough to scan such surfaces perfectly."[1] Far from being just a neutral observation about the complex interdependence of literary texts, this notion of past texts pointing toward future texts is grounded in Benjamin's basic notion of a revolutionary act as the retroactive redemption of the past failed attempts: "The past carries with it a temporal index by which it is referred to redemption. There is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Our coming was expected on earth. Like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak Messianic power, a power to which the past has a claim."[2]

The question here is: how far should we go along this way? Do we limit the logic of retroactive redemption to human history, or are we ready to take the risk of applying this logic to nature itself, which calls for humanity, human speech, to redeem it from its mute suffering? Here is Heidegger's ambiguous formulation of this obscure point: "I often ask myself—this has for a long time been a fundamental question for me—what nature would be without man—must it not resonate through him in order to attain its own most potency?"[3] Note that this passage is from the time immediately after Heidegger's lectures on *The Fundamental*

Concepts of Metaphysics in 1929–30, where he also formulated a Schellingian hypothesis that perhaps animals are, in a hitherto unknown way, aware of their lack, of the "poorness" of their relating to the world—perhaps there is an infinite pain pervading the entire living nature: "If deprivation in certain forms is a kind of suffering, and poverty and deprivation of world belong to the animal's being, then a kind of pain and suffering would have to permeate the whole animal realm and the realm of life in general."[4]

Heidegger here refers to an old motif of German Romanticism and Schelling taken over also by Benjamin, the motif of the "great sorrow of nature": "It is in the hope of requiting that/sorrow/, of redemption from that suffering, that humans live and speak in nature."[5] Derrida rejects this Schellingian-Benjaminian-Heideggerian motif of the sadness of nature, the idea that nature's numbness and muteness signal an infinite pain, as teleologically logo-centric: language becomes a *telos* of nature, nature strives toward the Word to release its sadness, to reach its redemption. However, one can give to this logic of retroactive redemption also a decisively non-teleological twist: it means that reality is "unfinished," not fully ontologically constituted, and as such open to retroactive restructuring.

And it is here that the unique figure of Ernst Bloch enters, with his ontology of not-yet-being, of reality not yet fully ontologically constituted, immanently pointing toward its future. What comes to my mind here is the countryside in extreme places like Iceland or the Land of Fire at the utmost south of Latin America: patches of grass and wild hedges are intersected by the barren raw earth or gravel with cracks from which sulphuric steam and fire gush out, as if the pre-ontological primordial Chaos is still able to penetrate the cracks of the imperfectly constituted/formed reality. In cinema, this medium of the "undead" image, this uncanny in-between dimension is clearly discernible in what is arguably the most effective scene in *Alien 4: Resurrection*. The cloned Ripley (Sigourney Weaver) enters the laboratory room in which the previous seven aborted attempts to clone her are on display. Here she encounters the ontologically failed, defective versions of herself, up to the almost successful version with her own face, but with some of her limbs distorted so that they resemble the limbs of the Alien Thing. This creature

asks Ripley to kill her, and in an outburst of violent rage, Ripley destroys the entire horror exhibition.

But why shouldn't we risk even a further step back and evoke the "open" ontology of quantum mechanics? That is to say, how are we to interpret its so-called principle of uncertainty, which prohibits us from attaining full knowledge of particles at the quantum level (to determine the velocity *and* the position of a particle)? For Einstein, this principle of uncertainty proves that quantum physics does not provide a full description of reality, that there must be some unknown features missed by its conceptual apparatus. Heisenberg, Bohr, and others, on the contrary, insisted that this incompleteness of our knowledge of quantum reality points to a strange incompleteness of quantum reality itself, a claim that leads to a weird ontology. When we want to simulate reality within an artificial (virtual, digital) medium, we do not have to go to the end; we just have to reproduce features that make the image realistic from the spectator's point of view. Say, if there is a house in the background, we do not have to construct the house's interior, since we expect that the participant will not want to enter the house, or the construction of a virtual person in this space can be limited to his exterior—no need to bother with inner organs, bones, etc. We just need to install a program that will promptly fill in this gap if the participant's activity will necessitate it (say, if he will cut with a knife deep into the virtual person's body). It is like when we scroll down a long text on a computer screen: earlier and later pages do not preexist our viewing them; in the same way, when we simulate a virtual universe, the microscopic structure of objects can be left blank, and if stars on the horizon appear hazy, we need not bother to construct the way they would appear to a closer look, since nobody will go up there to take such a look at them. The truly interesting idea here is that the quantum indeterminacy which we encounter when we inquire into the tiniest components of our universe can read in exactly the same way, as a feature of the limited resolution of our simulated world, that is, as the sign of the ontological incompleteness of (what we experience as) reality itself. That is to say, let us imagine a God who is creating the world for us, its human inhabitants, to dwell in. His task "could be made easier by furnishing it only with those parts that its inhabitants need to know about. For example, the microscopic structure of

