

Utopian Hope vs. Merely-Political Combat: Directionality for the Kingdom of God

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ABSTRACT

Utopia, as a concept, has experienced a resurgence within literature of various genres, ranging from scholarly work inside the ‘academy’ to diverse accounts of utopian and/or dystopian imaginaries within diverse fictional stories. Identifying what utopia picks out conceptually, however, is challenging, not least due to the limitations inherent in the ways we perceive the world could be. In this dissertation, I first defend a ‘processual’ account of utopia, contrasting this way of thinking about the idea against any fixed or granular description of some candidate, concrete state of affairs. I then look at the primary methodology leveraged by most processual utopian theorists, namely: utopian hope. After considering this affective, performative stance against what I call ‘merely-political’ combat, I demonstrate how utopian hope, within processual accounts, turns out to be equivalent to religious faith. As such, processual utopian projects require a return to a mystical, transcendent field of play for both their theoretical and methodological constituents. The second half of my project attempts to outline a fledgling, practical methodology for processual utopia, first identifying a very counter-intuitive directional focus on the part of the privileged when pursuing utopian ends. This focus requires the privileged to consider alternate imaginaries for possible futures while additionally requesting assistance from the marginalized to appropriately parse them. I conclude by examining several instances of liminal ‘utopias’ that have occurred in the wake of tragic events. These are placed in conversation with fictional accounts of utopian effort in order to highlight why utopian performativity must begin from a space of mutual vulnerability.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

In the first half of this dissertation, I defend the concept of “processual utopia” as a more fruitful way to think about striving for societies with less stratification in the way they distribute opportunity and privilege. I contrast this idea with theories that try to describe, using current imaginaries, concretely-imaginable utopias in the present. I argue that the latter effort is a fool’s errand as it entails opposition from opposing visions which are immediately juxtaposed against any solidified description of what utopia might look like.

I then examine the concept of utopian hope. I contrast this with the performativity normally found within politics, concluding that this does not usually result in utopian ends. This is because ‘merely-political’ effort is bent on a kind of binary striving for power, focused on proving the ‘other’ side to be irrational. Utopian hope counters political maneuvering on a more transcendental foundation. It looks for a reality that humankind cannot yet describe – something that remains on the horizon as a target for our dreams. This affective viewpoint should motivate our actions to make currently unimaginable realities possible in a not-seen-by-us future. I also suggest that utopian hope, although talked about a great deal over the past century by writers such as Ernst Bloch and Ruth Levitas, has its conceptual genesis in religious faith. I argue that the two are equivalent in the case of utopian affect and desire. My foils in this effort are Kierkegaard and St. Augustine and examining their accounts of faith reveals the parallel nature this mystical logic shares with contemporary ideas about utopian hope.

In the second half, I connect processual utopian theory to practice. The investigative point-of-view throughout is that of the privileged. I argue that those with the highest levels of opportunity within realms of power tend to defend the status quo, even when suggesting or devising initiatives to supposedly level the playing field more fairly. Privileged actors, it seems, are culturally programmed to reinforce the same logics that prevent substantive change. This also means that our targets for ‘better societies’ tend to simply reinforce the same stratifications of opportunity that exist currently. Privileged actors not only need help understanding the ideas of the marginalized concerning more just societies, they also need to engage in what might seem like ‘dystopian’ effort (from our perspective) in order to actually strive for something more ‘utopian’ in the future.

To help orient those wishing to be allies to the marginalized, I examine various accounts of alternate futures, explaining how those challenge our default ways of understanding the world. These, in turn, should motivate the privilege to ask for help (from the marginalized) in order to understand them, a request the latter must answer if processual utopia is the goal of all concerned. This highlights what I call an ‘ethical minefield’ that highlights divisive issues we can observe in our current socio-cultural moment. I end with an analysis of both tragedy and dystopian fiction, arguing that a sense of mutual vulnerability is needed for an actor to pursue processual utopia.

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Introduction

Utopians! And why not! For me this term has no pejorative connotations. Since I do not ratify compulsion, norms, rules, and regulations; since I put all the emphasis on adaptation; since I refute 'reality,' and since for me what is possible is already partly real, I am indeed a utopian; you will observe that I do not say utopia; but a utopian, yes, *a partisan of possibilities*.

- Henri Lefebvre¹

It was the summer of 2008. In the late afternoon, with temperatures still in excess of 115 degrees Fahrenheit, I boarded a dust-colored, up-armored Mine-Resistant Armored Patrol (MRAP) vehicle. Together with another Navy officer and six or seven Marines, we set off for a scheduled meeting with a conclave of local sheiks in northwestern Iraq. The forward operating base from which we departed was called Al Q'aim as a result of its occupying the site of a former railroad station of that name. Our destination was the main "city," although to call it a city is to do both a disservice and a kindness to it. Perhaps a better term would be "regional population concentration," given the spread-out nature of its related structures.

The purpose of our sortie was, to be clear, financial. We were to present a coalition-provided check to local leaders in order to fund an agricultural initiative, one that had been jointly proposed by Iraqi officials and peace-keeping forces. I cannot remember the exact amount. I seem to recall that it was \$10,000, but in retrospect, that figure seems trivial for any regionally scaled project. Perhaps it was \$100,000 instead.

Upon arrival at a well-to-do neighborhood, we disembarked to find approximately fifteen Iraqi officials (sheiks) gathered at a local leader's house. There was a large circle of plastic chairs arranged in the front yard, and we were asked to sit down and have tea while talking. We were also invited to shed our body armor. This offer was only

¹ Quoted in David Pinder (2011, 239). Emphasis mine.

accepted by the Marine interpreter and me, as the rest of our companions were reticent to take the risk. In fact, only one other Marine (an officer) sat down to talk. Most of the others wanted to remain with the vehicles in an overtly protective posture. (This was understandable, given the loss of life suffered by peace-keeping forces to this point. In fact, a large percentage of coalition military deaths occurred at, or near, gatherings of this type.)

As we drank tea and asked awkward questions through an interpreter, I found myself more in the role of observer instead of participant. There were stark contradictions that drew my attention. In no particular order, I contemplated the fresh, green grass on which our chairs were placed (denoting the status of the household necessary to cultivate grass in that location). I also noted the complete lack of female presence in the gathering. I also perceived an emotional mix of pride and embarrassment – perhaps as a result of the fact that these local leaders were being forced to rely on outside financial aid to better provide for their dependent populace. Finally, the incessant noise of the engines of the up-armored vehicles in the background (and the incomprehensible voices of the Marines standing watch around them) imposed a weirdly dissonant ambiance to the scene. It was all a bit surreal.

It was, in fact, a bit too much for me in that moment. I turned to my right and deliberately engaged the man sitting next to me (who had, until this moment, been silent). The language barrier was difficult, but it was not unsurmountable. I introduced myself as best I could, attempting to pronounce his name as correctly as possible, and I asked him about himself, his family, his ‘world.’ As the exchange went on, several other sheiks joined our conversation, one of whom spoke English fairly fluently. The conversation

became more animated and involved. It ranged across any number of subjects, but we did not bother to discuss Iraqi or American (or peacekeeping coalition) politics or economics. What we concentrated on were our families and our loved ones – in short, who we were, not simply what we did.

I especially remember one topic during this discussion. The sheik took some time describing his family, especially his oldest son. I can recall the importance he conveyed to the choice of his name. He explained that the names given children possessed enormous importance in his culture. The significance of his son's name was its reference to a "rampant lion" in Arabic, and he spent a good deal of time outlining the posture of a lion that he held in his mind when thinking of his son. It was a transparent moment, indeed a vulnerable one. I felt honored to be its recipient. Indeed, I keep a photo that was taken of the two of us that night. I often wonder where he is and how he is doing – especially given Al Q'aim's turbulent decade (and more) since that summer. I also wonder what has become of his family and son.

If anything of lasting significance was accomplished that evening, at that place, it seems to me to not be about some money that was given to a group of regional governors. It was about a relational interaction that took place in the form of a mutually vulnerable moment.² Why was that? What made this personal interaction so much more meaningful than financial support of local projects – projects intended for the betterment of the entire region? How did that relational constituent contrast with the imperial/political ones present during that tableau?

² Although it was not mutually vulnerable in an equivalent way given the setting and its power dynamics. The topic of vulnerability, in communal and corporate contexts, will be referred to numerous times throughout this project, especially in my conclusion.

Fast forward to early fall of the same year. I was on patrol with a police transition team (PTT) in Fallujah, Iraq. PTT teams worked with local police forces to train them as well as augment what was called ‘presence’ within the city as a way of discouraging unrest and insurgent activity.³ I found this experience a bit perplexing. On the one hand, when at the police stations, talking with the local constabulary and eating food with them, I felt as though I was making connections, instigating relationships, becoming ‘real’ as a person instead of just another uniformed American with a rifle. On the other, as we patrolled the streets and passed through marketplaces and neighborhoods, I felt very disconnected from the place and its people. I was struck by the difference in our positionality – in short, *the aesthetics of my (our) performativity sharply distinguished us from the populace*. We were intruders, not just because of our quasi-policing role, but also due to the obvious cultural and power disparities. One of those activities felt vulnerable and relational, the other cold and forbidding – an intrusion into spaces in which we did not belong or were not wanted (is there a difference?).

The point I want to make is that these vignettes were, fundamentally, *the same*. I was always and unambiguously an intruder. I was an outsider connected to (and part of) a certain power gradient that was always being reinforced in these moments. The feelings I had during any of these scenarios, either during their occurrence or afterward, were at least partly epiphenomenal to the calculus of power in play. Yet despite these similar power vectors, there were differences as well. These will be helpful in identifying those underlying constituents that have the potential to expose and/or oppose the ongoing consolidation of privileged or marginalized statuses. They also highlight the ethical

³ And, by extension, consolidating relationships of power such that we remained hierarchically dominant. Our actions, intentionally or not, tend to reinforce these relationships in the way of recreating them.

complexity that obtains within such contexts. Binary judgements about scenarios such as those I experienced will miss important pieces of the puzzle if we are thinking about practical roadmaps for more just future imaginaries. They certainly illustrate the ways in which the privileged tend to act, to include the results of those actions, when ostensibly (with genuinely helpful motives) attempting to ‘better’ the conditions of those less fortunate. In fact, even those vignettes that evoked good feelings remain problematic, providing us examples of what does not work.

Yet neglecting a more nuanced analysis seems equally mistaken. Scenarios in which difficult ethical decisions must be made are always messy. They exhibit a complexity that is difficult to capture in the simplistic, often caricatured, prose used when debating normative theories. One has only to think about the dilemma faced by the person stealing to provide for a starving family to see that moral analysis is very rarely ‘clean.’ For my project, the resultant question becomes *how* can (and should) those enjoying privileged statuses strive to improve conditions of possibility for those who are less privileged? This worry, spurred by the complexity inherent to such a desire, is the central motivation for what follows.

What do these small windows into my past reveal, and how do they relate to utopian directionality? The moments that mattered, at least to me, seemed to be thoroughly *relational* in their makeup and import.⁴ This is true even given the power-saturated nature of those interactions. Yet how does this relationality intersect with (or even attempt to counter) existing power imbalances? Keeping both of these dynamics in tension, what concepts do terms like “utopia,” “social progress/justice,” ‘better’ states of

⁴ I will say more about relationality and utopian struggle, especially in the context of gestural communication in chapter five; however, the topic will be situated throughout the entire project.

affairs, etc. identify? Put another way, to what do we refer when we talk about utopias and their possible instantiations?

As one candidate, some political theorists (and others) might envision utopia as a helpful discursive concept – a hypothetical state of affairs that has value mainly as a thought experiment. This is a common interpretation of what Plato was doing in his *Republic*. If the goal of human accomplishment and development can be distilled to a pursuit of virtue (for him, *arête*, or “excellence”) is utopia then embodied within the realization of the greatest amount of these things?⁵ Indeed, the idea of a concretely-feasible utopian reality has come increasingly under attack. As Gardiner states, “The 1980s and 90s have witnessed a widespread questioning of the legitimacy of utopian discourse.”⁶ One political scientist put the idea to me this way: “Utopia is, for me, a pipe dream. It can be a useful dream, for sure, but the issue with utopia is its feasibility.” With respect to (present-time) descriptively recognizable versions of utopia, I agree. If we construe utopia as a currently-imaginable, concretely-possible reality, its feasibility remains the central concern (i.e., hurdles emphasizing its infeasibility are quickly made apparent). As a well-known example, More’s vision of utopia is, for many, as dystopic as it is ideal, and recent attempts to construct utopias within recognizable conditions of possibility, even if being admirably motivated, invite censure as they become illustrations of their incommensurability with ‘reality,’ as we understand it.⁷

⁵ [350] – [369]. This section encompasses the end of his discussion with Thrasymachus through the beginning of his answer to Glaucon’s follow-on challenge (often referred to as “The Ring of Gyges”). It is while answering this second challenge that Plato proposes his vision of an ideal society.

⁶ 1992, 21

⁷ Examples of these range from the just-noted ‘original’ utopia of Sir Thomas More (1516) to those of Fourier (1971 trans.) and Saint-Simone (1822). I include in this genre attempts to concretely instantiate social utopias, which include such historical watershed events as the Paris Commune (in 1871) and the Owenite communities (1825-1827). For an insightful analysis of the ways in which the revolution and brief social democracy known as the Paris Commune have also informed utopian imaginings within the genre I

On the other hand, current states of affairs are, I think clearly, *dystopic* to a significant degree. There exists no corresponding challenge to dystopia's feasibility (contrasted with utopia's conceivability). Put bluntly, it seems ubiquitous. Humankind, ethically speaking, must do better. If dystopia uncontroversially describes obtaining realities, what can be done, and how can we do it, such that utopian modes of existence become more possible – perhaps even feasible? In this regard, I agree with Ruth Levitas that there is an “ever-present need to defend utopia against those who regard it as trivial and dangerous.”⁸ I will attempt to do this in what follows.

My project is also a work of reflection. It will remain personal yet extend beyond that scope as a result of its development. Its motivation flows from a desire to connect theory to practice in the context of pursuing visions of something better, something more just, something more utopian. Throughout, I put into conversation a variety of disciplines, theories, and actors that perhaps have not been considered together in quite the way I situate them here. I certainly will *not* be attempting to present a final solution or prescription for utopia. In fact, I will argue that, to a significant degree I am *unable* to generate those solutions without aid. Despite this inability, I cannot shake the weight of what seems to me an ethical obligation for humankind, writ large. I must, as a result, try to connect the dots in a way that is not merely theoretical or, on the other hand, something that remains mired within a solidified, caricatured description of a state of affairs doomed before its formulation.

refer to as “processual utopia,” see Kristin Ross (2015). Gerald Gaus, whose protopian theory I will mention in chapter four, considers the Owenite experiment (among many others) as part of his own (2016) investigation into a practical way to implement achievable (i.e., non-ideal) social visions of utopia. For Bloch's summary and analysis of certain social utopias, see his 1995, 471-619. He categorizes these under various names, going back to a Stoical vision and beyond, perhaps most holistically as “scientific” or “rational” utopias. The latter term is, I think, unfortunate, as he specifically argues that utopian hope reclaims rationalism from Enlightenment-based politico-economic (i.e., capitalistic) rationalistic logics.

⁸ 1990, 13

From the outset, I will concern myself with remedying what I think is a less emphasized grammatical placement in the rough definition glossed above – that of utopia’s role as an activity-generating term and as a *process*, in short: as a verb. I believe that it is only in this way utopia, as a project, becomes something towards which meaningful progress can be made. Of course, once that term is used, questions arise about both its possible content (what can/should progress look like?) and its directionality (how to decide where to go from here?). Can we, living in *this* history-become-present, accurately identify an appropriate directionality for utopian striving?

As we will discover, these are not uncontroversial questions. They impact any processual account of utopia at a fundamental level.⁹ This investigation will require careful navigation of messy spaces in which a variety of ethical and cultural variables intersect and combine (or, indeed, confront one another). Yet as difficult as the path might seem, I suggest that we, as humankind, must try to do just that – if our goal is to begin to balance the current scales of agency and opportunity so obviously weighted in favor of certain actors and their associated groupings and contexts.

Where and how do actors ‘utopia?’ We could perhaps broach this topic better by inverting its formulation, such that it becomes: Where and how do actors dystopia? Can we identify spaces within which either of these processes take place, and does their identification help us integrate both theory and practice in their respective cases? Do the answers to these questions raise additional uncertainties about the actors involved? Are

⁹ The moniker of “processual utopia” is not mine; however, it is relatively new in the literature. See, for example, Ivancheva’s (2006) project entitled by that name. Here the term will be used to denote an affectively targeted process of pre-figurative actions or initiatives taken with the goal of improving social justice (more on that term later). This might be rooted in contemporary accounts and theories; however, as I will argue the goal of processual utopia is (or should be) a new ‘reality’ altogether. That we, currently, cannot cognize the contours of that objective highlights the way in which Bloch (1995, 2000, and elsewhere) describes it – as the summum bonum of human existence –the utopian novum that goes beyond our current ability to envision future possibilities.

some of these predisposed to support or oppose utopian projects? If so, what (or who) determines this predisposition, and how do these phenomena both present themselves for our analysis as well as function, in a pragmatic sense, ‘on the ground?’