the Earth's interior could be left blank, at least until someone decides to dig down deep enough, in which case the details could be hastily filled in as required. If the most distant stars are hazy, no one is ever going to get close enough to them to notice that something is amiss."[6]

The idea is that God who created our universe was too lazy (or, rather, he underestimated our intelligence): he thought that we would not succeed in probing into the structure of nature beyond the level of atoms, so he programmed the Matrix of our universe only to the level of its atomic structure—beyond it, he simply left things fuzzy, like a house whose interior is not programmed in a PC game.[7] Is, however, the theologico-digital way the only way to read this paradox? We can read it as a sign that we already live in a simulated universe, but also as a signal of the ontological incompleteness of reality itself. In the first case, the ontological incompleteness is transposed into an epistemological one, that is, the incompleteness is perceived as the effect of the fact that another (secret, but fully real) agency constructed our reality as a simulated universe. The truly difficult thing is to accept the second choice, the ontological incompleteness of reality itself. That is to say, what immediately arises is a massive commonsense reproach. But how can this ontological incompleteness hold for reality itself? Is not reality *defined* by its ontological completeness? If reality "really exists out there," it has to be complete "all the way down." Otherwise, we are dealing with a fiction that just "hangs in the air," like appearances that are not appearances of a substantial Something. Here, precisely, quantum physics enters, offering a model of how to think (or imagine, at least) such "open" ontology.

And the consequences of this radical shift are breathtaking—they reach up to how we conceive the interaction of politics and ideology. The wager of a dialectical approach is not to adopt toward the present the "point of view of finality," viewing it as if it were already past, but precisely to *reintroduce the openness of future into the past*, to *grasp that-what-was in its process of becoming*, to see the contingent process that generated existing necessity. In contrast to the idea that every possibility strives to fully actualize itself, one should conceive of "progress" as a move of restoring the dimension of potentiality to mere actuality, of unearthing, in the very heart of actuality, a secret striving toward potentiality. Apropos the French Revolution, the task of a true Marxist historiography is not to describe the events the way they really were (and to explain how these

events generated the ideological illusions that accompanied them). The task is rather to unearth the hidden potentiality (the utopian emancipatory potentials) that were betrayed in the actuality of revolution and in its final outcome (the rise of utilitarian market capitalism). In his ironic comments on the French Revolution, Marx opposes the revolutionary enthusiasm to the sobering effect of the "morning after": the actual result of the sublime revolutionary explosion, of the Event of freedom, equality, and brotherhood, is the miserable utilitarian-egotistic universe of market calculations. (And, incidentally, isn't this gap even wider in the case of the October Revolution?) However, the point of Marx is not primarily to make fun of the wild hopes of the Jacobins' revolutionary enthusiasm and to point out how their high emancipatory rhetoric was just a means used by the historical "cunning of reason" to establish the vulgar commercial capitalist reality. It is to explain how these betrayed radical-emancipatory potentials continue to "insist" as a kind of historical specter and to haunt the revolutionary memory, demanding their enactment, so that the later proletarian revolution should also redeem (put to rest) all these past ghosts. One should thus leave behind the rather commonsensical insight into how the vulgar reality of commerce is the "truth" of the theater of revolutionary enthusiasm, "what all the fuss really was about." In the revolutionary explosion as an Event, another utopian dimension shines through, the dimension of universal emancipation, which is the excess betrayed by the market reality that takes over "the day after." As such, this excess is not simply abolished, dismissed as irrelevant, but, as it were, *transposed into the virtual state*, continuing to haunt the emancipatory imaginary as a dream waiting to be realized.