To continue this line of questioning, what about a general methodology for utopia? Is there a principled way to think about utopia’s method that does not simply become re-appropriated within current rhetorics (and their *regenerative* logics) of existing power relationships? This worry is central to my analysis. My project will focus on two facets of a proposed utopian methodology. The first of these – utopian hope – might seem primarily theoretical at first blush. I will show, however, that while its theoretical implications remain quite rich, the concept is rooted in practice. Its description, to be sure, will remain a bit unsettled, but this reflects similar conclusions made by those already mentioned above. Indeed, its importance is in no way lessened by its refusal to be firmly concretized in the way of a checklist or ‘idiot’s guide’ for pursuing utopia. It does, on the other hand, raise important parallels with other, primarily religious, logics. These highlight a synonymy between the affective methodology described here and theological-cum-processual approaches to utopian ‘no place’ and ‘no time.’ These latter concepts will be explored in chapters two and three.

The second facet of my analysis will be both an ontological and epistemological distance experienced by the privileged in the context of these topics.¹⁰ This will be discussed in chapters four and five. If individuals and groups (enjoying relatively elevated statuses within current relationships of power) create, and ironically continue to recreate, their own privilege and scope of possibilities (i.e., from the perspective of the

¹⁰ I owe the term “epistemological distance” to Douglas Lind. See his 1994, 358 for an account of how this distance affects those writing in a legal tradition from diverse roles and perspectives.

agency accruing to any actor or group under consideration), then might those with the most power to instigate change have a correspondingly stronger propensity (or motivation) to defend the status quo? How do specific actors and their corresponding groups tend to act in these spaces when confronting inequitable conditions of possibility? Identifying these vectors seems crucial to any understanding of processual utopia, especially when attempting to determine its methodology.

The foregoing thoughts and questions preview the topics I address below. Put more formally, I will argue that privileged actors, those enjoying the highest levels of agency and opportunity in a given space, are, counterintuitively, required ‘to dystopia’ from their default perspectives. This is to say they must learn to resist their culturally-encoded instincts.¹¹ Unpacking these concepts will require exploring the ways these agents and groups act, pragmatically and quotidianly. I present this analysis within the context of seminal accounts of processual utopian theory. My goal will be to unmask the ways in which utopian effort opposes the status quo politically, culturally, *and ethically*. This has the benefit of integrating theory and practice such that current tendencies (of action) can be understood at a more fundamental level – one that impacts the method and directionality of any utopian effort.¹²

This will be followed by suggesting several possible starting points for processual utopian methodology. It turns out that privileged actors are impoverished in several ways such that their ability to be allies in this project requires the aid of those less fortunate. This has the unfortunate and unavoidable result of placing an ethically-compelling burden on ‘both’ actors. It is only as a joint endeavor that utopia, in the way of a

¹¹ A more fine-grained definition of which will be offered later, especially in chapters two and four.

¹² For an ethnographically-based account of the morality of performance, analyzed in the context of striving for better states of affairs (in the ethical sense), see Conquergood (1985).

processual project, gains traction. As such, processual utopia remains primarily relational in theory and praxis across multiple facets of the socio-cultural landscape. The ways in which this relationality can be instantiated and offer opportunities to envision human existence within a framework of mutual vulnerability also inform why certain moments in the vignettes described above were markedly different than others. I will go on to suggest ways in which those with more socio-cultural agency currently can begin to move from their default perspectives in order to make meaningful change possible.

As a result of the relational aspect of this effort, I will have to wade into an ethical minefield. This is because I am arguing for the necessity of disadvantaged perspectives when attempting to: 1) more accurately identify utopian horizons towards which to strive processually, and 2) appropriately act and/or react in the world in order to support those alternative possibilities. This might not initially seem problematic; however, what prevents privileged actors from (even inadvertently) appropriating those narratives and re-interpreting them such that they subtly reinforce, or recreate, existing hierarchical structures? I might have the best of intentions at heart, yet an important premise of my argument will be that privileged actors experience a murkiness – a *chiaroscuro* perspective, if you will – when trying to see the world through marginalized eyes.

The structures of power that exist, socio-politically and, in form and function, *theologically* (I explain this immediately below and again, more thoroughly, throughout the first three chapters), work for us in an opaque way that becomes tacitly accepted by those they serve. I will refer to this in what follows as an ongoing *deification* of existing power structures. The socio-political actions of the privileged become, in effect, rites that affirm, in a sacramental fashion, the order that exists. Using theological language, we

worship what is, ontologically, nonexistent yet remains divinely powerful as a result of its sanctification. Our deification of extant power structures not only gives them their power but also *recreates* them continually within a re-consecration of what turns out to be an idol – a normative form of structural representation without any ‘real’ referent.

All this is to say that privileged actors have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. There is nothing original in this statement; however, it has profound implications for the ways in which different classes of actors parse their realities within any form of normative space (speaking here, of course, about relationships of power emplaced culturally-cum-politically). What I will discuss is the way this logic plays out in the actions and, more importantly, the *imaginings* of diverse groups of actors when attempting to pursue ‘better’ states of affairs. As already intimated, if utopia is construed in an active, developmental, sense, if it is decoupled from a concretely-delimited and/or descriptive goal, the question of directionality for the resultant effort becomes central. This is just to ask, “Where do we go from here?” If the imaginations and actions of those possessing the largest potential for effectual change are, perhaps without conscious intentionality, simply recreating what ‘is’ in a kind of ontological circularity, then it follows that these actors will experience obstacles when attempting to apprehend alternate perspectives. This is an unavoidable by-product of the aforementioned invisibility in the way political simulacra function *to those privileged by them*.

Importantly, this mechanism functions as it does *regardless of motive*. In fact, the lack of any overtly malicious motive explains the opaque ways in which privileged actors are engaged in what turns out to be effectively dystopian effort (processually speaking, from the point of maximizing quotients of justice across all actors and their respective

groups). Privileged imaginings and their resultant projects are chained to systems which reciprocally recreate the quotients of agency that currently obtain. In fact, this logic should be carried further to note that the perspectives of privileged actors, applied to any utopian project, tend to be fatally flawed. Their perspective is inadequate for selecting the directionality for utopia as it tends to remain self-serving. Perhaps if the privileged did the opposite of what ‘seems correct,’ humankind might be closer to choosing an appropriate horizon of possibility towards which to aim!

These preliminary thoughts highlight both the necessity of alternate perspectives (not immediately available to privileged actors/groups) to any project invoking utopian struggle as well as the inability of those actors to accurately parse those perspectives unaided. Thus there is an entailed dilemma faced by those of privilege when imagining utopia. They need ontological assistance. The boundaries of reality must be enlarged beyond those default sets pre (and pro) scribed by the status quo. Yet this alone is not enough. A richer ontology is a necessary yet insufficient initial condition for remedying a privileged perspective. In order to make available additional possibilities based on newly liquified sets of what exists societally, a corresponding way of unpacking their referents is also needed. It is one thing to come to grips with the fact that a currently affirmed description of reality is deficient. It is quite another to know what to do with this knowledge. Aid in parsing these alternate imaginaries will be needed. Ironically, the assistance of those afforded lesser quotients of agency is required in order to negotiate the terrain of ethical interaction and, by extension, more equitable agentic possibilities.¹³

¹³ I have not described my project in terms of ‘social justice,’ and I will use the term rarely in what follows. This is intentional, as I will trouble the genesis (and ontological boundaries) pertaining to extant, or default, notions of social justice in its more commonly understood forms. I will not attempt to specifically differentiate the term here other than to note that I assume in what follows that ‘justice,’ simpliciter,

The minefield that must be negotiated should now be clear. The path I am navigating is a treacherous one, and my conclusions will resultantly be faltering and incomplete. Yet for me it is a path that *must* be attempted. This turns out to identify the other horn of the dilemma more clearly in this context. As a reminder, those holding the power necessary to change current conditions that limit the possibilities afforded the marginalized are inherently impoverished when it comes to ascertaining both the root causes of those limitations and the appropriate tactics needed to remedy them. Privileged ways of seeing the world are distorted. Yet despite this handicap, and here is the rub, they still need to be substantively mobilized as allies for change, that which might surpass mere rhetoric and/or a seemingly endless dialectic, to occur. How do we bridge this gap? Can it be bridged?

I believe one way in which privileged ontologies and their meaning-making apparatuses can be refocused is to change the ‘lenses’ through which we view the world. While there are various avenues that could be explored here, I will examine certain accounts of alternate futures, constructed by currently marginalized actors, and argue that they possess the ability to offer different perspectives on what we accept as ‘reality.’ This is to say that they are different imaginaries that shed light on facets of existence not immediately available or apprehensible to privileged actors. But if what I have said above is correct, simply looking through different lenses is not enough. It is, to be sure, a start, an ‘upsetting of the apple cart,’ of the default position of confidence in our own

requires uncontroversially ‘better’ states of affairs (speaking ethically) than those obtaining currently. To the extent that my portrayal of utopian hope-in-action is aimed at potentializing more ethical-cum-better states of affairs, my project trades in what might be termed an ‘egalitarian’ description of social justice. In the same vein, and for similar reasons, I will also not address reparations for past (social or other) injustices here. Although this is undoubtedly a pressing discussion that needs to occur, it is beyond the scope of what I can attempt in this project.

interpretation of what exists, of what is real, of what is (capital “T”) *true*. But the epistemological prong of our inadequacy persists. What can be done at this point if privileged ways of parsing reality, even an expanded version of it, repeatedly recreate and reinforce logics underwriting current relationships of privilege? Can the blind lead the blind in this context? What catalyzes utopian struggle for privileged actors?

Ethically speaking, then, paradoxes exist that must be resolved in order for humankind ‘to utopia.’ To clarify, consider that it seems wrong to suggest that those less advantaged should be required to meet the privileged half-way. Why should they be obligated to come alongside their oppressors as guides in order to facilitate utopian struggle? To sharpen these stakes, from a marginalized perspective it seems plausible to expect privileged actors to take any such aid and repurpose it in a manner that merely supports those same structures (social, cultural, political, etc.) that maintain current relationships of privilege. This might be, in fact, *the default way in which such overtures have been (and are) received*. Yet without this assistance, utopia, as an affective, conative stance/set of actions embodied within a process, seems dead in the water.

These latter concerns, and their implications, inform my discussion in chapters four and five. How can we forge a meeting place, a common ground, between actors of privilege and those not so favored, such that individual and communal action can be directionally targeted? Even more controversially, the definitions and categories of privileged and marginalized might turn out to be more ambiguous than those accepted in a de facto matter that tends to be worryingly coarse-grained at best and ideologically weaponized at worst. I will, I am afraid, likely offend a significant percentage of my readers in those chapters, yet if we are unable, or unwilling, to confront the hard

questions and press towards a more nuanced and less ‘politically-aligned’ (more later) interpretation of the terrain of power confronting utopian effort, this latter objective becomes nothing more than wishful thinking. The ethical terrain to traverse here is quite thorny, and as a result my project addresses multiple, perhaps *not* default, audiences.

As inappropriate as it might seem, this request (an ostensible plea by the privileged for assistance), should it occur, seems crucial to processual utopia. Without such aid, without any attempt to forge a communal front focused on destabilizing the status quo, current conditions of possibility will merely be (re) entrenched. Ethical inaction uncontroversially seems, in most paradigmatic moral scenarios, *wrong* in its refusal to intervene in certain (unethical) circumstances. This would seem to apply equally to a reticence on the part of either actor in this dilemma to move beyond understandable unease in order to consider requests or actions by their counterparts supporting utopian progress. Doing nothing is, clearly, a dystopian choice.

I will suggest in chapters four and five that the marginalized *have* in fact been reaching out to do this. They have been offering their perspectives, aesthetically and viscerally, for some time. What and where, then, is the disconnect? I will argue in chapter four that the privileged have tended to interpret these gestures within frameworks that make them into strawmen. These have been built on certain assumptions that must be challenged in order to move the discussion away from well-worn tracks leading, for far too long, nowhere useful. In this way, appeals from the disadvantaged to consider a different perspective, and the opportunities these appeals have represented, have been squandered.

Yet in that same chapter, I will demonstrate that the truth gleaned from marginalized perspectives in this dialogue has another, largely unaddressed, entailment. It mitigates against any reversal of oppression within utopian struggle. The current cultural-political moment bears witness to the siren song of what Audre Lorde refers to as the “master’s tools.” An appeal to processual utopia cannot be a call to ‘just anything’ that ostensibly counters past oppression. To do so would be to pick up those same tools and, using them, begin a doomed enterprise that is also dystopian as a result of the same logics I introduce and unpack in chapter two. In much the same way as Tolkien’s “One Ring to rule them all” cannot be used to advance good purposes, the ‘master’s tools’ lead to inevitable injustice and social stratification.

The analysis of this paradox will, I hope, furnish the reader with a helpful backdrop for my follow-on exploration of specific accounts of alternate futures written from marginalized perspectives and how these intersect with (and inform) a theory of processual utopia, to wit: a desire and accompanying set of actions aimed at a future instantiation of the city of God. I hope to showcase opportunities to broaden our ontologies, disrupting the limits of what is allowed within default sets of “what is real.” This new knowledge must be combined with a *corrective* from those currently marginalized in order to accurately understand them. In other words, privileged meaning-making apparatuses must be refined in order to understand marginalized realities with any accuracy. The combination of these mutually-necessary constituents comprises the most promising starting point for developing a privileged, processual utopian methodology.

In practice this will incur the same complexity I referenced when discussing ethical decision-making in complex situations with diverse moral valences. In chemistry, this term (“valences”) denotes potentialities within elements and molecular compounds. These ‘charges’ inform how a particular chemical substance tends to act or react in diverse situations. In much the same way, socio-cultural situations – and their complex constituents – possess a multitude of utopian and dystopian ‘charges’ or tendencies. These cannot be reduced to an overly simplistic characterization of any side being totally right and any ‘other’ side being totally wrong. Banal reductions to absurdity in these arguments undercut substantive change. They create unnecessary barriers while over-extending otherwise valuable analyses such that they become diluted at best and malicious at worst. This complexity has been clearly demonstrated within contemporary events and movements over the past two years, specifically as they pertain to efforts ostensibly aimed at leveling inequities. Painting with too broad a brush is as dangerous as not painting at all. Ethical behavior, individual and corporate, cannot be jettisoned completely in pursuit of what Bloch refers to as the ultimate ethical good (and what St. Augustine calls the City of God). This complexity will require me to say more about the dangers of supposedly utopian effort that resorts to ideological qua political combat bent on destroying an opponent. In the fourth chapter, I also show how this has happened (and is happening) right now.

In what follows, I assume a robust variant of normative realism. As a gloss, this is the belief that moral propositions have truth values and that some of these values are not false across all metaphysically possible worlds, independent of any relative world-

variable.¹⁴ In simpler words, this means that some things are wrong (or right) no matter what. These facts obtain in much the same way that two plus two always equals four (and never five). This assumption is more significant than it might first appear, as it will sharpen the minefield I have described, to include its ramifications for future utopian effort. It will entail that some actions are always dystopian, despite their ostensibly positive intent. Morality, on a fundamental level, cannot be mortgaged wholesale in utopia's pursuit (within this proposal). This urge for ethical truth, in an objective sense, is elegantly articulated by Virginia Woolf:

It seems plain that we think differently according as we are born differently....But is there no absolute point of view? Can we not find somewhere written up in letters of fire or gold: 'This is right. This is wrong'? – a moral judgement which we must all, whatever our differences, accept?¹⁵

This means my project will be ethically complicated – and it will likely piss everyone, of any ideological bent, off at some point. In fact, this is something that will distinguish my project from other accounts of processual utopia, *to include those of my primary sources offering different utopian imaginaries*. What I will say is intended to provoke a reaction. It is meant to be confrontational. Put bluntly, I want to hear those reactions. I want the resultant dialogue to be a bit raw and unvarnished. When discussing issues that have inherent temporal constituents that include such things as past wrongs due to slavery or oppression more generally, the minefield to be navigated

¹⁴ A more formal definition requires commitments to substantive semantic, alethic, and metaphysical theses. The primary difference between robust realism and minimal realism concerns the metaphysical status of proposed moral truths. Anecdotally, the term has come to mean something a little less rigorously defined – namely that moral propositions have truth values, some of them are actually true, and these true moral propositions pick out normative facts and properties that have an “oomphy” claim on our comportment – a claim that is both objective and stance-independent in nature. For paradigmatic examples of natural and non-natural robust moral realism see Shafer-Landau (2003), FitzPatrick (2008), Enoch (2011), and Cuneo/Shafer-Landau (2014).

¹⁵ (1938, 9) Woolf is comparing feminist ethical intuitions with a (1938) patriarchal hegemony's arguments concerning the justification of war in this context.

becomes almost infinitely complex. If some actions are always right and others always wrong, then simply ‘turning the tables’ in the hopes of rectifying those past wrongs becomes morally untenable as well.

I refuse to reduce the discussion of utopia to an us-vs-them or a them-vs-us discussion that paints all those on *any* side as messiahs and all on the other as demons. Making alternate futures accessible will require more sophisticated interpretations of ethical obligation and/or transgression than what seems to have become rigidly bifurcated mainstream (or, perhaps, folk) methodology leveraged within political party agendas, social network bias and censorship, and mass media (perhaps better, info-tainment) ideological interests. It will also require more ethical gravitas (and less superficial gloss) in its approach to analysis than that involved in spinning the facts such as to construct or support a specific political message. As a result, I am unique to this point in the literature in my effort to identify spaces in which the marginalized and privileged can, and should, attempt to meet without downplaying the entailed ethical messiness *that will need to be navigated by both sets of actors*.