In his extraordinary opus, Ernst Bloch provided a detailed and systematic account of such an open universe—opened up toward its future, sustained by the hope of redemption, joy, and justice to come. He analyzed this dimension of hope in all its scope, from "low" kitsch romances through political and economic liberation up to religious extasis. In our "postmodern" cynical constellation, he reminds us that denunciation of ideology is not enough: every ideology, even the most horrifying Nazism, exploits and relies on authentic dreams, and to combat false liberation one should learn to discern in it the authentic utopian core.

This approach reaches its climax in Bloch's insight that "only an atheist can be a good Christian and only a Christian can be a good

atheist." One should take this insight quite literally: in order to be a true atheist, one has to go through the Christian experience of the death of God—of God as the transcendent Master who steers and regulates the universe—and of resurrection in the Holy Spirit—in the collective of those who fight for emancipation. We may disagree with many points made by Bloch, say, with his critique of Freud, but he is one of the rare figures of whom we can say: fundamentally, with regard to what really matters, he was right, he remains our contemporary, and maybe he belongs even more to our time than to his own.

Notes

1 Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1999), 482.
2 Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (New York: Schocken Books, 2007), 254.
3 Letter from October 11, 1931, *Martin Heidegger—Elisabeth Blochmann: . Briefwechsel, 1918–1969* (Marbach: Deutsches Literatur-Archiv, 1990), 44.
4 Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 271.
5 Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 19.
6 See Nicholas Fearn, *Philosophy: The Latest Answers to the Oldest Questions* (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 77.
7 Fearn, *Philosophy*, 77–78.

Introduction: The Privatization of Hope and the Crisis of Negation

Peter Thompson

When this volume was first conceived shortly before the onset of the Second Great Crash in 2007–8, the title *The Privatization of Hope* was intended as a way of showing what had changed since the publication of Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* some fifty years earlier. I wanted to take a look at the way in which concepts of hope, utopia, liberation, fulfillment, transcendence, and all of the other things which contribute to what Bloch called the "warm stream" of human history had become subsumed under the "cold stream" of economic reductionism in its consumer-capitalist form. Happiness and optimism were now counted in cold hard cash and commodities. People were feeling happy about their ability to spend on the basis of their constantly rising house prices and low interest rates. Bingeing had become the international pursuit of pleasure by the wealthy West, encouraged by an economic system which saw it as the only way to maintain itself against the tendency of profit rates to fall in a capitalist economy. Expansion and growth at no cost to people or planet were the totems of the giant noughties Ponzi scheme and concerns about the "externalities"—from global environmental considerations to the Dickensian working conditions in India and China—were either denied *in toto* or pushed to one side as insoluble or, in any case, considered part of the price which had to be paid for economic advance. Living for the day had become the motto of society, and any sense that we were involved in any kind of process or dynamic that would lead to something different, something new, something better had

all but disappeared. Francis Fukuyama had proclaimed the end of history in 1989, and despite our objections to it on various grounds, usually ideological, everyone largely accepted that he was right. And for some fifteen years he was right. That particular end of history itself ended in 2008, however, but we have not yet found a new beginning. We are in a Gramscian interregnum in which the old world of the absolute hegemony of capitalism and its ideology is dying, but a new world, or even the semblance of a new world, has not yet emerged to replace it. What is important with Bloch's work now has therefore changed since the first conception of this book. Whereas once it was conceived as a counterblast to the shimmering illusions of the bright satanic malls, now it has become a way of maintaining the "principle of hope" against a growing darkness and uncertainty.

As the crisis has advanced, it has become clear that what was at stake was not only fundamental economic stability but also the political and ideological hegemony of the postwar social settlement itself. Class reappeared on the scene as a political determinant, and the cynical response to David Cameron's contention that "we are all in this together" was boosted by the almost daily revelations about corruption, manipulation, and distortion in the leading echelons of the state apparatus and ruling social groups. Politicians were seen to be feathering their own nests as much as the leading bankers; the press and wider media were seen to be in cahoots with the police and security services; and social inequality and disparity of wealth distribution became clear for all to see. In other words, there had come about an unmasking of the whole political and economic system of ideological control that had prevailed since 1945. The year 2008 was late capitalism's Berlin Wall moment.