My position is thus quite different from that of Sartre in his introduction to Fanon’s (1961) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Killing an oppressor is not, or so I will assume, *required* to make a marginalized actor “fully human.”¹⁶ Some will, of course, disagree. Yet I suggest that events during this past year (2020-2021) provide excellent empirical examples of this ethical complexity. We all should be appropriately humble

¹⁶ Although it might be justified at times. My point is that I am assuming certain acts are wrong (or right) regardless of the status (marginalized or not) of the actor in question. Combining ethical wrongs in the hopes of instantiating a ‘right’ seems, like the proverb, problematic at best. Of course, the tricky bit is ascertaining what is ethical or not in a given situation, given a history of systemic oppression. Nevertheless, given processual utopia’s basic premises, it is difficult to see a way in which practicing (in a pre-figurative way) new utopian imaginaries can include paradigmatic ethical wrongs. This is, at least, the normative position I will defend in what follows.

concerning our individual grasp of the power dynamics at play, no matter how we personally view our ethical obligations and how they accrue to either privileged or marginalized actors. Put differently, we should not rush to judgement, especially if that judgement tends to align with a specific political agenda. These ethical starting points are perhaps different from the current status quo within academia, yet as the proverb says, “Iron sharpens iron.” My goal is to stimulate respectful and (hopefully) fruitful debate, so I will not shy away from controversial topics and their implications.

One of these is worth broaching immediately, as it will help to identify certain simplifications I make in the interest of clarity. This is the question about who I will be identifying as marginalized and/or privileged in this project. As in the analysis of ethical complexity glossed above, this is a question that has no simplistic or binary answer, even if the standard assumption within academia (and, to be sure, political rhetoric) seems to settle on a default definition of privilege as equivalent to being white and a (cis-gendered) male. Aside from that equivocation being problematic empirically, it is simply not the case that the status of privilege can be reduced to all-and-only white males in any context, even a western, Eurocentric one. To maintain this bifurcated world-view is to lack introspection and nuance, especially given contemporary contexts both politically and academically. Perhaps a better way to think about these positionalities would be in a relative sense. Someone, or some group, might be described as being relatively privileged or relatively disadvantaged in a given space. Reversing these descriptive vectors is also revealing – can we visualize and discuss ‘spaces and moments’ of privilege and/or marginalization? Remaining intellectually and morally flexible with

these frameworks will be necessary to utopian process.¹⁷ This will become very clear in chapter four while discussing the role and function of the ‘master’s tools.’

The need for more nuance in these terms conceded, I will need to rely on a ‘standard’ referent for privilege in order to avoid derailing the focus of the dissertation going forward. Much like the caricatured and bare-bones characterizations of utopia and dystopia that I will propose below, I will primarily refer to Eurocentric, white male hegemony as an easy-to-understand, if quite coarse-grained, representation of what is meant by ‘privilege’ in what follows. But that “primarily” is only that – a moniker for my default use of the term in this project. I will also, at various points throughout, expose the underlying complexity of these terms (indeed, *labels*) in order to problematize any righteous indignation or rushing to judgement in the contexts being explored. To attempt a more precise delineation of privilege and marginalization across multiple contexts would take my investigation too far afield. It would also run the risk of derailing the project at numerous points as a result of trying to parse “who is who” with regard to the topic being discussed. Thus the simple, and overly caricatured, equivalence of my own demographic with the status of privilege will serve as a default foil.

Of course, this also raises the question of the terminology used in this context. “Marginalized” doesn’t work neatly as an antonym for “privilege,” linguistically speaking. It refers more often to dispersion and existence on the periphery, and as such, perhaps better terms in this context might be “centered” vs. “marginalized.”¹⁸ This is fascinating as a way to envision relationships of privilege, especially given the way in which ideas such as the ‘metropole’ and the ‘colony’ permeate scholarly and fictional

¹⁷ Thanks to Kwame Harrison for his insight in challenging default conceptualizations of these positions.

¹⁸ Again, thanks to Kwame Harrison for urging me to clarify this terminology.

literature concerning socio-political imaginaries. This bifurcation also highlights the importance of diaspora existences and the ways in which those communities are treated by political and juridical structures. In the interest of remaining within the corpus of most research and general discussion about these conditions, I will, most often, continue to describe the individuals and communities in question as either privileged or marginalized. That said, I will also at times substitute “disadvantaged,” “less fortunate,” and “less advantaged for the latter term (and their corollaries for the former) for the purpose of hopefully encouraging reflection on the various ways in which to conceptualize these states of affairs.

These terminological and referential limitations clarified, I will also (especially in chapter four) provide empirical examples and accompanying theoretical analysis of the ways in which utopian/dystopian vectors of effort, and relative status as a privileged or marginalized actor or group, are clearly fungible in our current socio-cultural landscape. These will be offered in order to counter the seemingly ubiquitous, and likewise coarse-grained, prevalence within the current literature on processual utopia to assume that *only* those viewpoints stemming from certain, politically progressive perspectives of political theory (and rhetoric) can possess academic and intellectual credibility.

As a roadmap, after clarifying in the first chapter the ways in which I will situate the concepts of utopia and dystopia, and to help parse the differences between their valences within socio-political spaces and scenarios, I analyze the differences between what I call “merely-political” and utopian variants of that effort in chapter two. It turns out that the former is not aimed at utopia, and the latter is not aimed at supporting the existing normative simulacrum – that is, a simulated space built on a reified stratification

of agency/privilege. This provides us a bar against which to interpret the directionality of any given effort. The distinction between these vectors is something that should give everyone pause when attempting to judge the personhood and/or motives of any actor or group of actors under consideration.

The second half of my dissertation will turn to a proposed utopian methodology for the privileged. Chapters four and five concentrate on alternate imaginaries, beginning with an examination of how easy it is for the privileged to ‘rationalize’ away calls to critique extant normative boundaries that reify the status quo. This leads to an examination of several accounts of alternate futures constructed by marginalized actors of various types. Each of these seems to be highlighting a systemic insufficiency within the limits of currently understood communicative performativity. This, in turn, identifies shortcomings in current systems of *language*, due to the bracketing of unallowed or affirmed ‘existences’ and the mechanisms (terms, images, melodies, harmonies., etc.) that can appropriately refer to them.

What seems to be needed then is a different language, a utopian dialect perhaps, that allows for a newly unfrozen body of referents and their associated representational vehicles. This conclusion aligns well with contemporary research on both the evolution of language as a meaning-conveying instrument and its developmental arc. To this end, ingroups and outgroups leverage symbols (indeed, codes) that include performative, affectively encoded, (perhaps uniquely *artistic*) vehicles making up what we refer to as language, simpliciter. This conceptual framework, describing how language is both normed and its resultant coding concretized, puts into sharp relief the subsequent need to rupture that solidity. Possibilities for coherent imaginaries of alternate, utopian futures

seem to call for a broadened field of referents, and their respective signifiers, in order to be adequately addressed.

In my final chapter, I attempt to carry the discussion a bit farther in the hopes of accomplishing a number of things. These include the desire to provide some empirical, even if liminal, examples of how pre-figurative “utopia-ing” might look like as presented within recent (journalistic) research. I suggest that certain fictional accounts describing dystopian futures have the potential to outline promising affective directionalities for utopian struggle. Both of these highlight the importance of apocalypses (as endings or even disasters), considered in both individual/personal and collective tropes, as a powerful utopian technology inviting further research. Apocalypses unveil what is hidden within strategically normed spaces as well as rupture (or end) existing hierarchies such that utopian practices are more easily facilitated. Perhaps more importantly, the vulnerabilities and resultant relational constructs engendered by apocalypses seem to provide a valuable conative backdrop for affective utopian struggle. When situated into a relational context, shared apocalypses seem to create spaces of ‘shared disaster’ – a concept I think picks out a promising vector for ongoing research.

Chapter One – Utopia Revisited: Performative Process vs. Fixed Destination

1.1 Introduction

utopia (noun)

uto-pia | yù-'tō-pē-ə |

Definition of utopia:

- 1) Often capitalized: a place of ideal perfection, especially in laws, government and social conditions
- 2) An impractical scheme for social improvement
- 3) An imaginary and indefinitely remote place¹

Origin:



mid-16th century: based on Greek *ou* ‘not’ + *topos* ‘place’; the word was first used in the book *Utopia* (1516) by Sir Thomas More.²

What does utopia mean? Better, what *should* it mean? Can we locate its constituents in a way that doesn’t remain hopelessly esoteric? If its literal translation signifies its inability to be realized in a physical location (i.e., “no place”), to what do we refer when we discuss it? Is it merely a foil against which to theorize; a conceptual red herring that might be useful in a similar way to the idea that, say, ‘heaven’ might bring to mind when contrasted to conditions in the actual world? Does the idea of utopia even bear discussing at this point, roughly 500 years after its introduction?

¹ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/utopia>

² Google Dictionary: “utopia” As I will explain in chapter three, the equivalence of (Blochian) utopian hope with Augustinian faith gives us another moniker for utopia, namely the *civitas Dei* (or City of God). Bloch himself comes to the same conclusion (1995, 504-508). The Kingdom of Heaven and processual utopia are equivalent referents within their respective world views.

I believe the concept of utopia remains relevant, importantly not only for its related imaginaries but even more so for its ability to inspire *action*. In fact, its relevance is more than accidental to the human condition, *per se*. It embodies, as I will show, a uniquely human and clearly ethical obligation. Removing utopia from the picture impoverishes humanity. As Oscar Wilde famously declared, “A map of the world that does not include utopia is not worth even glancing at...”³ Yet there is a danger here of both contradiction and concretization. To see this, consider the rest of his statement: “...for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and seeing a better country, sets sail. Progress is the realization of utopias.” This characterization adds more complexity, as utopia is represented as both a place (or a series of places) and progress (as process).

If utopia, literally “no place,” is both a place and a series of (different) places, we run afoul of Leibniz’ law of non-contradiction and risk lapsing into incoherence as a result.⁴ Additionally, there exists in this formulation the seemingly hopeful yet ambiguous idea of ‘progress.’ Who gets to define what progress looks like and in what direction it lies? The history of humankind has demonstrated that notions of progress can be easily conflated with oppressive narratives of power (both in their creation and reinforcement) in various and even opposing ways. As such, the idea that we can map conceptions of progress onto a vision of utopia seems dangerous at best and catastrophic at worst.

³ 1891, “The Soul of Man Under Socialism”. It is here we can clearly see the incentive propelling the play on words within More’s seminal account. Are we discussing utopia or *eutopia* (i.e., “no place” or “good place”)?

⁴ Namely: it can’t be the case that both “p” and “not p” obtain. This entails the equally well-known “law of the excluded middle,” perhaps originally suggested by Aristotle. For Leibniz’ formulation, see his 1989 (transl.), 30-31.

For now, I set aside the problem of progress in this sense (as I address it more thoroughly later). I will, however, say a bit more about the contradiction between “destinations” and “no places.” Leibniz would seem to negate the possibility that both these ideas obtain. This granted, equally famous explanations of how his law *fails to fully describe reality* clarify how I will interpret utopia, conceptually and descriptively, here. Plato, as one example, argued that one needed to hold constant three things in order to consider something in a frozen state of contemplation, namely: parts, relations, and time.⁵ These might be seen as necessary, if not always sufficient, conditions for philosophical investigations, especially in the context of developing conceptual definitions. Yet this time-honored tenet of philosophy is used as a foil over and against his own construction of a Platonic world of constant change. Heraclitus also insisted that the world was in an ever-changing state – one of *becoming* (or flux), and thus he claimed that, as one of his analogies, “no man ever steps in the same river twice.”⁶

I think utopia must be interpreted within Plato’s and Heraclitus’ frameworks – that of a process of *becoming* within a world of change. As such, we must untether it from concretized, descriptive definitions in order to carve at the joints of what the term means in any significant way. If *process* picks out the genre to which utopia should be assigned, then perhaps we should focus on what I contend is its proper grammatical usage – that of a verb. This is where my project begins. I suggest that it is only in the recognition that utopia’s realization must be on-going, that it entails movement within individual and communal ‘becomings,’ that we can connect theory and practice in order to make progress (with all its attendant difficulties) in the case of ethical ‘betterness.’

⁵ *The Republic* (436b)

⁶ Aphorism, c. 490 B.C.E.

We, I, *all of us* must learn how to utopia. And this effort will look different from the perspectives of diverse actors.

In this chapter, I defend this notion of utopia that abandons a reliance on concrete feasibility while focusing on an intermediate goal – that of potentializing new possibilities permitting ostensibly better, indeed *more just*, states of affairs.⁷ To be sure, ‘betterness’ does not (without significant clarification) entail ‘justness,’ as any number of counterexamples will show. Yet these counterexamples will depend on a construction in which the partisanship enjoyed by those defining ‘better’ in a given scenario plays a

⁷ I have also addressed this conundrum in an earlier footnote, to include the problematic nature of “social justice,” in this context. The difficulty with clarifying the referents of (ethically) ‘better’ and (social) ‘justice’ in these contexts stems from their default constructions as co-varying with either interactional or institutional instantiations, respectively. On this reading, interactional comportment (i.e., considered as agent vis-à-vis agent) comprises first-order ethical behavior. How I treat you, as a person, both positively and negatively reflects or represents the morality of *my* comportment individually. Institutional comportment, interpreted within such constructs such as juridical codes, cultural mores, and religious doctrines, is a second-order phenomenon. It provides structures within which individual (qua ethical) comportment take place (or does not take place). This is commonly referred to as the realm of social justice. (See, as one example, Thomas Pogge’s explanation of a commonly held view of these first and second order normative interpretations in his 1992, 49-52.)

One problem with this traditional construction is its ‘default’ biconditional formulation. As a result, social justice can be addressed, *if and only if* it is emplaced or discussed within an institutional context. But this is absurd. It is easy to conceive of a world in which more individual people, in their personal, *interactional* behavior vis-à-vis other individual agents comport themselves such that the quotients of, say, stealing and murder were reduced in that world when compared the actual world. That the states of affairs obtaining in that possible world *might* turn out to be more “socially just” seems clearly plausible. This possibility is all that is needed to defeat any biconditional requirement for social justice’s positionality.

Perhaps another way in which an objector could frame this challenge would be to insist that social justice is just that, “social.” To the extent that we are discussing multiple actors in a social (perhaps in the sense of social-cum-political) context, social justice turns on a political form of normativity. That context seems to be of a second-order nature and should therefore be treated differently than ethical behavior, simpliciter. On closer inspection, however, this claim is either a tautology (if A, then A) or merely vacuously true. For consider that interactional, first-order normativity is usually not discussed in a singular vacuum. Social-ness on some scale is assumed, regardless of first or second order instantiations. To the extent that multiple actors are co-involved, a certain level of politics, at its most basic level, takes place. Accordingly, both first and second order ethical considerations are in play regardless of the number of actors considered in any scenario.

So it turns out that social justice can, in fact, be discussed as a first-order, ethically situated concept emplotted within a striving, in the sense of utopian hope that I will explore in what follows, for ethically better states of affairs. It is in this way that I combine the terms throughout this dissertation. A word of warning, however, is needed. As noted here and in the earlier footnote, commonly understood notions or descriptions of social justice should be suspect, especially when formulated by those holding strategic levels of power within any normative simulacrum. As such I will limit my use of the term. I am grateful to Michael Moehler for pressing me to clarify my terminology in this context.

deciding role in its definition. As such, they will depend on privileged constructions of related conative states. To clarify my usage of these words, when (and only when) describing *utopian* possibilities, I will use “better” in an ethical, *and not necessarily conative*, sense. That is to say that a better state of affairs, when compared to any ‘less good’ state of affairs, should be interpreted as the former being *more just* than the latter, even if it “feels worse” to a majority of the actors in the scenario. This might be controversial, yet it is consistent with my assumption of a robust variant of normative realism. As such, discussion about the relevant ethical constituents in play have grounds for discussion aside from concerns relative only to the context at hand. This allows us to avoid certain distractions right from the start. Keep in mind, however, that the word “better,” when used as descriptive within hegemonic notions of progress or effort toward more socio-cultural equity should not be conflated with the usage just described. Commonly-employed English being what it is, I will be required to use the word in both senses throughout this project.

To return to utopian affectivity, one might categorize it as aesthetically-performative modeling. It should be obvious that my approach is fundamentally defeatist, at least as far as it considers humankind’s current capacity for bringing about utopia. My project gives up on any concrete realization. It thus, in a real sense, remains a pipe dream, a kind of foil against which to rail or about which to eulogize. This mindset (or starting point) is not without precedent. In a Christian tradition, St. Augustine takes a similar stance in the *civitas Dei*. He is clearly defeatist in his evaluation of the *civitas terrena* and its ability to precipitate a utopian reality. In fact, the earthly city’s irredeemable inability to instantiate justice and goodness is the foil against

which Augustine juxtaposes the *civitas Dei*. Only God can redeem the failings of sinners.⁸ Only he can weave a perfect tapestry out of the messy imperfection that humankind has wrought (and continues to compound). Yet while Augustine is focused on the redemption of creation in the form of the kingdom of God, he does not give up on the *actions* of humans now. One of the more poignant vignettes he offers is that of the earthly judge attempting to adjudicate cases rightly yet erring from time to time such that innocent defendants are punished unjustly.⁹ He does not, significantly, urge the judge to stop judging. He uses the scenario to illustrate a tension he sees in ‘the now’ that will only be fulfilled and redeemed in ‘the not yet.’