As clear as it always was that capitalism is essentially a system of labor exploitation and generalized commodity production—even its more intelligent supporters are aware of that—it also became increasingly impossible to imagine anything beyond the confines of a capitalist order, even one in serious decline. Alain Badiou calls this a "crisis of negation," in which many of the apparent certainties about the way in which the breakdown of social order almost automatically leads to new social alternatives have become severely dislocated. Of course it can be argued that this belief was always naive, unfounded, or—as Henk de Berg argues in this volume—downright dangerous, but in the context

of the work of Ernst Bloch, the apparent loss of hope for change or improvement seems to have become a self-fulfilling and debilitating condition. As is so often said these days, it is easier to imagine the end of the world than it is to imagine the end of capitalism. Our thoughts now tend toward the apocalyptic not as the first breath of something new, as Bloch posited it, but as the final gasp of something old.

And yet when Ernst Bloch wrote his *Principle of Hope* he was, as a Jew, Marxist, and atheist intellectual in exile from Nazi Germany, able to maintain a commitment to hope in the darkest of hours. Indeed the first version of *The Principle of Hope* was entitled *Dreams of a Better Life*. It was only the publishers who prevented the use of that title. In many ways it was probably a good thing that they did so, because the title Bloch actually arrived at shows quite clearly that what is at stake is not simply the daydream of how things could be better but the underlying *principle* of how things could be made better and how hope functions in the world as a real latent force. Hope as a principle demonstrates that it is something linked not just to optimism but to the tendencies present in a material world that is constantly in flux.

The chapters in this book demonstrate quite clearly how Bloch saw the world as an experiment. Indeed, his last book was called *Experimentum Mundi* (1975). It begins: "I am. But I do not have myself as yet. We still do not know in any way what we are and too much is full of something that is missing."[1] Bloch was a Marxist process philosopher. For him, there could be no end to history because history itself is the process of the arrival at an autopoietically constructed truth of what it is to be human in the world.

Hope, for Bloch, was the way in which our desire to fill in the gaps and to find something that is missing took shape. But this sense of something missing, of desire, and of hope was not something which had a quasimystical character. For Bloch it started with simple physical material hunger, and yet he maintained a commitment to a dialectical understanding of the unfolding of human interaction with these material forces that give rise to desire and consequently to hope. Thus, while a materialist, he also saw that the route from hunger to hope had taken humanity on a series of ideological and theological byways. These byways were not always, however, blind alleys or dead ends. Instead he searched in them for what was valuable and productive within them.

The gamut of his interests ran from Hegel to Karl May (everything else is just an impure mixture of the two, he once said)[2] via religion, myth, fairy tales, and ideology. The whole of *The Principle of Hope* is thus not just a listing of the ways in which we exercise hope but an analysis of the ways in which hope can be achieved in the real, material world so that our hunger can lead us back home via hope and belief. In this sense he borrowed his categories not only from Marx but also from Aristotle, Hegel, Avicenna, Kant, Spinoza, Schelling, and indeed all those philosophers dealing with the complex and dialectical relationship between the human being and the material world. For him the human being and matter were one and the same thing. That we had not found the way home yet was down to the continuing disjuncture between what he called the *kata to dynaton* and *dynámei on*, between what is possible and what might become possible. Bloch is therefore in that group of philosophers who believe that a genuine and authentic humanity has not yet emerged.

The watchword of much of his thought can therefore also be encapsulated in the idea of the "Not Yet."[3] The process that would take us from a static concept of being to one of becoming and of coming to possess ourselves was at base a material one, but it was also one in which our desires, ideas, hopes, and dreams fulfilled a fundamentally important material function in overcoming the "ontology of the Not Yet."[4] Bloch constantly distinguished between two forms of hope, namely, the objective possibility of hope on the one hand and the always present hope and aspirations of the *noch-nicht-gewordene Mensch* [the human becoming] on the other. As he puts it in his Tübingen lectures: "Matter can be defined in the following way: According to Aristotle's definition it is at one and the same time that which is possible [*das Nach-Möglichkeit-Seiende* (*kata to dynaton*)], in other words that which can appear in history as determined by historical-materialist conditions, as well as that which may become possible [*das In-Möglichkeit-Seiende* (*dynámei on*)], or the correlate of the objectively real possibility of that which is. Matter is the substrata of possibility within the dialectical process."[5]

His attempt to marry the objective and the subjective carried within it both a sober recognition of real-existing possibility as well as the eternal drive of a quasitranscendental vitalism, an innate and irrepressible hope seeking constantly to replicate itself and drive the individual, and

thus—in dialectical interpenetration—economy and society, forward. His philosophical efforts were wedded to the human drive, and he was clearly convinced that simply being able to recite the whole of Marx's *Capital* would never move anyone to anything. He was a philosopher who took the Marxist interpretation of the objective development of the economy toward socialization and thus socialism/communism as read and yet wanted to inject the warm stream of human-centered life force into the cold stream of that objective trend and analysis.