This “not yet” hints at what I will explore here. To use Augustinian terms, I am interested in actions we *should* be taking in the *civitas terrena*. We must accede to both the liminality and horizontality of utopia, when compared to concrete alternatives. In this regard, like Kathi Weeks and Jose Muñoz (and Ernst Bloch at least half a century prior), I think that what is feasible and realizable now must remain located in a performativity that is at peace with utopia remaining ever-receding on the horizon.¹⁰ As noted above, utopia literally means “no place.”¹¹ The conceptual referents that stem from this place of *loss* and/or *emptiness* should then also be extended to include “no time.”¹² Utopia demands action that follows an ‘arrow of desire’ towards something that is currently beyond imagination. It is in this form that I pursue it here.

⁸ St. Augustine of Hippo (1951, 295). This is from *De Civitas Dei*, Book IX, chap. 17 (and elsewhere).

⁹ Ibid (1951: 514). This vignette is found in book XIX, chapter six.

¹⁰ Weeks (2011), Muñoz (2009), and Bloch (1995,2000) will be explored in depth at various points in what follows.

¹¹ The word also signifies “good place” in its onomatopoeic formulation as *eutopia* – a conflation that seems intentional within More’s (1560) seminal account.

¹² Kesler (2012, 88, 97-100) argues post-colonial utopias seek not a “where” but a “when” (uchronia or intopia).

1.2 A Possibility-Focused Theory

Utopia has traditionally been construed as a physical state of affairs, and as such, strong pressure has been brought to bear against the feasibility of most, if not all, such proposals. There have, however, been recent accounts suggesting a different characterization, rethinking its structure and temporality while situating it within hope and aspiration.¹³ My objective in the sections below will be to elaborate on this kind of theory (performative qua aesthetic).

Utopia's possible instantiations, on this view, are works in progress. So described, utopia, as a term of *art* situated within everyday praxis, is pursued within aesthetic performances (taking a variety of forms), and as a result, new possibilities for its instances become available. I have already noted the cost incurred by this approach. We must sacrifice, or at least suspend, any aspirations to reach or definitively concretize any end-state.¹⁴ Utopia's process turns out to be somewhat vague while remaining focused on a currently unrecognizable state of 'better-ness' with respect to future modalities of existence. 'To utopia' will remain *liminal* in that its target is located on the horizon – a horizon of desire.¹⁵ Despite the limitations entailed by this construct, it remains more pragmatically useful than its alternative. It accommodates diverse modalities of utopian method without insisting on (among other things): 1) a *single* interpretation of what is meant by the phrase "doing utopia" (or even its use as a describable state of affairs), or 2) success or failure referenced to a concretely definable formulation of it.

¹³ See Weeks (2011) and Muñoz (2009) for candidate examples. What follows is indebted to their arguments as well as those of Cristina Sharpe (2016), Ytasha Womack (2013), and Sara Ahmed (2017) – among others.

¹⁴ This idea (that of 'improvement') will be discussed more thoroughly below.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Levitas (1990, 220-223) for an argument in support of utopia, conceptually, incurring a requisite "education of desire." See also Abensour (1999) and Lacan (1966, esp. 241-244).

Throughout this chapter, I examine the fruitfulness of this approach within various contexts. To begin, I highlight specific tendencies (or, as I have explained the term, valences) existing within performative utopia vis-à-vis dystopia within strategic normative spaces. Here I am indebted to the work of Baudrillard, DeCerteau, Debord, Marx, Althusser, and others in order to set the stage upon which efforts to utopia occur. Secondly, I will clarify how dystopian struggle occurs within these spaces. The representational elements inherent to the preservation of current forms of normative spaces allow us to see how efforts to maintain the status quo are both utopic and dystopic from differing vantage points. As a result, I conclude that utopian struggle is in fact dystopian struggle (and vice versa) dependent on those perspectives. The relations of power within a given space stratify the actors within it. They do this by identifying and graphing them on a scale roughly indexed to utopia on one end and dystopia on the other. Positionality on that scale provides us, in an admittedly coarse way similar to the discussion of who counts as marginalized or disadvantaged in my introduction, the respective utopic or dystopic perspective of any actor, referenced to that normative space.

To practically ground this framework, I then deploy it, within empirical examples, to recent historiographical research examining legal structures and sub-altern artistic artefacts in diverse locales. Specifically, I unpack *how* the previously mentioned normative simulacra (as colonial legal structures) function to stratify the agency-cum-personhood of certain groups. The respective conditions of possibility for privileged and non-privileged actors provide concrete examples of utopian or dystopian positionality and direction of effort. It turns out that the types of actions taken by both confirm my analysis as well as furnish us pictures of utopian and dystopian performativity in action.

In the final section, I provide a definition of “processual utopia.” This concept will then be explored in more detail in chapters two and three. There I will be interested in analyzing performative tendencies, situated within efforts to pursue aesthetic examples of alternate “ways the world can be,” in order to orient any such definition. As such, the directionality of utopian struggle will continue to take center stage.

1.3 Utopian 'Hope' and Struggle: Real-Possibles and the Novum, The Liminal and The Concrete

The struggle to actualize utopian (or dystopian) hope can take the form of either straightforward actions or aesthetic representations, in short within performative modeling. The theoretical foundations of my argument to follow in this regard are inspired by the work of, among others, Ruth Levitas, Ernst Bloch, Kathi Weeks and José Muñoz. I will, however, synthesize certain elements of their proposals into an integrated whole in the hopes of constructing a more holistic conception of utopian effort and its eventual methodological employment, specifically in the case of privileged actors. Addressing this latter objective will require me to deviate at times from a wholly sympathetic rendering of the accounts in question.

To this end, revisiting the synergy of communal hope (as both conative and practical affect) and individual investment (or “willing”) proposed by Weeks in her blended analysis of Bloch and Nietzsche will be helpful. Her interpretation of utopian hope can also be integrated into Muñoz' portrayal of utopian imagining (to include its temporal aspects). Both of these accounts are grounded by what Bloch refers to as the

No-Longer-Conscious and the Not-Yet-Here.¹⁶ Throughout what follows, it will be helpful to hold in tension his ideas of the real-possible and the novum, terms I will revisit at various places below.

For now, it is enough to say that *performativity* (stemming from an affective stance of hoping and acting) in the service of utopian struggle has to be rooted in what we can cognize currently (Bloch's real-possible) even though it aims toward making possible states of affairs that are currently beyond our ability to imagine (what he calls the novum). Utopian effort cannot bypass current modalities within which 'reality' is situated, yet it continually seeks to rupture limitations on those realities to make possible an unexpected novum, an unpredictable yet newly possible state of affairs.¹⁷ This remains beyond our apprehension or ability to describe; what is made possible by these efforts remains decoupled from current conceptual capacity.¹⁸ Thus Weeks:

Concrete utopian thinking must approach it as a more contingent development, with possibilities for significant ruptures and unexpected developments. [...] And herein lies the challenge: to think the relationship between present and future both as tendency and as rupture. The future is at once that which we must map cognitively and *that which necessarily exceeds our efforts at representation*. [...] More specifically, wanting a different future and making it may not hinge on knowing what it might be.¹⁹

The starting point for this hoping is then a commitment to something 'beyond our ken,' while the process must remain rooted in an active struggle realized within contemporary actions (which are, in their turn, constrained by current conceptions of

¹⁶ As defended against accounts, such as Popper's (1945) *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and Fukuyama's (1989) "The End of History?", arguing against the rationality of utopia, as both a concept and goal. See Weeks (2011, 178-204) for a synthesis of Bloch's dichotomy of hope actuated through Nietzschean self-determination. Considered together with Muñoz' (2009, 19-31, 37-39), this blending of affective and performative hope and struggle inform my argument here.

¹⁷ Weeks (2011, 202). This need to allow the present to inform utopian hope is reinforced by Nietzsche's insistence that humankind cannot be "passed over" in the process of realizing/instantiating the 'overman'.

¹⁸ Ibid, 196-197 These concepts are *not* contradictory. In fact, they actually support my project. More below.

¹⁹ Ibid, 197. Emphasis mine.

reality). What might be referred to as a ‘Nietzschean individualism,’ interpreted by Weeks and located within intensional “personal ownership,” provides the glue that holds these together.²⁰ Each individual subject needs to ‘own’ her unique past and present in an act of willing it to be as it was/is, which in turn preserves her agency in the construction of possibly different futures.

The first (Nietzschean) step then is that of self-affirmation within this willing of the past. Taking ownership of a subject’s past and present is necessary to avoid a resigned subject-hood entailing an already-determined characterization of that past (and its resultant present) as existing within an attitude of *ressentiment*.²¹ A capitulation to current conditions of possibility destroys the creative ability to imagine different states of affairs *as possible* in an alternative future, one unchained from the past and its limited present possibilities (for Nietzsche, the “eternal return”).²²

The second step (in bridging Weeks’ stages of utopian hope) is, significantly, a willingness to commit oneself to a future that doesn't include an 'us' in the current sense of the word. This requires another act of willing expressed within the refusal to eliminate future modalities in order to preserve current ontologies.²³ Put another way, we have to be ready to abandon current relationships of privilege in order to make different conditions of justice possible. These various acts of willing, applied to a perspective of

²⁰ The term "intensional" here denotes various modalities ‘instantiated and owned’ by individuals. Each actor is constrained by conditions of possibility unique to her past and present (as Weeks quotes Nietzsche, 2011, 200-202). As such, she inhabits her own possible world requiring an act of willing in order to put determinative space between her past and any possible futures. Ironically, this construct is supported by a Kierkegaardian existentialism in the same way, even if this ‘act of willing’ turns out, for him, to be a ‘leap of faith.’ See his (1845, VI, 443 and VI, 484-498) for a quite different way of expressing what seems to be the same general idea.

²¹ Weeks (2011, 200-201)

²² See Ferrer (2021), for a compilation of Nietzsche’s thoughts on the ‘eternal return.’

²³ This is my formulation. Nietzsche, within Weeks (p. 201), says, "sacrifice the future to themselves" (for the original, see his 1969, 298, 230). Note that both of these 'steps' necessary to imagining a different future are *actions* of the will; they are *verbs*.

each individual's past and present, destroy any predilection to self-pity. They affirm both future goals and the position occupied in the past/present as a product of self-willing (to include the possible/hoped for *creation of something new*).²⁴ The subject becomes something different than merely an already-determined entity with arbitrary limits hindering the realization of possible futures.²⁵ To borrow a description from the Mad Hatter (in Wonderland), this subject possesses more "much-ness."²⁶

This can help us gloss a new formulation of what it is to be a (utopian) subject. Returning (from Nietzsche) to a Blochian context of hope and its potential realization, a *collective* practice of hope and struggle, indeed an insistent and persistent imagining (including such things as artistic representation, manifestos, *and accompanying actions*), constitutes a first step towards making this new subject possible.²⁷ And this subject's

²⁴ As Weeks puts it, "The first lesson of these [Bloch's and Nietzsche's] accounts is that utopian hope hinges at least as much on the quality of our relationship to the past and present as it depends on our orientation to the future." (2011, 202). This demonstrates the importance of both the past (as alternative modalities instantiated within the no-longer-conscious) and the future (the not-yet-here) as being equally important and extant within any construal of *present* utopian hope and struggle. The present *cannot* be "jumped over" when actualizing utopian efforts, somewhat opposing the working conceptualization of "accelerationism" as championed by, for example, Srnicek and Williams (2015).

²⁵ Cristina Sharpe (2016) exposes the 'present-ness' of the past as it exists and continues in the present and the future, calling for communal 'wake work' for and within the global black community. She deploys sets of meanings framed as metaphors for existence "within the wake" of commodification such that personal and collective endings can be first identified and then attended to. Perhaps one of the most poignant comparisons she presents to sharpen the distinction between 'being black' and being accorded full agentic identity is in the words of a black President (94-97). In two topically similar speeches separated by only a short time period, the worth of black bodies, as contrasted to white ones, is thrown into focus such that from even within a marginalized perspective, according (self) worth doesn't measure up. It simply reinforces the conditions of subjugation and marginalization. Without the identification of past (and future) endings currently 'present' in the wake of shared identity, the possibility of mutual aid, mutual hope, and mutual struggle for black utopia is compromised and limited before it begins. This shared existence in the wake, when recognized within communal consciousness of that modality, enables the beginnings of communal imagination and the actuation of future possibilities in terms of a *becoming*, as a liminal state of affairs, informed by the past, present, and future. I think this concept of identifying endings *as endings* (or beginnings) is central to the project of utopian action. I will say more later, but here I note that endings, as applied to Sharpe's account, can be situated as both endings of original status (the no-longer-conscious) as well as opportunities to grapple for agentic equality (the not-yet-here).

²⁶ Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. 1865. New York: MacMillan.

²⁷ Indeed it is unclear how any construal of utopia, verb or noun, could be only-ever individual. Communality is entailed by the concept in all but perhaps its most hedonistically theoretical formulations.

activity is clearly to do utopia as an indefatigable impulse responding to an ever-refined arrow of communal desire.²⁸ Put concisely, an ongoing striving for increasingly different (from the norm) social visions become the methodology of this agency.²⁹ An active utopian hope requires a communal reaching towards new and different possibilities.³⁰ This communal constituent, moreover, reinforces the place that relationality occupies in the case of all actors involved. In the next chapter, I further refine how this concept informs utopian struggle, more holistically; however, it is important to see here that a forging of mutually supportive relationships is central to the process of making different futures possible. Processual utopia entails non-bifurcated, inclusive socio-cultural spaces defined from and within multiple perspectives and referenced to *all* actor types.

Recall that in the introduction I noted that even in those personal, military vignettes that were clearly imperial and dystopic, I experienced moments of relationality that had different moral valences – elements that seemed more ethically ‘correct’ at a

²⁸ Towards the novum. This is precisely what Weeks is arguing for when contrasting mandated modes of production (and reproduction) with an emphasis on 'what we will' (206-213). Utopia, as a move from these modes of *self*-representation, is connected with *desire* (qua hope as I am using it here).

²⁹ The question that comes to mind is how this concept differs from commonly understood notions of progress. Perhaps a general idea of progress qua improvement can, I think, be mapped nicely onto what I am describing in the sense of striving for possibilities quantitatively and qualitatively better (from certain perspectives – this is important) than current boundaries to available social contingencies. What I am arguing for here, however, does *not* at all map onto prevailing notions based on social logics underwriting contemporary rhetorics of socio-political progress. This is due to a number of factors. First, as I discuss later, obtaining strategic normative relations (i.e. realms) of power have a vested interest in maintaining their influence. This can be illustrated by noting that privileged actors and actor-types seek to perpetuate their privilege, resulting in progress being defined in forms that do not jeopardize currently obtaining hierarchies. Second, dystopia for one actor-type can be (and likely is) utopia for another. Thus progress or improvement, in a general sense, become concepts contingent on *perspective*. This seems to be a (or the) primary motive for Horkheimer and Adorno spurring their argument in the (1947) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, namely a desire to trouble a particular (millennia old) narrative of a particular, western notion of human progress.

³⁰ What I am describing as an ever-evolving, *communal* effort to 'follow a utopian arrow of desire' towards an end that is both unpredictable and qualitatively better can also be seen within musical efforts known as *improvisation*. Improvisation implies individual mastery blended with communal effort in a way that appeals to the no-longer-conscious (as possible routes of musical travel extant in potential yet not actualized) and the not-quite-here (what might happen after the next chord change). Thanks to Julia Eggleston and Cara Daggett for suggesting this parallel.

fundamental level. Those instincts turn out to be vindicated here in that relationality, indeed the forging of a new type of community, forms the core of utopian struggle considered as a process. What is more, this relationality seems tightly bound to a shared vulnerability defining this community. Without this collective risk, relationships become epiphenomenal with respect to their necessity. That is to say that they are nice to have, indeed they might seem fundamental in a sense, but (putatively) we can do without them. With vulnerability, however, any façade built on an assumption of self-reliance disappears.³¹ This vacuum opens up space for something new, something utopian.

Utopia, for Weeks identified as a move away from perpetually reinforced modes of production and reproduction, is thus a process of hope-cum-action that remains in progress. It is neither prescriptive nor, more importantly, descriptively *concrete*. This is as it should be, as concretizing utopia cannot fail to re-index the pendulum of political forms of representation. To illustrate this idea viscerally, imagine the weight of the pendulum pinned to the opposite side of a newly oriented fulcrum (i.e., as the reciprocal and equal response to the concretization of what can only be movement towards or against normalizing modes of socio-politico-economic (re)production). In other words, to take a fully graphed position on a scale between utopia and dystopia entails the identification and mobilization of its obverse. This can also be expressed in terms of potentiality. The potential outlined by a granular description of a fixed destination is, in the same instant, an *impotentiality* with regard to that description. This is because the reification of utopia as a discrete, concretely cognizable or currently achievable, contingency at the same time actualizes the inverse potential of its negation and/or

³¹ Which shares a parallel reliance on, say, religious descriptions of the inability of humankind, alone, to bring about the City of God as a result of original sin. Self-reliance is not an option in the quest to instantiate the ‘not-yet.’ See Genesis 3:1-19, Romans 3:10-23, 5:12 (ESV).

dissolution.³² The trick is to avoid either of these alternatives by refusing to limit conceptualizations of utopia to a binary of competing extremes.³³

'To utopia' then is represented within the process of imagining difference as both ephemerally present in the no-longer-conscious and unpredictably possible in the not-quite-yet (or not-yet-here).³⁴ To trace its contours fully would only pick out another point of departure and entailed resistance, a bifurcated singularity that always initiates its own destruction. In order to be identified within the real-possible oriented towards a Blochian novum, utopia must theoretically *and pragmatically* move from solidified objective (noun) to unsure process (verb). It remains an imperfect and 'sweaty' coupling of imagination and praxis attuned to the horizons of both sunset and sunrise, to the no-longer-conscious and the not-quite-yet.³⁵ Utopia remains *liminal*; its position is on an ever-receding horizon. This underlines the methodological necessity of *poiesis* in its formulation, realized by imagining new differences, of conceptualizing conditions permitting new possibilities that remain on the horizon of cognition. These are essential

³² Thanks to Ben Taylor for suggesting this parallel.

³³ Which emphasizes the importance of forging *relationships* between *all actors in a given context. This avoids the devolution of ostensibly utopian projects into what I will describe as the "merely-political" realm of action in the next chapter. This is especially salient to contemporary events which seem bent on concretizing a bifurcation of socio-political viewpoints such that the position of the 'other' is effectively demonized. This is not, as I will argue throughout, in any way equivalent to processual utopia.

³⁴ For one example of a way in which a no-longer-conscious modality of existence might inform present utopian hope and struggle see Scott's (2017) synthesis of the emergence of early states that highlights different socio-cultural states of affairs exhibited by 'barbarians' over and against grain-focused polities. These barbarian modes of existence approximate a way of living rooted in: 1) a mutually felt (and common) vulnerability to nature, both *inter* and *intraspecies*, and 2) a rhythm of life dictated by an effort to meet community needs. The dominant historical narratives obviously favor fixed polities able to convert excess resources *into such activities as historical chronicleing*, etc. It should not surprise us that we have been "fed a line" for a long time (see pp. 37-62, 219-256).

³⁵ Ahmed (2017, 12-13), emphasis mine. Her definition of a 'sweaty concept' is similar to the way I cash out utopian effort: "A sweaty concept: another way of being pulled out from a shattering experience. [...] I am thinking here of a situation as something that comes to demand a response. [...] I am also trying to show how descriptive work is conceptual work. A concept is worldly, but it is also a *reorientation to a world*, a way of turning things around, [...] a description of the world from the point of view of not being at home in it."

to utopia's pursuit.³⁶ Adorno (with Bloch) puts utopia's definition, as "the determined negation of that which merely is," which then points, "to what should be."³⁷

Indeed, the *bringing of something new* into existence must embody the objective of this concept, even if that something can never be fully imagined. Confined, yet also liberated, as a striving for imaginaries, it inhabits spaces located alongside and within artistic expression, conflict, gesture, pleasure, desire, disgust, pain, loss, conflict, and reconciliation (to name a few). The utopian process is the cook-pot of this continuous state of action, of dreaming, of hoping, of being, and, most importantly, of *becoming*.³⁸ And as all accomplished chefs realize, recipes are simply points of departure, references exploited for ongoing development and experimentation.

While conducting research in this vein, I read an account by Christopher Small critiquing nomenclature-limited descriptions of music (as "musical works") that resituate the ontological referent of that term within performance. These are instances of music-making (i.e., 'musicking,' as he refers to it).³⁹ The ramifications of this switch are strikingly similar to what I am proposing in the case of processual utopia. As a result, I will conclude this section by looking at a few examples that describe how this phenomenon (a grammatical transformation of the referent in question) functions in order to describe its costs and benefits.

Recall that descriptive accounts of utopia tend to problematically concretize its contours in a non-ideal fashion. They also identify utopia as an easy target for feasibility

³⁶ See Shapiro (2013, 25-29) for an account of the relationship between poiesis and "creating" different worlds through aesthetic performativity.

³⁷ Bloch and Adorno, "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988, 12).

³⁸ I owe this phrasing to Cara Daggett. See also Womack (2013, 41-46).

³⁹ Small (1998).

objections. Small refers to this phenomenon as an inevitable result of conceptual reduction. This is to say that what was always meant as performance becomes reified abstraction, crystallized within something empirically describable which is thus limited *qua controlled* by the normative power structures (perhaps in the form of cultural ‘norms’) that obtain. As Small puts it:

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing “music” is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. This habit of thinking in abstractions, of taking from an action what appears to be its essence and of giving that essence a name, is probably as old as language; it is useful in the conceptualizing of our world but it has its dangers. It is very easy to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents, to think, for example, of those abstractions which we call love, hate, good and evil as having an existence apart from the acts of loving, hating, or performing good and evil deeds and even to think of them as being in some way more real than the acts themselves, a kind of universal or ideal lying behind and suffusing the actions. This is the trap of reification, and it has been a besetting fault of Western thinking ever since Plato, who was one of its earliest perpetrators.⁴⁰

He goes on to say that this reduction to objectification, in the case of music, trivializes performances, i.e., *actions*, as they become only a medium through which the object – the abstractly-perfected musical ‘work’ – is experienced. It, the work, is thus not touched or modified by its performance. It is a trope of a Platonic Form, named by its title, that just “exists out there, somewhere” as a measure against which performances are judged. Its mode and of communication remain monolithic and one-way, from composer to listener-via-performer, and nothing they do can improve (or harm) the work, as it is an already-existing ‘thing.’⁴¹

This is identical to how I have described the differences between descriptive utopia, as a concretized ‘place,’ and processual utopia, as affectively-targeted,

⁴⁰ Ibid, 2-3. This is similar to how Benjamin describes the function of historicity (1940a) as well as Sharpe’s description of concretizing black “non-being” and imprisoning that identity within “the hold” of the slave ship (2016, 68-101).

⁴¹ Ibid, 6

performative instances of action/rupture. Replacing both instances of the term “music” with “utopia” in the extended quote above is a revealing exercise, particularly in light of the sentences that follow. The urge to give a fine-grained description to examples of utopia, then, stems from a motivation to freeze it. As I argue in the next chapter, this results in the way that power relationships existing within the normative status quo are likewise reified (or, better, *deified*), ensuring their continual re-creation.

1.4 Utopia or Dystopia?

So what is *dystopia*? This needs clarifying if we are to make headway in a struggle to oppose it. To begin, dystopia is, of course, a *preferred* state of affairs for certain actors. As a political science professor mentioned in a recent conversation, “Dystopia is always, at the same time, utopia *from a certain perspective*.” Thus utopia and dystopia both co-vary with physical states of affairs, aesthetically and performatively referenced to, and dependent on, current socio-political relations of power in any given context. Recall that these are the expected effects of socio-political simulacra and their strategical spheres of normative sway. That utopian and dystopian vectors exist within concrete states of affairs does not at all threaten the idea that we should be thinking of utopia in performative terms. The danger lies in being content with (or, better, relying on) concrete visions of either concept.

As a gloss, dystopia for any given actor is both a situation in which she finds herself not part of the privileged group or ‘actor-type’ *coupled with ongoing actions to perpetuate that state of affairs by those who are privileged*. To the extent that she is not afforded the same level of consideration as another individual or group, she is

experiencing dystopia. (This definition seems to be supported by previous experimental efforts to realize utopia, in that the goal seems to be to “level the playing field” for all participants.⁴²)

Of course, this is very coarse-grained. I have not yet identified ‘who might count’ as actors deserving equality of privilege.⁴³ Setting this worry aside for now, this model of dystopia being compared to a utopian ideal of agentic treatment (as actors who count) is useful in that it allows for degrees of non-privilege. One individual or group might not be part of the privileged ‘fully-affirmed citizen’ group, but she (or they) might be treated better than some other group. Thus we can imagine a kind of sliding-scale between degrees of dystopia and utopia, and this scalar construct will be enough for my purposes. If utopia and dystopia are situated on, and referenced to, a comparative scale of agentic treatment within a specific socio-political construct, then to utopia can be imagined as effort to improve one’s position on this scale.

This also sheds light on the idea that dystopia is usually utopia from another perspective. If resources of any kind within such constructs are finite, then even that group most privileged within it has an interest (self-serving as it may be) to preserve and even improve their conditions of existence. This results in *dystopian* struggle targeted at those not ‘on top,’ highlighting three important things. First, the issue at hand is the level of *agency* accorded the diverse groups of actors within the relevant socio-political space, and this agency is apportioned to those groups in unequal amounts. Second, efforts to improve the agency of disadvantaged groups are actions intended to unsettle and/or reimagine that simulacrum in the hopes of increasing the amount of agency accorded to

⁴² See earlier footnote in my introduction for examples of these.

⁴³ See, e.g., Van Dooren’s (2017) account for a defense of at least partial agency in the case of multiple species.

them. Third, we now have a theoretical lens through which to identify empirical examples of both utopian and dystopian effort, both historical and contemporary.

There is a deficiency we should note about this working model. This can be recognized in the implied ‘zero sum’ nature of these caricatures of utopia or dystopia. The imagery of a graph plotting the stratification of agency (and opportunity, privilege, etc.) also seems predicated on win-loss interpretation of any movement on that graph. If we are pursuing a process-driven vision of utopia, in some way that objective should be identifiable as ‘better’ for all actors involved. While I cannot adequately resolve this contradiction here, I will offer that one way to hold these ideas in tension is to recognize that there are at least two axes to the roughly-construed graph in question. Ethically-speaking, ‘to utopia’ is to strive for Bloch’s *summum bonum* (or St. Augustine’s city of God). On that axis of utopian effort, every actor can be seen as affectively striving for a morally better state of affairs both for herself individually and humankind collectively. Materially-speaking, however, we must consider that we are working within a construct of finite resources. On that axis, it is the case that utopian process will have ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ with regard to resource distribution. Indeed, my argument throughout will be linked to the idea that those more fortunate will need to willingly ‘lose’ in this regard to pursue processual utopia.⁴⁴

To summarize the argument thus far, subjects within *any* socio-political system are accorded various levels of agency within these systems *as a result of their being normative*. (Seen from the perspective of the marginalized subject, her agentic status is determined, or is always in the process of being negotiated, as co-varying with those codes that shape her lived experience.) In the final section of this chapter, I offer several

⁴⁴ Thanks to Michael Moehler for asking me to clarify this point.

examples of this phenomenon as exemplars roughly illustrating my scalar depiction of utopia and dystopia as well as the ways in which normative structures at the strategic level functioned to reinforce the status quo.

1.5 How Utopian and Dystopian Efforts Function: Some Empirical Examples⁴⁵

Newly installed imperial governments hotly debated the ability of colonized populations to rationally interact with imposed legal codes and infrastructure. The concept of a colonial subject's agency, both individual and/or collective, seems central in early disputes about how to apply imperial law in a colonial setting.⁴⁶ As I am interested in how personhood is stratified by normative structures, colonial legal debates provide a paradigmatic example of that stratification.

If the juridical entities of empire are considered, the idea of legal agency, in a subaltern context, seemingly picks out a more holistic, perhaps even more fundamental, constituent of subjective *identity* - that of personhood more broadly construed. Put another way, imperially-imposed legal structures determined the extent to which bodies were regarded 'as persons' within these political-cum-normative forms of representation.⁴⁷ It was not just the ability to appear, speak, and be heard by the law that was at stake. Rather, where an individual or group fell on a 'graph of personhood'⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Some of the analysis in the following sub-sections are from my (2021).

⁴⁶ See Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepúlveda's exchange concerning this topic in both Las Casas (1992) and Sepúlveda (1984). These outline their contrasting positions regarding Indian agency in the 1550-1551 court debate at Valladolid. See also Coates' (2016, 17) summary of Francisco de Vitoria's (1539) treatise on the ability of the Indians of New Spain to (rationally) govern themselves.

⁴⁷ This objective, in turn, limits the forms empire's (legal and other) strategies can take such that *it remains empire*. There are conflicting goals here: that of the universalization of culture/power structures while simultaneously adjudicating (and then maintaining) *difference*.

⁴⁸ I owe this formulation to Danna Agmon. This graphing is more than a simple picture referencing levels of personhood. The target of imperial legal strategies was (is) to create and reinforce difference (for

imposed by those legal structures determined the boundaries of her identity *as a person*.⁴⁹

Colonial subjects were resultantly engaged in a dual-pronged, ontological and epistemological battle for: 1) their identificational status as ‘bodies’ within their specific normative qua political constructs (the ontological prong), and 2) recognition as agents within their respective discursive fields of *being* (the epistemological prong).⁵⁰

All of this aligns with my analysis thus far. Subjects within *any* normatively-
efficacious, socio-political system seem to be accorded levels of agency that are defined, and restricted, within these systems *as a result of their being normative*. Put another way, seen from the perspective of the sub-altern subject, her agentic status is determined, or is constructed, in a co-varying relationship with those juridical codes that shape her lived experience. It seems natural that these will inform her responses to them. Imperial and subjective wrangling over the status of a subject’s agency appears to have been thoroughly enmeshed within the mode of politico-normative representation to which she is subject, allowing for contingently co-varying strategies and tactics realized within that particular setting.

Below, I summarize two imperial contexts featuring pitched battles over identity and personhood. These provide context-specific examples clarifying my argument concerning agentic positionality and its import for utopian process. It turns out that this idea of stratification, as a result of legal (in this case, imperial) objectives to adjudicate difference, can be deployed and scaled more generally, ranging from the perspective of

colonial subjects) such that colonial identity became distinct from full personhood, as represented by imperial citizenry. This is what is meant by a “graph of personhood.”

⁴⁹ Bishara (2017, 66-80) outlines a relevant example. She explores the concept of vicarious personhood as accruing to various marginalized subjects. See also Pierce (2003) and Sharafi (2014).

⁵⁰ These will be important later when discussing utopia’s methodology (and the obstacles faced by privileged actors to be allies).

individual legal maneuvering to the inter (as well as supra) national realm of analysis. This will give us examples of how ‘to utopia’ and ‘to dystopia’ are positioned within these contexts. They will also demonstrate the difference between strategic and tactical maneuvers as referenced to their specific instances.

Shifting from this legal context, I then look at a recent book investigating performative ruptures instigated by Peruvian artists within a differently expressed normative context, that of the colonizer’s religion. Specifically, the author demonstrates that as the colonized Andean Indians negotiated their identity in the face of imposed Catholicism, the artists commissioned to create artworks for town churches used the aesthetic space granted them to subtly validate their Incan culture “under the nose” of Spanish clergy and officials. To conclude this chapter, I unpack a snapshot of Saidiya Hartman’s (2019) exploration of how black actors, primarily women, struggled to express their personhood in two paradigmatic tenement venues. Specifically, the refusal of their respective socio-normative fields of power (specifically, those applying normative pressure) to permit these women to function as full persons within the strictures of accepted comportment resulted in what she refers to as “wayward lives.”

1.5.1 New Spain: Legitimization and Assimilation

The *personhood* of the newly conquered Indians was front and center in Spanish legal debates. Their status as fundamentally rational persons was openly contested in a well-documented court argument between Bartolomé de Las Casas and Juan Gines de Sepúlveda concerning how the Indians were to be classified and then treated.⁵¹

⁵¹ Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (1992 transl.). The preliminaries of this document outline Sepúlveda’s position and its argument as well. See also Sepúlveda (1984 translation). See

Sepúlveda's position can be read as a direct application of religious (Aquianian) natural law:

But, for their own welfare, people of this kind are held by natural law to submit to the control of those who are wiser and superior in virtue [...] as are the Spaniards [...] This is the natural order, which the eternal and divine law commands be observed. Therefore, if the Indians, once warned, refuse to obey this legitimate sovereignty, they can be forced to do so for their own welfare [...].⁵²

In less legal prose, Francisco de Vitoria famously argued that the newly conquered Indians were capable of rational behavior and self-governance of a sort, yet he also insisted that they were *not* equal to those championing (and, indeed, proselytizing) European-interpreted natural law.⁵³ This putative deficiency, couched in religious and ethnographical terms, required (and justified) the concept of Spanish empire. The creation of difference, woven into this specific interpretation of natural law, legitimized both imperial conquest and its continued governance “for the sake of” the Indians.

While my focus is an agentic map providing us with utopian and dystopian vectors of effort, we can see how empires framed strategic narratives such that: 1) difference was created and sharpened, and 2) subjective response was accordingly shaped. The blending of religious aims, supported by papal bulls and representing a historically interpreted Roman imperial ethos, and agentic judgments of difference (based on Christian interpretations of natural law), formed a powerful duet justifying imperial strategy in New Spain. As Pagden puts it:

[...] it was evident that the persistent reliance in circles close to the Castilian court on the papal donation, and its continuing importance in the official historiography of the Spanish empire, served to keep the continuity between the Spanish monarchy

Owensby (2008, 134-135) for an interpretation of Sepúlveda's argument in the context of championing “natural slavery.”