The Principle of Hope

The question now—half a century after the first full publication of *The Principle of Hope* and long after the apparent death of the grand narrative of progress—is whether hope can still exist in anything other than an atomized, desocialized, and privatized form. Is the tragedy of late capitalism actually that culturally it has prevented itself from becoming "late," precisely because it has reduced human hope to the lowest common denominator, whilst leaving those of us who would rebel against this apparently denuded and degraded world sighing the powerless quasireligious sigh of the unoppressed creature in a nonhostile world? Have we reached a stage of pure *kata to dynaton* with a *dynámei on* that has lost its driving power? In other words, what has happened to Bloch's "invariant of direction": that drive toward human freedom which, though often suppressed, he claimed was always present? It could be argued that hope generally resides now in individual liberation through money or fame or both. The dreams of a better world are dreams of a better world for oneself or one's family. It is not just socialism which appears to have died but the very concept of the social itself.

In the past few years, and in step with the economic crisis, we have seen more traditional hopeful movements toward the overthrowing of despotic regimes which at least appear to give some hope for a revival of the chance of fundamental change. The Arab Spring, which started in Tunisia and spread throughout the Middle East and is still in its early stages, reminded us of the euphoria of 1989 and the fall of the Berlin Wall. But, just as in 1989, the long-term outcome is open to question and, as with all revolutions, at the moment it appears to have been hijacked by forces that the original revolutionaries would not have sup-

ported. Equally, those who overthrow their old leaders today may well find that the new ones are not quite as magnanimous and liberal in victory as they thought they might be.

Despite an apparent turn to a pragmatic accommodation with real existing capitalism, it will be argued here that in philosophical terms Bloch's time might now have finally arrived. As Johan Siebers puts it here in his chapter, this is because "firstly, the idea of truth is recovering from its anesthetic; secondly, religion is back in philosophical discourse, as well as in the workings of geopolitics; and thirdly, questions surrounding the relation of human beings to the rest of nature are urgent." All of these were of central concern to Bloch and, as Loren Goldner claimed in a very perspicacious review of the English version of *The Principle of Hope*, published in 1986, "he [Bloch] still remains more a contemporary of the 21st century."[6]

Bloch was above all a Marxist philosopher who based himself in a Hegelian understanding of Marxism but who sought to reinvigorate a Hegelianism which did not simply present his thought as a dualistic teleology of spirit and nature. To put it in very current terms, he prefigures some of the thinking around contemporary continental thinkers in that he sees philosophy not as something separate from "the Real," or the "*an-sich*," but as a contingent part of it, with necessity playing only a secondary and indeed contingent role. Indeed I would argue that Bloch presents what might be called a *Metaphysics of Contingency*, that is, a philosophy that, though based in contingent materialism, sees matter itself as an unfinished category and carries within it a nonreal drive which contributes to and, as Catherine Moir argues here, creates its own entelechy. Quentin Meillassoux, to take the most prominent contemporary example of "speculative materialism," attempts to create an understanding of the absolute which is both nonmetaphysical and nontranscendental: a "*speculative form of the rational* that would no longer be a *metaphysical reason*."[7] In other words it is an attempt to create a justification for facticity that does not rely on an *in-itself* beyond that which is. Again, Bloch already attempted to do this by talking of "transcending without transcendence."[8]

We might explain this link between contingency and speculative process by paraphrasing Marx's statement in the *Eighteenth Brumaire* to say that "*contingent events* make history, but they do not make it just as they

please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past."[9] By stating that every contingent point in history is its own telos, but one conditioned both by its own making as well as its determining circumstances, rather than being a part of some preexisting plan (religious or political-philosophical), Bloch sought to rescue agency and human desire from the dogmatists of determinism whilst defending Marxism against the dogmatists of idealist relativism. Things are neither fully determined nor fully contingent but a dialectical mixture of the two.

We might therefore say that he was a speculative materialist long before the term became adopted in current continental thinking. Indeed, Habermas called Bloch a speculative materialist and attached the label "the Marxist Schelling" to him as early as 1960.[10] Catherine Moir sets out the ways in which Bloch approached the question of matter and the problem of materialism and speculation throughout his work, in particular in his *Das Materialismusproblem, seine Geschichte und Substanz*, and draws some very useful parallels between the work Bloch undertook in the 1930s and that which is going on now. For him, building on Hegel, contingent reality may well be the starting point, but it soon falls away and becomes necessary to the process of the emergence of new possibilities. In Bloch's system of the Not Yet, contingency represents a *kata to dynaton* that carries with it its own *dynámei on*. By arguing for an understanding of history as process in this way, Bloch attempted to rescue both Marx and Hegel from the accusation of teleological thinking.

The only thing that is truly transcendent about humanity, Bloch says, is our desire to transcend. This can take many forms but, as Rainer Zimmermann sets out in his chapter, hope has to be learned as well. It does not just come about automatically, but is the product of experience, failure, and resistance to an everyday acceptance of reality. Bloch called this *docta spes* or educated hope. Hope therefore learns, but it also teaches as well as constitutes its own conditions. It is also the means by which we reach beyond pessimistic nihilism to give purpose to an existence which is objectively purposeless in any transcendental sense. As Bloch puts it, our nature as *homo faber* is what transforms "nature perceived as utterly purpose-free" (*PoH*, 1130–31) to create a sort of optimistic nihilism in which hope is the wave and particle that carries us forward. Nietzsche contended that existence is fundamentally based in

the recognition (conscious or not) that "in some remote corner of the universe, poured out and glittering in innumerable solar systems, there once was a star on which clever animals invented knowledge. That was the highest and most mendacious minute of "world history"—yet only a minute. After nature had drawn a few breaths the star grew cold, and the clever animals had to die (amended)."[11] However, it is this very pessimistic bleakness which also gives rise to hope. Hope is not happiness and bland optimism. Hope is what gives us strength in the face of the knowledge of entropy and death, both of the individual—what Bloch calls the greatest of all antiutopias—and of the universe as a whole. It is for this reason that hope plays such an important role in religious belief, of course. Any visit to a religious ceremony will remind one that it is there to hold a light against the darkness. Bloch tried to bridge the gap between the external, nonnecessary facticity of our existence and the internal importance which we give it in the process of dealing with our presence in the world. As he puts it: "*True genesis is not at the beginning but at the end*, and it starts to begin only when society and existence become radical, i.e., grasp their roots. But the root of history is the working, creating human being who reshapes and overhauls the given facts" (*POH*, 1376). The point of both philosophy and social action is to overcome dualisms of all kinds so that we might attain the "naturalization of man and the humanization of nature." All this means that in *The Principle of Hope* consciousness comes to the fore not as something secondary to being but as a fundamental part of it. As Loren Goldner highlights, *The Principle of Hope* "exists as a long footnote to Marx's remark that 'humanity has long possessed a dream which it must only possess in consciousness to possess it in reality.'"[12] This would be achieved, as Bloch saw it, only by human activity in harnessing the power of nature around us.

In Vincent Geoghegan's chapter we are shown how mastery of nature—rather than its exploitation—was at the center of Bloch's concerns, placing him firmly on the side of modernity and the development of technology in order to overcome our physical limitations. In this, Geoghegan argues, Bloch must be differentiated from Adorno and Horkheimer who, in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, saw technological utopias as the dark side of the human drive to exploitation.[13] Hope married to class struggle and scientific progress were the means by which we could transcend our

material roots and speculate about what might be beyond the finitude of both our awareness as a species, as well as our given natural circumstances. In their contribution Francesca Vidal and Welf Schröter show how Bloch's ideas on the ways in which technology can be harnessed for humanity are prevented from becoming real by the ways in which capitalism takes the work that is liberated and turns it into more exploitation for those in work and a greater number out of work. For those in work, at least in the advanced economies, technology has not necessarily liberated them to become more creative but has meant rather that work as unwelcome rather than productive labor has spread into the private sphere so that the boundaries between work, pleasure, and leisure have become eroded.