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Coates (2016, 17) and Owensby (2008, 16, 91-92, 134) summarize de Vitoria's arguments supporting the Indian's right to land ownership that “God has given them.” For the original, see Vitoria (1539: 1967 translation).

and the ancient and subsequent Christian *Imperium romanum* firmly on the agenda.⁵⁴

Indeed, this legitimizing discourse bounded the possibilities (i.e., limited) subjective responses (as differing between privileged and not-so-privileged actors).

In the context of New Spain, consider that the Roman mandate providing the rhetoric (and the operational logic) of world domination required the King, as Holy Roman Emperor, to be accessible and merciful to his subjects.⁵⁵ Both his prerogatives and obligations were contained within the same legitimizing discourse. Imperial law, codifying the discourse of empire, was created by royal fiat and flowed from the King *directly* to his subjects. As a result, Indians viewed the Spanish legal system as a potential venue in which to appeal to the King directly *as imperial subjects*. (This top-down vector provides us a clear example of the strategic nature of privileged action as a default, *affective*, performance.)

This scenario also highlights an effort by the Indians to bypass the power and function of Spanish officers and Indigenous intermediaries. These officials were, in the course of enforcing legal codes throughout the various politico-cultural strata in New Spain, effectively (even if not always purposefully) blocking efforts to expand the visibility and voice of the Indians. It should not be surprising that direct appeals to the King, in the form of subjects confirming both his (divine and secular) right to make law, and the obligation to protect his citizenry, continued to increase through the seventeenth

⁵⁴ Pagden (1995, 32). Italics in original. See pp. 39-52 for how these foundations were supported and challenged both internally to, and externally from, Spain. Of interest is Ross' (2015, 816-824) discussion of whether or not law genuinely bound conscience as legitimized by its genesis within Christian-cum-natural law.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 11-28

and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁶ Their insistence on being recognized as imperial subjects, and acting as such, can be interpreted as maneuvering to regain both a sense of self-determinacy (still entailing imperial subjugation) and the ability to act and speak as a person within Spanish empire. De Certeau makes note of this phenomenon when discussing “everyday” tactics used by normed subjects in this case:

The cautious yet fundamental inversions brought about consumption in other societies have long been studied. Thus the spectacular victory of Spanish colonization over the indigenous Indian cultures was diverted from its intended aims by the use made of it: even when they were subjected, indeed when they accepted their subjection, the Indians often used the laws, practices, and representations that were imposed on them by force or by fascination to ends other than those of their conquerors; they made something else out of them; they subverted them from within—not by rejecting them or by transforming them [...], but by many different ways of using them in the service of rules, customs, or convictions foreign to the colonization which they could not escape.⁵⁷

That the Spanish recognized the need to create the *Juzgado General de Indios* lends credence to this hypothesis.⁵⁸ This was the result of an intentional, indeed *tactical*, response by the Indians that resulted in existing court resources being overwhelmed. Indeed, Viceroy Luís de Velasco II called the situation a “crisis of law,” requiring a dedicated venue for cases involving Indian legal suits. This was due to: 1) the number of cases brought to the *audiencia* through normal Spanish court systems, and 2) the subsequent difficulties incurred by those Indians while attempting to pursue justice.⁵⁹ It (the court) was seated in Mexico City and headed by the viceroy who was charged to not only render judgment on purely Indian cases but also to investigate alleged wrongdoing by royal officers. As a result:

The effect of this was to empower Indian claimants to complain not only of

⁵⁶ Owensby (2008, 32-48). That he sees these efforts as a battle for personhood is clear: “-these leaders, appealing to the mercy and prudence of a distant king, harbored a hope that the law might be made an instrument of their survival and agency...” (47).

⁵⁷ De Certeau (1984, 31-32)

⁵⁸ Owensby (2008, 43-47)

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 42-43

corregidores' illicit actions but also their refusal to enforce the law against other Spaniards, [...allowing] Indians to seek refuge in the viceroy's administrative powers. Indians responded with great enthusiasm, applying for administrative relief, especially decrees of royal protection—*amparos*—in large numbers from the 1590s forward.⁶⁰

While the establishment of a dedicated venue is understandable from an imperial perspective, seen through a subjective lens, a unique, Amerindian court provided a possibly more direct line of communication to the King and with it a mode of agentic representation with the potential to expand Indian personhood within the empire. That this tactic (i.e. the willing use of imperial courts) resulted in Indians reinforcing the conditions of their own domination is an unsurprising by-product of both the strategy supported by a particular form of imperial legitimization and subjective, tactical responses to it.⁶¹

The Indians' efforts, requiring debilitating financial cost and long travel commitments (reckoned both in distance and time), testify to the fact that they perceived the *Juzgado* as a way in which to appeal to the King *as his subjects*, situated within an imperial narrative emphasizing subjects' access to the Crown as a requirement for lawful rule.⁶² The phrase “as his subjects” picks out that concept by which the individual Indian, in the role of a litigant availing herself of the right to ‘speak to the King,’ could

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 44. The majority of this administrative relief would have been from intermediaries holding local or regional positions of power.

⁶¹ As Spanish empire matured, indigenous litigants aggressively pursued *any* legal seam through which their recognition as full persons could be achieved. See Twinam (2015) for one such case and response. See also Mumford (2008) for responses by colonized and colonizer alike in the context of late Spanish empire. Note that whatever form imperial strategy took, indigenous subjects responded in ways that leveraged legal status to improve their power and status as *recognized* subjects (i.e., persons). The apex of this battle for personhood is highlighted by Premo (2017). She suggests that litigants, pressing for expressly *human* rights (as contrasted with hierarchical, limiting constructs based on natural law), *created* the Enlightenment in the colonies.

⁶² In 1588, José de Acosta insisted that, “the multitude of Indians and Spaniards form one and the same political community, and not two entities distinct from one another. They all have the same king, are subject to the same laws, are judged by a sole judiciary. There are not different laws for some and for others, but the same for all.” Owensby (2008, 48) notes that this quote is self-congratulatory and unrealistic, given how the colonial legal system in New Spain continued to maintain colonial difference. Acosta's words are from his *De procuranda indorum salute*, Madrid: CSIC, 1984-1987 [1588], 516.

imagine herself as being on something approximating ‘equal footing’ as compared to *any* Spanish subject.⁶³ Significantly, the desire of Indian subjects to function as (full) subjects in a way that responded to imperial normative structures was an agentic struggle to broaden the classification of their personhood.

1.5.2 Aintab and Ottoman Legal ‘Flattening’

The effort to forge an imperial identity took a different tack in the Ottoman empire.⁶⁴ The primary problem was the need to stabilize and standardize the empire in order to create an Ottoman identity and a resultant loyalty to it.⁶⁵ Süleyman clearly recognized the role legal structures occupied in this endeavor is clear. Pierce offers that:

While Süleyman never gave up his career as a military chief [...], his responsibilities in the arenas of law and religion began to be more conspicuously cultivated in the years around 1540. It is hardly surprising that the sobriquet by which Süleyman became known was *kanuni* – the lawmaker, the legally minded regulator.⁶⁶

The panoply of legal choices in Aintab was vast, to say the least.⁶⁷ Various jurisdictional carvings within Islamic culture, to include those of the different faiths

⁶³ The Spanish word for “subject” in this case is *sujeto*, for which the primary adjectival meanings include “fastened”, “fixed”, and “secure”. Coupling these meanings with the implied “contingent upon” predicate results in a fascinating way in which to describe Indian conceptualization (in the language of their conquerors) of what it was to be a King’s (or imperial) subject.

⁶⁴ See Pierce (2003, 253-258) for an example of Islamic sectarianist disagreement affecting the legal states of affairs in Aintab. These tensions granted, Islamic conquest of a previously Islamic polity did not require the same discourses of legitimization to support the new ruling regime as did Eurocentric empire..

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 285-287, 389. Also of interest are pp. 356-361 for Pierce’s analysis of the ways in which Süleyman’s new *kanunname* treated *zina* (sexual crimes). In brief, the new law book relaxed the burden of proof incurred by charges of *zina* such that they: 1) expanded the opportunity for these cases to be heard in court (instead of being bracketed within family law), and 2) in so doing, provided a public forum in which marginalized groups (especially women) were permitted a public voice (where before this was usually not the case). This represents an area in which the Ottoman empire expanded its legal influence in order to move issues formerly sequestered within family or ‘small-scale’ jurisdictions to imperial courts. Perhaps would-be imperial power brokers must have some amount of standardization (both as to what can exist and how to explain those existences) for the implementation of their normative strategies to count as a candidate for *being empire*. Süleyman recognized this as affecting his executive (and thus legislative) power quotients, especially in remote provinces like that in which Aintab was located, prompting both his exhaustive *kanunname* and the appointment of new provincial judges.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 108.

living within it, provided an array of options for prospective litigants. It is no surprise that they opted to appeal to that venue or jurisdiction most likely to afford them the broadest autonomy and chance of success. Pierce's analysis is of a one-year period during which a new imperial judge arrived in Aintab, likely bringing with him Süleyman's new book of *kanun* (or common) law.⁶⁸ During the investigation of three cases (while glossing the local community's overall response to, and use of, the imperial court) she argues that the citizens of Aintab increasingly turned to this venue when pursuing legal objectives. This was plausibly due to: 1) the new law book's jurisdictional scope in light of ongoing Ottoman efforts to spread imperial culture, and 2) the new judge's seeming willingness to grant a public voice to larger segments of Aintab society, especially marginalized groups, resulting in their willingness to use that court to their advantage.⁶⁹

There are a couple of observations I want to make here. First, an imperial initiative to standardize, and thus *flatten*, the legal landscape seems indicated, especially considering Süleyman's focus on Ottoman legal codes (to include his own contributing authorship). If we grant that the primary imperial problem being faced was one of forging a common identity for the empire's citizens, a standardized legal framework makes sense. The resultant blending of legal standardization with identity politics, represented within Ottoman politico-normative initiatives, provides a stage on which to

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 123-124. This is one of many places in which Pierce outlines a myriad of 'problem solving' venues within Aintab.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 108-109, 285-287. See also footnote 21.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 356-361, 375-389. This is the primary argument of her book. Pierce parses the available evidence concerning the new judge's arrival and citizens' responses in order to paint a detailed picture of how the judge's comportment and putative implementation of the new *kanun* code affected life in Aintab. To situate these observations and provide supporting context for her conclusions, she also chronicles Süleyman's personal activity within this project of legal standardization, situating those efforts within a broader imperial context of solidifying authority and quelling rebellious factions throughout the empire.

examine how that phenomenon refined concepts of personhood over and above a simplistic legal definition. Creating an imperial identity normatively flattened the space where subjects conducted “everyday life,” while a more fine-grained analysis reveals ways in which that imperial identity was applied to individual actors.

In addition, the citizens of Aintab took note of how the new law book extended *kanun* law’s jurisdiction to cases previously reserved to disparate venues. Perhaps more significantly, as traditionally marginalized populations were offered a public opportunity to express their own interests “for the record” before the new judge, more of them took their grievances to court. This occurred even when a marginalized litigant had little chance of her case being successful, highlighting the fact that motives for taking a case to court were not necessarily only, or even primarily, legal ones.⁷⁰ These can thus be characterized as *tactical responses* exploiting an opportunity opened up by the new law book, the court, and the new judge within which even marginalized litigants could “punch above their weight” with respect to the stratification of their personhood traditionally afforded them in this locale. As Pierce puts it:

Users of the court and their witnesses necessarily chose their words carefully. But particularly in matters where honor was at stake, they were mindful that another audience was listening, one that would make its own judgment independent of the court, since the latter’s rules sometimes led to punishment and pardon that went against intuitive local readings of justice. The community [...] might grant a kind of social absolution that the judge could or would not. Hence we find women frequently making theater in the venue of the court and playing to an audience made up of the larger community.⁷¹

That the court was a stage on which subjects defended their communal personhood can also be seen in the phenomenon of folks going to court to have their

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 351-356. This is one example Pierce offers to suggest that a, if not *the*, primary reason for someone to appeal to the Ottoman court was to protect or recapture her community reputation.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, 203. “Women,” in this case, can be extended to other marginalized populations, to include minority religious groups.

voice heard – even when they had no hope of winning.⁷² The new judge allowed this, even permitting, at least in one very visible regional case, the losing female litigant to have the last word for in the court record.⁷³ The motive to defend one’s reputation in the community seems to have been a prominent reason for choosing the imperial court over other venues.

Again, my aim here is to focus attention on the maneuvering by subjects occurring within these realms of strategic power – specifically actions taken by those marginalized within them.⁷⁴ The value of being noticed, of being aesthetically presented such that the larger, indeed political, community had to attend to these actions, seems central. These instances of aesthetic intervention will be further analyzed in later chapters in order to connect them to contemporary theories of what utopian struggle might look like.

1.5.3 Andean Church Murals as Scenes of Subaltern Tactical Rupture

While analyzing the content and context of Andean church murals in the Cuzco district of Peru, Ananda Cohen-Aponte unpacks a fascinating performative dialogue that occurred between Indigenous artists and observers, Spanish missionaries, and related imperial power brokers. These entailed economic relationships negotiated between colonizer and colonized, and it is telling that the latter, when engaged to provide services for colonial religious church structures, took the opportunity to insert local themes into

⁷² *Ibid.* Pierce claims that women sometimes broke the law intentionally to gain the opportunity to speak to the community at court. One example is that of the litigant Hadice Bilal in the same passage, who chose to travel to Aintab from Aleppo in order to address the community there (as the man with whom she was involved was a citizen of Aintab). See also “Fatma’s Story”, 351-374, for another example.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 251-275

⁷⁴ Accounts of this phenomenon I do not have the room to include here include Sturman (2005), Sharafi (2014), and Bishara (2017).

their products. Importantly, these were not merely aesthetic adornments; they focused on altering the positionality and even the content of the ostensibly Catholic scenes represented within them. To connect this research with my project, she (Cohen-Aponte) argues that these church murals became spaces for a tactical exercise of Indigenous agency (both for the artists and their local viewers). This allowed the artists to conduct a campaign to recapture a marginalized Andean identity “under the noses” of imperial authorities.

Her initial case study is that of “paths to heaven and hell” in the context of Catholic evangelization.⁷⁵ Patterned after a print by Hieronymus Wierix (c. 1600), the murals she analyzes feature a reimagining of topic and message within local contexts. Both painted art and recorded sermons from this period conflate the topical path to hell with the *Capac Ñan*, the royal Inca road. Strewn with flowers and filled with music and merriment, this is presented as the path to damnation while the contrasting road to heaven is narrow and thorn-filled, leading to an almost unpassable gate. The (church at) Andahuaylillas’ mural not only features the town’s patron saint, conflating heaven with the local church, but it also features details (e.g., an Incan noble sailing to hell and vignettes recalling an internationally popular auto-sacramental “play” about spiritual pilgrimage) that situate the composition into Andean contexts and about Indigenous subjects. This provides an example of how Catholicism was forced to clash and/or combine with local narratives in order to be locally accessible.

With respect to tactical rupture, the author continues with two examples showcasing the agentic maneuvering, seen within their efforts to renegotiate their identity within Spanish Empire, the muralists exercised when normatively constrained by

⁷⁵ 2016, 68-82. Some of the following analysis has appeared in my (2019) published review.

religious requirements. As a result of the newly widespread availability of European fabrics and their intrusion into Andean markets, local artists were pressed into the service of local church art, stimulating the emergence of “clothed walls” covering church interiors.⁷⁶ Intriguingly, this development turned the existing Incan religious practice of painting textile murals on the exterior of *huacas* and Incan temples *inside-out*, deploying it within a Christian context. In the case of several depictions of Christ’s baptism, Andean artists repurposed important local bodies of water and indigenous subjects to situate the event within Andean spaces. This allowed them to referencing Incan origin sites as the scene’s locus of authenticity.⁷⁷ In both the textile and baptism cases, artists opportunistically used border and margin details to penetrate Christian narratives with Incan cultural and religious iconography. In this way, they reimagined sacredness in locally understandable forms that avoided church censorship while appropriating its topoi such that Incan identity was reaffirmed.

As a final example, Cohen-Aponte examines post-rebellion murals in Huaru and San Pablo de Cacha.⁷⁸ During the Tupac Amaru rebellion, these had been the sites of horrific atrocities committed within their walls. She concentrates on the art of Tadeo Escalante at the Huaru church to bring artistic and cultural-religious tensions to light both within the murals’ overt (religious) subjects and covert (cultural) messages. She demonstrates that Escalante leveraged the aesthetic (and, in this case, participatory) space created by his murals as an opportunity for Indigenous invasion of imperial normative (i.e., here religious) structures. Unable to directly confront imperial colonization at a strategic level, sub-altern groups leveraged their own artistic expertise to challenge a

⁷⁶ Ibid, 83-117

⁷⁷ Ibid, 119-144

⁷⁸ Ibid, 145-181

narrative of marginalization at the level of aesthetic performance. Recognizing a seam in the normative structure of empire, they seized an opportunity to reinforce their unique identity and history within imperial vehicles of religious indoctrination. This allowed them, over time, a basis from which to renegotiate that identity while reclaiming a fuller conception of Incan agency, both individually and collectively.