In the knowledge that, for a great many people in the world, the fetters of being merely a factor of production in whatever economic system prevailed would never be enough to satisfy their desires, Bloch realized that class struggle was not something that could be rejected in favor of some sort of idealistic adherence to an abstract and antipolitical concept of progress, freedom, and liberty. Technology could only liberate in harness with a political struggle to take social control over the labor process. As Bloch puts it in *Atheism in Christianity*, "One should not muzzle the ox that treads the corn, however necessary the drivers may find it to do so, both inwardly and outwardly. Especially when the ox has ceased to be an ox" (2). There are shades of George Orwell's *Animal Farm* here, but there is also the same understanding of the power of class struggle within historical change. Even if people were not aware of their desires or understood them in religious or consumerist terms, with dreams of heaven or a lottery win in the place of social change, the sublimated desire could not help but rear its beautiful head in various preilluminations [*Vorscheine*] and daydreams. Vidal and Schröter show that this is still the case in the most advanced of computerized workplaces.

Caitríona Ní Dhúill argues in her chapter that you don't have to be a Lacanian (although it may help) to realize that desire is born of a sense of lack as well as the lack of a lack. Her chapter deals with an aspect of utopia that is often neglected, namely, that of the position of women. She deals centrally with the way in which traditional patriarchal philosophy sees woman as a vessel for reproduction and often extends this biological fact into a social metaphor. She does not exempt Bloch from

this critique, but she does point out that his dialectical understanding of utopia also has implications for feminism and the role of women in a future society which he saw as "eternally female" (*POH*, 1375). For example, when advising an artist friend on how to paint the possibility of revolution under fascism, Brecht said, "Paint a pregnant woman."[14] The trope that the present is always pregnant with the future has, of course, been a commonplace since at least Plato. In this interregnum period, however, we are living with a kind of phantom pregnancy. It is increasingly difficult to see what this historical period will give birth to, hence the sense of a lack of direction and the feeling that the future of humanity has gone missing. Hence also the concentration on one's own private happiness or one's own private paranoia.[15]

As both Bloch and Brecht claim, however, for most human becomings the sense that "something's missing" is both constitutive and provocative. This is why many of the contributions here deal not primarily with political questions but those of hope, faith, negation, negativity, and the void. Bloch was a philosopher firmly rooted in the continental and German idealist tradition, in which speculation about ontological questions plays a primary role and in which epistemological questions about precisely what we can know about our being and becoming are subordinated or, indeed, integrated into our being itself. This helps to explain why Bloch is virtually unknown today—particularly in the Anglo-Saxon world—despite the fact that many of his concepts have found their way into everyday German language. Phrases like *der aufrechte Gang* [the upright gait], concrete utopia, the darkness of the lived moment, the spirit of utopia, and, above all, the principle of hope appear frequently in journalistic articles without any hint of where they might come from or what their explosive content might actually be. Another reason is that much of Bloch's more complex philosophical work, particularly on materialism, has not been translated into English (more exists in Spanish because of his influence in the 1960s and 1970s on liberation theology). In turn this is partly because Bloch's writing style is very difficult terrain at times. David Miller maintains that rather than being frustrated at the way Bloch writes, it is necessary to recognize that his style is itself one of experimentation, both with his own ideas and with those of his readers. Bloch adhered to the idea that thinking was about transgressing, and in order to convey that transgression it was necessary to write in a way

that did not fit in with the traditional academic disciplines and that certainly doesn't lend itself to the analytic tradition. We might also say that Bloch's central interest in music as the birthplace of hope—rather than tragedy—means that to read Bloch, one has to read it with a musical ear. Just as it is necessary to give oneself over to music, then it is sometimes necessary to give oneself over to Bloch's writing. Over the coming years translations of Bloch's remaining works not yet available in English will be published by Peter Thompson, Cat Moir, and Johan Siebers with Brill publishers.[16] Moreover, it is to be hoped that this volume will contribute to increased interest in a philosopher who has until now been largely neglected in the English-speaking world but who has substantial contributions to make in the twenty-first century.

The purpose of this book is therefore to make a contribution to rectifying Bloch's anonymity. There are essays here from some of the leading thinkers in Bloch studies both from Germany and the "Anglo-Saxon" world. Although these chapters deal with various areas of Ernst Bloch's work, there are red threads that run through the contributions and, I hope, add up to a more or less complete picture of what he is trying to address in his work. In fact, the subtitle of this book could well have been "something's missing." It appears in many of the chapters here, not only because it was one of Bloch's favorite phrases but also because it contains within its apparent simplicity a philosophical depth to do with presence through absence and the lack of a lack which allows an investigation of the question of what is possible and what might become possible in today's world.

Brecht's 1930 play *Mahagonny* presented a fictional world that bears an uncanny resemblance to the real world in which we find ourselves today. The worship of money has replaced the worship of gods, and it is not always clear whether this is a step forward or a step back. As a good dialectician, of course, Bloch would have said that it is both and that the apparent darkness surrounding us is a necessary precondition for the sparks of hope and the preilluminations of utopia to glow more brightly in the future. As Frances Daly says in her contribution here: "[And] whilst we might no longer face the same type of hegemony in which a dismal disbelief in another world than this gained easy traction, what a present dissatisfaction might mean is not in any sense straightforward." She traces the way in which, for Bloch, the "something's

missing," or presence of utopia through its absence, means that nothingness and negativity are the very things which are a precondition for the positive realization of our dreams of a better world even when the darkness seems darker than ever.

The Spirit of Utopia

Adorno said of Bloch that he had restored honor to the word *utopia*, but Bloch's concept of utopia is far from a straightforward one. Just as he talks about the *principle* of hope, so he also talks about the *spirit* of utopia. Furthermore, he is also famous for having described his utopia as *concrete*. And he uses the term *concrete* here in its Hegelian sense, where it should not be misunderstood to imply some sort of blueprint for the future. Rainer Zimmermann argues in his contribution: "concrete utopia in the Blochian terminology means thus what can be approached by reflexion and action such that eventually it would become reality, contrary to what is purely utopian and therefore impossible." Bloch takes his understanding of concrete here from Hegel's 1817 Encyclopaedia, in the section on logic setting a processual—we might say autopoietic—utopia against a preformed and programmatic one. The programmatic version is thus one abstracted from process. Linguistically, the nominalized form *abstract* is actually a solidified form of the verbal phrase *to abstract* or *abstrahieren*. The concrete, on the other hand, is derived from the past participle, *concretus*, of the Latin *concrescere* (to grow together, condense). In other words, the term *concrete* describes an ongoing process of growing together and condensation, whereas the term *abstract* means the extraction of a moment from that ongoing process. The abstract is, therefore, what Bloch calls a reified processual moment, crucial in its contingent role within history but meaningless in its own right. The truth of an abstraction or a fact can be discerned only on the basis of understanding it within the nonsimultaneity of past, present, and future as we experience and anticipate them.

The problem with an abstract(ed) fact, therefore, is that its truth is limited to itself. It is merely a paradigmatic screen grab from an ongoing film, valid for the moment in which it was taken but limited to that moment and the bubble surrounding it. It is for this reason that Bloch was extremely fond of quoting Fichte and Hegel, who, on being alerted to

the fact that their philosophy did not accord with reality, said: "Too bad for the facts!" The vast majority of utopian thinking could be said to rest in abstract utopias, in abstractions from the process in which the utopia becomes something really existing, whereas the concrete utopia is one which exists and does not exist at the same time because it is in the process of its own creation. Little abstracted sparks of utopia exist all around us in everyday life, but they cannot yet add up to a utopian process until and unless they become radicalized, grasped at their roots. The truth of history is, therefore, not an abstraction but the ongoing process of the emergence of the concrete and the growing together of contingency into necessity. History for Hegel and Bloch is thus a tendential process in which the abstracted moments of which we are aware coalesce and condense into a historical truth that has only a retrospective and nonteleological telos. In that sense all history is counterfactual and the future is one of endlessly open possibilities conditioned only by the real and rational outcome of the process to date.

What this in turn means is that a concrete utopia is one that has existence only as a possible outcome of an autopoietic process but that it contains within it shards of past and present utopian images—abstractions—that we carry forward with us on the journey but that also carry us forward, giving us the will to keep pushing forward and to become what we might be. To put this in Lacanian terms, the shards of utopia which we tend to carry with us are the fetishized *objet petit a*, which stand in for, but at the same time are part of, an as yet impossible absolute. Our hopes and desires and utopian impulses become fetishized into abstractions precisely because the process that will fulfill our desires is one that remains by necessity entirely invisible to us.

The Darkness of the Lived Moment

The fundamental opacity of the historical process means we live in what Bloch calls "the darkness of the lived moment" so that we are surrounded both by failure and success, utopia and dystopia, freedom and oppression. The crisis we face today, in contradistinction to Bloch's ultimately optimistic position, is that, as Wayne Hudson puts it in his chapter, "The odds against a boom in utopia are high." In her chapter Frances Daly concentrates on the idea, central to Bloch, of a "darkness of the lived