1.5.4 The Beauty of Waywardness

In the small sideshow at Coney Island, the chorus consisted of eight girls, including Mildred and her. The famous Henderson's Music Hall dwarfed the small musical revue; but it was still the theater and that was what mattered. Mabel's career was just beginning and, no doubt, she would go on to better venues and proper shows. [...] Every time she stepped on the stage, she felt like a bigger and greater version of herself, or not like Mabel at all, and both experiences made her feel wonderful. She could remember the first time she sat in the audience of a vaudeville theater watching the performers on stage: she was transfixed, as if some part of her that had been asleep for a very long time was awakened and that she might feel deploy yet not fear anything. She enjoyed tremendously the singers and the musical acts, but it was more than this. It was the ache of being alive in every part of her body and overtaken by this rush of sensation, by the awakening of perception. At that moment, she thought: I want to be up there. I can do that. It was a tangle of emotions hard to settle. *Intuitively she knew that she was slipping into another arrangement of the possible, the costume of another existence, inhabiting a body different from the one violated in a coal bin.* This other persona might enable her to be more deeply in the world, to inhabit it without being harmed, or at least to endure it. When the lights in the auditorium dimmed, she reveled in this other existence, which was not at all her, as if the stage possessed the capacity to transform her personal calculus, to augment the basic sense of who she was so that *all the parts added up to someone so much greater than she had ever been.*

- Saidiya Hartman, "The Beauty of the Chorus", *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*⁷⁹

What comes to mind when we hear the term "innovator?" The same question might be asked about the default meaning of "social visionary." Saidiya Hartman attributes these titles (and more) to the cast of young black women she exhumes for our recognition and consideration. While certainly a masterpiece of sociological, historical, and historiographical research, her *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments* is presented as "an archive of the exorbitant, a dream book for existing otherwise."⁸⁰ Denied

⁷⁹ 2019, 301-302. Emphases mine.

⁸⁰ Ibid, xv (Introduction – "A Note on Method")

representation as pivotal figures in history, these women pioneered a performance of “the nowhere of utopia” situated within the nowhere of the ghetto instantiated as acts of societal waywardness that strove to rupture the limitations placed on who they could be.⁸¹ Actually, these limitations were more crippling than that— they also proscribed what they could imagine being. In the process of acting out against them, these heroines became creators of alternate imaginaries, dreams of a world that could be – a world in which they were autonomous agents in every sense.

This approach to agentic action was necessitated by a multitude of causes, not least of which was their no-longer-legal-yet-never-ending slavery, experienced in the unwillingness of society to allow them to intermingle with ‘decent society.’ Slavery, perhaps no longer of the chattel variety, thus still constrained black bodies within narrow limits. The boundaries of societal imaginations of black roles, opportunities, neighborhoods, jobs, education, etc. remained isolated from the ‘norm’ of the cities in which these tenements existed. Black bodies were cemented in a space of ‘otherness.’ With no autonomy in their present, black personhood was forced to negotiate its own identity in realms of new imaginaries. Imagining a freedom to move, to not be considered property, or to act on one’s dreams required crossing the lines of expected/normed behavioral limits. And these were policed brutally, often to the point of permanent physical and/or psychological damage.⁸²

Yet the risk was, Hartman claims, worth it. The freedom experienced in the restless movement common to those living in these neighborhoods was like an irresistible

⁸¹ *Ibid*, xiii

⁸² See her chapter on Esther Brown (*ibid*, 229-256) for one example of how targeted laws (and their definitions) such as vagrancy and prostitution statutes were specifically deployed to police (or, better, constrain) black agency.

drug. There was no stopping it. I cannot conduct here an exhaustive summary of her case studies, so I will concentrate on only one— that of Mabel Hampton. Fascinated by the stage and the theater (epilogue to this section) and determined to avoid the iron ceiling of white servitude, she moved to Harlem from Jersey City and took a three-room apartment right across from “Black Broadway” (Seventh Avenue). Dancing in the cabaret paid the rent, and what Hartman says about this activity is worth quoting at length:

In the cabaret, it was not as easy for Mabel to shed her individual skin. The cabaret was as different from the stage as it was from the private parties and buffet flats (an after-hours club in a private apartment, the kind of place where “gin was poured out of milk pitchers”). Each space had its own script and set of requirements, dictated the terms of possibility, decided the arrangement and comportment of the figure. *The challenge was to improvise within the space of constraint, bending and breaking the rules without breaking the form.*⁸³

Her aim, while dancing, was to break free, to compose her own present with radically new future possibilities. No stranger to rape and assault, Mabel continued to make herself vulnerable in notoriously dangerous venues for the chance at a liminal freedom found in those performances. This included the necessity to, as one example, escape out of a window to avoid being raped by the producer of a show.⁸⁴ The risks were, for Mabel, worth hazarding. Although black singers were not permitted to perform on virtually all classical stages (her passion was music, specifically opera), she eventually left the chorus (and its associated cabarets and house parties) and attempted to break that glass ceiling as well.⁸⁵

That her struggle inhabited the realm of artistic performance is, I think, no accident. Hartman remains focused on aesthetic performativity aimed at rupturing

⁸³ Ibid, 303, emphasis mine.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 336

⁸⁵ Ibid, 331-335

current constraints on comportment. Bodies in motion, waywardness, errant wandering, improvisation – all these are terms evoking the kind of utopian struggle I am pursuing here as well. As she puts it, these were attempts to “thrive under assault.”⁸⁶ They were utopian tactics deployed in the pursuit of the possible, targeted against strategically policed limits on hopes for, or imaginations of, better futures. These experiments provide us examples of the how the less fortunate must contend for their agency against a normatively-enforced set of present and future possibilities.⁸⁷

1.6 Chapter Conclusion

Efforts ‘to dystopia’ and ‘to utopia,’ realized as processes within specific normative spaces, can be seen in the actions taken by privileged and marginalized actors within them. Significantly, in these contexts the latter found (or created) opportunities to leverage ‘ground-up,’ tactical maneuvers that destabilized strategic initiatives. These, in their turn, are the actions of opposing effort that I unpack in the next chapter, to include an investigation of the nature of strategic and tactical tropes of normative function. They also illustrate something central to my motivation. This is that *dystopia turns out to be a kind of utopia when considered from the default perspective of the privileged*. Efforts to make progress, even under the banner of social justice or other terms like it, simply serve to reinforce the status quo. These acts of reinforcement wind up deifying the status quo, as they establish doctrinal rites of socio-cultural worship sanctifying the strategic narrative. They create a supporting system of morality and then worship it as their

⁸⁶ Ibid, 306

⁸⁷ These are limited as a result of the past-become-present. More on this temporal variable shortly.

creator. Sacraments of progress, adhering to those doctrines, then reconsecrate themselves. The circle sanctifies its own circularity.

What seems common in these examples is the initiative taken by marginalized actors to tactically counter their oppression. The Indians of New Spain, recognizing an opportunity afforded them in virtue of the King's role as Holy Roman Emperor (and required comportment vis-à-vis his subjects) overwhelmed colonial legal structures with suits aimed at both countering oppressive intermediaries while striving to establish their status as (full) Spanish subjects. Marginalized groups in and around Aintab, especially women, took advantage of the legally flattened landscape created by Süleyman's new law book in order to speak before a broader audience, even if there was no chance of "winning" their respective cases. Andean weavers seized an opportunity to invade imperial religious spaces by inserting uniquely Andean cultural and religious mores on the murals woven and then hung within churches throughout the region. These reminded the populace of their former identity while perhaps remaining invisible to imperial clerics. Black women, offered no escape from futures offering only perpetual servitude, became willfully wayward as they enacted risky experiments.

In each of these vignettes, tactical, on-the-ground, responses to the strategic normative landscape played a pivotal role in renegotiating marginalized identities. Despite hegemonic pressures devaluing their agentic status, they found ways in which to assert their personhood by creatively thwarting the structures oppressing them. This perspective allows us to decouple certain causal valences and vectors normally conceded to dominant power structures and their ability to mandate and enforce normative codes. Those subjects in these cases became actors in a fuller sense of the word.

This confrontational process is what I consider more holistically, from both ethical and cultural perspectives, throughout what follows. What I concentrate on next is how it can be extrapolated to a project of processual utopia, or the City of God, considered in either a Blochian or Augustinian sense. What does the “subjective perspective” afford us in the way of illuminating its content and methodology, especially when applied to those of privilege? Utopia resides within affective, and aesthetically performative, modeling involving action (and its related symbols/symbology) aimed at rupturing current relationships of power. It aims to mitigate the limitations experienced by those on the “short end of the stick.” In the next chapter, I look at the primary theoretical mechanism cited in accounts championing a process-based interpretation of utopia. This, in turn, informs a fledgling methodology offered in later chapters.

Chapter Two – Utopian Hope: An Antidote for the ‘Merely-Political?’

There is an element of irony in utopia. The utopia seems to say something plausible, but it also says something that is crazy. By saying something crazy, *it says something real*. It [utopia] is on the margin between the realizable and the impossible and on the margin between the sane (if fictional) and the insane (the pathological).

- Ricoeur¹

Let us stress here the special philosophical and utopian character of festive laughter and its orientation toward the highest spheres. The most ancient rituals of mocking at the deity have here survived, acquiring a new essential meaning. All that was purely cultic and limited has faded away, but the all-human, universal, and utopian element has been retained.

- Bakhtin²

2.1 Introduction

Ernst Bloch argues for a particular variant of *hope* being central to the concept of utopia, giving it two roles: 1) that of a container bearing utopia’s content and, 2) simultaneously, the reagent catalyzing it. In the latter case, his writings on utopia and its related utopian consciousness seek to uncover the traces of this hope in performative praxis.³ Historically, he is not alone in this objective. As examples, Fourier, Saint-Simone, and St. Augustine also trade in forms of future-anticipatory, conatively-positive phenomenology as providing the driving force behind utopian imaginaries. This is the case despite the fact that they situate their versions of this hope very differently.⁴

¹ 1986, 303 (discussing Fourier). Emphasis mine. This idea that utopia, here in the form of affective hope, signifies something that actually exists (even if temporally displaced) as ‘real’ compared to the strategic position held by hegemonic political simulacra, will be of central importance to this chapter.

² 1971, 12. Quoted in Howard (2017, 205).

³ Among others, *The Principle of Hope* (1995 ed.) and *The Spirit of Utopia* (2000 ed.). We should keep in mind (in what follows) the aestheticism inherent in these artistic forms of performativity.

⁴ Fourier (1971 ed.) emphasizes ‘freedom’ as the basis for utopian imaginings and his resultant “phalansteries.” Saint-Simon (1822), as a fore-runner to ‘accelerationism,’ built his utopian visions on the projected benefits of technological advancement. St. Augustine, struggling with the tensions within the ‘being’ of human consciousness that captivate Bloch, grounds his version of hope (in his case, faith) on transcendental catalyzation (while still giving central importance to the role of a version of love – namely *caritas* – that finds its way into Bloch’s proposals as well). See Arendt’s (1996 trans.) dissertation for an exegesis of the role of *caritas* within St. Augustine’s *Civitas Dei*, specifically its utopian-cum-kingdom of God telos.

Hope, however, is an imprecise conative state. Using it for utopian methodology requires further qualification.⁵ Theologically, it is described as a conative state about a theoretical crystallization of future reality for which faith is the signifier.⁶ This is to say it orients desire (bracketing religious content). Yet this raises more questions. Perhaps the most pressing is “for whom?” Hoping, as a state of desiring, does not entail positive ends, as can be seen with even a cursory exploration of daily news or social media, let alone critical inquiry. If utopia picks out a better state of affairs than that which currently obtains, then the concepts must be linked in a way that is not worryingly contingent.⁷

This seems pertinent to political characterizations of progress, especially within Western ideas of liberal democracy.⁸ Is progress, in a general sense, necessarily linked to (in this case, *political*) hope, and how is that defined? This raises a more fundamental question about hope’s function. In light of the “for whom” query just noted, *what function does it serve for those benefactors?* How is it deployed to provide those benefits? What ramifications do these deployments have for political subjects within a given socio-political context? Who (individually and collectively) is *excluded* from its instrumentality and teleology?

Despite these uncertainties, recent accounts of utopian consciousness, describing alternate futurities, have attempted to recapture utopian hope within their projects in both

⁵ Even Bloch, with his material situation of hope as a potentiality within (human) matter, has to allow for the “nothing” (1995: 63, 194) within utopian impulse as the “anti-utopia.”

⁶ Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)

⁷ This contingency is not, notably, a concern for St. Augustine’s *civitas Dei*. I will argue in the third chapter that utopian hope and religious faith, in a processual utopian context, are equivalent. An Augustinian variant can avail itself of the resources common to theistic variants of ethical ‘better-ness,’ to include its grounding in necessary goodness accruing to God’s nature.

⁸ This is not, of course, limited to Post-Enlightenment contexts insofar as its constructions flow logically (and theologically) from religious precursors. This granted, contemporary neo-liberal discourse provides a clear case of this phenomenon for use here.

senses of the term noted at the outset.⁹ A utopian imagination, construed as affective hope, ‘paints pictures’ of different possible realities. These images, deployed within aesthetic performativity, supply not just the grounds for a positive conative phenomenology ‘towards’ alternate ways things could be, but they also serve as candidates for its content. Thus, as in the political gloss just mentioned, hope is instrumental within these proposals as well. It serves a methodological function while also providing an associated teleology towards which utopian effort is targeted. Yet additional questions remain. Can utopian hope be distinguished from its political counterpart? Do these distinct constructions forge a significant connection between (utopian) hope and a subjectively better state of affairs? Some scholars, such as Cristina Sharpe, might be interpreted as opposing this line of inquiry altogether.¹⁰ Perhaps, as she might be initially read, the work to be done in the case of marginalized existences must remain physically and temporally in their past and its entailed, present constituents.

In this chapter, I argue that utopian hope must be distinguished from (*merely*) political constructions and their related uses. They are altogether separate. While political relationships might exist in all socio-cultural interactions, we need to go deeper in order to better understand what is happening in the literature exploring utopian possibilities, alternate futures, and ‘better’ states of affairs. At least one way that these perspectives differ is orientation to the status quo. As a preview, I situate these versions of hope as types of affectivity that remain teleological in their function.¹¹ I unpack its

⁹ See Weeks (2011), Muñoz (2009), and Ahmed (2017) as examples.

¹⁰ I will, later, take up her (2016) discussion of temporal displacement and conflict in the case of black being in the aftermath of slavery.

¹¹ My use of “teleology” here needs clarifying vis-à-vis instrumentality. If the latter refers to ends determined by agents and the former to ends determined by nature, then the concepts seem at loggerheads. This dichotomy, within Blochian materialism, is a mistake. For him (and others, to include Adorno, Benjamin, and contemporary scholars such as Levitas), utopian hope remains within human materiality yet

‘merely-political’ construction compared to its emplacement by Bloch and others in accounts of utopian consciousness. It turns out that the latter variant (and not the former) is what is being recuperated in recent accounts of alternative futures. In fact, even those scholars who concentrate on attending to the debris of shattered, collective hopes rely on the same theoretical starting points to orient their efforts. This latter approach provides rich, empirical grounds for operationalizing the temporal constituents within utopian theories. Throughout, I demonstrate that merely-political constructions of hope distort notions of progress by first conflating them with reified power relationships and then concretizing them within a particular paradigm. This has the effect of obscuring what Bloch calls the “remainder” of human effort that is unachieved (and/or discarded) in the past/present (or past-within-present) and which demands that utopia (at least partially) is generated from a *lack* within human consciousness. To put the idea differently, utopia comes from a place of loss.¹²

2.2 A Tale of Two Hopes

Before explaining what is meant by “merely-political,” I need to revisit the distinction made between utopian and ideological impulses by Karl Mannheim a century

aims for a currently uncognizable goal – a purpose (i.e., a *telos*) – which comprises the ultimate ethical good for humankind. Bloch refers to this as the *summum bonum* or “the Absolute.” Agents and nature are thus combined as coordinates for utopian hope’s current location and its future purpose. I am grateful to Michael Moehler for urging me to clarify the term here.

To say a bit more, some might object to this term (teleology) as a result of perceived commitments within a worldview bounded by material finitude. This is also a mistake in that it is hard to see how any account of utopia, descriptive or processual, can be completely without ‘eventual’ content. Utopian proposals rely on the presumption that there is a metaphysically possible world in which an ideal state of affairs (or at least a *more* ideal state of affairs – see Gaus, 2016, for a “non-ideal” theory) obtains as compared to that existing in the actual world. This is opposed to a merely logical or noological possibility. It must be metaphysically possible, or what is the point? As such, there is a ‘purpose driven-ness’ to utopian effort. It is necessarily teleological.

¹² This highlights the importance of perspectives such as Sharpe’s (2016) for utopian imagination. In an Augustinian qua Christian sense, this represents a loss of relationship with God as a result of sin.

ago. This distinction does not rule out similarities – in fact, they are strikingly similar in their relation to reality, it turns out.¹³ Yet they are diametrically opposed when it comes to their relationship to the existing simulacrum of normative power.¹⁴ To illustrate this connection, Mannheim examines the ways in which socio-cultural epistemologies and psychologies are created and then affirmed in a certain context.¹⁵ His analysis, beginning with the default presentation of religious prescriptions as the epistemological grounds for social knowledge, challenges any notion of self-determination in the case of our individual (and corporate) “ways of knowing the world.”

Mannheim insists that it is only when we are forced to self-reflect on why we consider a certain world-explaining viewpoint to be uniquely valid can we see the ways in which our social ontologies are bounded.¹⁶ This self-reflection has become more commonplace in recent times as the result of a fragmentation of political viewpoints (and their associated bids for power). This disintegration of a single, unified disseminator of social knowledge, ever-more-swiftly enacted since the inauguration of the Enlightenment and the entailed integration of science into politics, has resulted in opposing political theorists’ attempts to unmask the foundations of their opponents’ efforts to control the collective consciousness. This has resulted in a crisis of “uncovered consciousness,” within all political forms of competition.¹⁷ The goal of political debate is to uncover and discredit an opponent’s social supports (epistemological and psychological) underwriting

¹³ In that they are both *incongruous* to reality. Utopia is also *transcendent* to reality. See Ricoeur (1986, 272).

¹⁴ For an explanation of what I mean by “*simulacrum*,” see Baudrillard (1981). In brief, it picks out the obtaining political power structure in a specific socio-cultural context. More later.

¹⁵ What follows is taken from his 1936 (1-54).

¹⁶ Or, as he puts it, when we come upon an obstacle that “throws us back upon ourselves” (ibid, 47).

¹⁷ Ibid, 33-54.

her *Weltanschauung* in an all-or-nothing struggle for dominance. This has forced us, as subjects, to confront the constructed nature of our own ‘realities.’¹⁸

Although this summary could lead us far afield (with regard to political theory in general and political strategy/rhetoric specifically), I’m interested mainly in two of its entailments: 1) the way in which political competition, so described, *bounds the scope of political struggle*, and 2) how and where utopian theory/praxis might integrate into this “unmasking of the unconscious.” (something ubiquitous, according to Mannheim, in a post-Enlightenment context.) The latter theme will be explored in a subsequent section. As for the former, Mannheim uses his proposed description of political-cum-sociological functioning to construct his definition of politics (which is worth quoting at length):

The other danger which arises from this alliance between science and politics is that the crises affecting political thinking also become the crises of scientific thought. [...] Politics is conflict and tends increasingly to become a life-and-death struggle. The more violent this struggle became, the more tightly did it grip the emotional undercurrents which formerly operated unconsciously but all the more intensively, and forced them into the open domain of the conscious. [...] Political discussion possesses a character fundamentally different from academic discussion. It seeks not only to be in the right but also to demolish the basis of its opponent’s social and intellectual existence. Political discussion, therefore, penetrates more profoundly into the existential foundation of thinking than the kind of discussion which thinks only in terms of a few selected “points of view” and considers only the “theoretical relevance” of an argument. Political conflict, since it is from the very beginning a rationalized form of the struggle for social predominance, attacks the social status of the opponent, his public prestige, and his self-confidence.¹⁹

This begins to clarify what I am gesturing at using the compound term “merely-political.”

There is a difficulty, perhaps even an impossibility, for politically-based struggle to stray outside of specific limits – it is wedded not only to the idea of its own *Weltanschauung*

¹⁸ In an ideal sense. It is not as if humankind, due to the modern wedding of science and politics and its associated unmasking of the collective (i.e., social) unconscious, has experienced an evolutionary ‘leap’ in collective self-awareness. Mannheim is making the point, correctly I think, that the concept of being enmeshed within a specific ideology is far less arcane to the general public than it has been in the past.

¹⁹ Ibid, 38. The distinction he makes here between political and academic thought will be revisited.

but also to the destruction of its opponent's alternative. Politics becomes an "ultimate fighting" cage, populated by gladiators in the disguise of political agents.

Using this insight as a backdrop, Mannheim goes on to suggest that these dogmatic political positions are what is meant by "ideology." He situates this concept using two tropes: the total and the particular. The latter is focused on the individual and her psychology; the former encompasses the 'other's' world-view and conceptual apparatus.²⁰ According to him, following the disintegration of the Judeo-Christian "unitarian" construct of the world and beginning with Kant and proceeding through Hegel and Marx (and others), the referent of the term "world" moved from an ontological unity to something only considered in reference to a "knowing mind." That is to say, the field of play in dispute moved from the psychological to the noological. It is no longer a question of a political opponent being misguided or self-deceived, it is a question of her ability to think accurately at all.

This argument can be applied to the entirety of the normative simulacrum under consideration here. The dominant ideology underwriting obtaining power structures is thus granted the status of 'correct' thinking. Opponents are, as a result, considered unable to parse reality correctly and as such are intellectually marginalized. Political rhetoric ironically mirrors its theological precursor (which it was supposed to replace): the victor determines *what exists* within the realm of (socio-cultural) representation. Bacon's idols of the den, tribe, theater, and market become *religious* ideals – representations consecrated as "really real" and granted divinity by the sacrament of political dominance.²¹ To paraphrase Mannheim, ontology is derived from political

²⁰ Ibid, 57-66.

²¹ *Novum Organum*, Book 1, sections 44-61 (1952 ed.).

experience. The upshot is that the dominant ideology, in this political sense, refers to that system of reasoning seeking to both validate and replicate the status quo.

Now we can see that future hope, in the context of a political simulacrum's representation of 'progress,' is only applicable to a narrowly curtailed ontology of *what can be allowed to be* (and an epistemology of how it might be understood). This relationship is controlled by the power structures holding sway. It cannot stray outside those bounds without the sanction of the dominant political powers. Its corresponding referent (what is allowed to be hoped for) also must 'exist' within the same restrictions. Thus hope, when tied to political constructions of progress, entails an alignment of interests between the object of that hope and the dominant power 'player' on the scene. A stronger way of putting this would be to say that, if an object of political hope were allowed that strayed outside the cannon of this pre (and pro) scribed ontology, the simulacrum would cease to exist in its current form. To use theological language, administering the sacrament with an unconsecrated host would concatenate the conditions of its own existence, communion between it and its supplicants would cease.

To summarize, hope, when used to pick out a certain conative state towards some condition/objective in the future, is rigorously limited in its formulation within a strictly ideological context.²² These limitations force it into service as a tool serving a narrow, deified ontology granted the status of being 'truth' by the prevailing political powers-that-be. As such, it can only serve the status quo.²³ Notions of progress and hoped for

²² There is a possible objection here. Utopian consciousness might be thought to have its own ideological constituents (in fact, Marx and Engels would insist that it does). I cannot explore the concept of utopian ideology here, so I will only say that I am using the term as Mannheim has explained it in the context of political development and competition, referenced to post-Enlightenment thought (1936, 59-75).

²³ This status quo is not limited to only serving caricatured privileged groups, such as the ubiquitous group of "old, white men" used, often deservedly so, as punching bags in contemporary social-cultural analyses. Any space in which the prevailing valences of power favor a particular group serves as an example of a

better states of affairs, when cast as objects of politically sanctioned hope, then suffer the same limitations. The dangers of this kind of hope are legion. These also accrue equally (and necessarily if Mannheim is correct) to academic qua intellectual proposals *when these choose to align themselves with an existent political party or position*. Mannheim puts it this way: “The more intellectuals became party functionaries, the more they lost the virtue of receptivity and elasticity which they had brought with them from their previous labile situation.”²⁴ Even Macchiavelli, as Alison McQueen demonstrates, changed perspectives in his later writings to become fundamentally “wary of the promises of redemptive politics.”²⁵ So much for this variant of hope (and its associated notions of progress). In the next section, I explore an alternative.

2.3 Utopian Hope Within the Not-Yet-Conscious

I now turn to merely-political hope’s utopian competitor. As recent proposals attempting to recapture a functional element of utopian hope rely on his thought, I will confine myself to Bloch’s constructions here.²⁶ I will also limit myself to brief glosses of his conclusions, as a full exegesis would be beyond the scope of a book, let alone a single chapter.

Hope is, for Bloch, more than a conative attitude that carries imaginations pregnant with utopian content. It is something ontological within matter and instantiated in a unique relationship vis-à-vis human material existence. This is a result of the (for

‘status quo’ that then is served uniquely by merely-political hope operating in that space. Ricouer (1986, 273), “...ideologies relate mainly to dominant groups; they comfort the collective ego of these...”. See also Althusser (1971), esp. 106-126, for a (modified) Marxist analysis of ideology.

²⁴ Mannheim, 1936, 38

²⁵ 2018, 97

²⁶ Yet I will at times acknowledge amplificatory work by Benjamin, Adorno, St. Augustine, and others.

him) unique nature of human consciousness and being which is, to use the German, *Bewusstsein* and *Sein* respectively.²⁷ (Heidegger's search for the essence of *Da Sein* – roughly, “being itself” – within *Being and Time* thus also becomes important to Bloch's exploration of utopian impulses within humanity.²⁸) This ability to investigate ourselves allows us to interrogate our own existence and its requisite conditions of possibility such that substantive evaluations are possible. This is to say that we can question both who we are (being reflexive about our identity and ontological status) and where we have been/are/might be going. To put this latter point differently, we can hold in tension the relative necessity of the past and the contingency of the future while grappling with the presence of both in ‘the present.’ Utopian hope, for Bloch, depends on these temporal constituents in what he refers to as the Not-Yet-Conscious grounded in the Real-Possible.²⁹

This ability to conduct self-analysis (individually and collectively) reveals something else central to Bloch's utopian theory. This is what he refers to as “the darkness,” which is an incomprehensible remainder or block to perception left over within human experience, accomplishment, events, etc.³⁰ Another way to say this is that there is always something missing upon self-examination. This darkness forms a “null” in the core of our existence, or our self-awareness. We somehow know that there is something more, something closer to the ‘Absolute’ that is the culmination of utopian longing. This is also represented throughout his writing as a trace running through

²⁷ This also, in a religious sense, recalls the concept of the *imago Dei* – the image of God – implanted within humanity at creation. For a contemporary account of this concept, which includes exegesis and deployment of canonical and contemporary formulations, see Peterson (2016).

²⁸ (1953). Heidegger's thought is central to Muñoz' utopian proposal mentioned in chapter five.

²⁹ 1995, 114-180, 195-222 and 2000, 191-196

³⁰ Ibid 180-186, 189, 193

collective and individual consciousnesses.³¹ This can be found throughout aesthetic/artistic expression in various forms, of which his clear preference is music. The largest unified section of his *The Spirit of Utopia* is dedicated to what he titles “the philosophy of music,” in which he attempts to locate these traces/flashes of collective utopian striving in various composers’ styles and individual works.³² Its strongest expression he christens “a Luciferan spirit” that attempts to break free of the current bounds of humankind’s possibilities in the search for light, for space, or (to use his words) that “dark-bright” singularity that implodes what is in order to make way for what might be.³³

It is easy to get caught up in the orgiastic, even chiliastic, language used to describe the conditions that catalyze an active, affective, and focused utopian hope here; however, what seems especially pertinent is its placement.³⁴ It is experientially both individual and collective while also a consequence of the metaphysical makeup of human existence. This places it in stark opposition to the political construction of the concept I have shown to be impoverished in both its potential and content. Bloch is suggesting that

³¹ As well as through various works of aesthetic performativity. Ibid, 178 and following. More accurately, Bloch uses the terms “image-trace” and “flashes” indicating evidence of utopian insight. He correctly gives credit to St. Augustine as the first utopian theorist to identify this phenomenon (2000, 195). Thus St. Augustine: “I am aware of something within me that gleams and flashes before my soul; were this perfected and fully established in me, that would surely be eternal life.” (*De Trinitate xii, c.7, n.10*).

³² 2000, 34-164.

³³ Ibid 62-66. “Luciferan” refers to the angel of light and is opposed to “satanic,” which he identifies in *The Principle of Hope* as the agency within the possibility of the Nothing, the alternate, anti-utopian possibility for humanity should the Absolute” not be realized (1995, 12, 311).

³⁴ Bloch’s integration of theological symbolism can lend itself to a superficially messianic analysis. When compared to Mannheim’s “inventory” of utopian impetus, chiasm seems clearly to entail a belief in utopia’s “breaking into” current reality as a singularity of pregnant deliverance. Mannheim’s exemplar of this type of utopianism is Münzer and the Anabaptist movement in Southern Germany as well as, surprisingly, contemporary anarchism exemplified by Bakunin and others (1936, 211-225). Bloch’s variant is processual *within* time, while positioning traces of the past, present, and future as constitutive within the ‘stuff’ of material, active utopian hope. Perhaps ironically, St. Augustine would also be at odds with Münzer on this topic. See Nina Rismal (2017) for an account of processual utopia that aligns with my assessment while, on the other hand, suggesting a stark difference between Bloch and Adorno that I find slightly overblown. See the following footnote.

utopian hope runs through the fiber of every human, no matter what her state circumstantially. Put differently, *not* to have this impulse, this trace of something missing, this null realized in day-to-day existence, indicates that either we have arrived already at the Absolute, or utopian, state of existence or *that we have lost an essential part of what it is to be human*. The call to attend to this condition is what Bloch (with Benjamin, Adorno, and others) emphasizes throughout his summaries of the various genres of artistic and literary expression highlighting what he deems to be expressions of this longing within humanity breaking into open expression.³⁵

Thus utopian hoping directly challenges current notions of accepted reality, as the latter entails the just-described inescapable darkness, or lack of completeness, in its makeup. The goal of utopian hope is to ultimately remedy that lack, even if we cannot concretely describe or imagine what human existence might look like once it is achieved. This active hoping, this affective stance informing everyday performativity, exists within material reality and is embodied within human performance. It uses the “stuff” of today (the Real-Possible) to make possible the novum (the Not-Yet-Conscious) of human existence.

That this striving is an *ethical* struggle is also clear. It is an ever-pending, yet-still-active move from what is to what *should* be. The novum, for Bloch and all

³⁵ Adorno seems determined to emphasize the negation of ‘what is’ as the referent for this trace (see Bloch and Adorno, “Something’s Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing,” in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988: 12). This has caused some to suggest that he is nihilistic about utopia. The account cited in the previous footnote is one example. Utopia might be, for him, simply referring to what is not (i.e., “no place”) when for Bloch, his detailed and enthusiastic program of examining performative artefacts for traces of utopian striving seems to be more sanguine. I’m not convinced. The wording might be different, but for Bloch (and Mannheim, 1936, 192-193, and Ricouer, 1986, 272-273) the shattering of what exists now defines utopian function. Benjamin, in contrast, concentrates on past traces of dreaming and loss within historical re-construction to emphasize utopian functioning as referenced to utopian perspectives.

processual utopian theories, is the summum bonum, the ultimate ‘good.’³⁶ We can’t jump over the Real-Possible to achieve it; there is no chiliastic metamorphosis that transports us from here to there. What utopia looks like will be incomprehensible to current apprehension; indeed it might not even involve an ‘us’ that is currently recognizable. It remains a fleeting figure, a trace, a recognition of historical loss and future possibility combined in a present, pregnant tension.

This is a very different conception of hope (and progress) than the merely-political variant analyzed in the previous section. If anything, that version is easier to understand (and grapple with) than the partial glimpses of future possibilities (as always-limited and conatively-targeted objectives) that Bloch affords us here. Yet it might be that to recuperate the concept of a utopian impulse within the material being of humankind demands its own requisite faith as the “essence of things hoped for,” as a striving grounded in the “evidence of things not seen.”³⁷

2.4 Hope Within Normative Power Structures

I have broadly described how these two variants of hope differ; however, it will be helpful to bifurcate their function more precisely to understand how contemporary proposals deploy them. The position each occupies within normative space determines both the ‘level’ at which they operate with respect to power relationships within that space and also the vector of efficient causation orienting each variant *vis-à-vis* the normative sphere of power as such. This should clarify the dangers and benefits accruing

³⁶ Bloch (1995, 298-305)

³⁷ Hebrews 11:1 (ESV). I examine the intertwined nature of religious faith and utopian hope in the next chapter.

to each of them in the context of recent attempts to recuperate hope's function in support of utopian projects.

Recall that merely-political hope is thoroughly enmeshed in what is often referred to as the dominant (and their political competitors') narratives. While the term might be saturated due to overuse, it effectively represents how socio-cultural story-telling and modes of systemic reproduction combine to sustain a status quo. This process is not merely a 'holding on' to power and privilege (for the benefit of those exercising greater power quotients in a specific socio-politicontext), it is most importantly a process of *re-creation*.

While this ongoing genesis is perhaps not *ex-nihilo*, it is important that *it appear to be so from a certain perspective*. This is because the political realm of debate is one requiring a totalizing variant of ideology. It argues not only for the correctness of its own position but also for the incorrectness of its opponent. This includes the charge that an opponent is not only mistaken but fundamentally deficient in her ability to parse reality. When read inversely, it entails the claim that one's own position is *metaphysically* 'truer' (capital "T"), and as such is grounded in 'the way things are.' The status quo cannot merely be an extension of what has been (although it is certainly that). It must also be a re-formulation based on a uniquely advantaged epistemological framework to which is ceded the ability to access and interpret reality. To elide these perspectives, it is, *mutatis mutandis*, an illusionary act of (re) creation seemingly justified *ex nihilo* yet constructed and grounded *ex post facto*.

Baudrillard would insist that this 'reality production' actually *is* an act of *ex nihilo* creation. *It just remains exactly that, nothing*. It is the tattered and faded (and, finally,

rotted away) map of Empire with which Baudrillard illustrates the function of political simulation.³⁸ Forms of normative representation are merely representations without concrete referents. Their power stems from the ways in which they are apprehended or accepted (and, as such, justified *ex post facto*). This puts the function of their variant of hope in stark relief.³⁹ Thus Baudrillard:

This is the mythic vision of the original crime, the vision of the alteration of the world in the play of seduction and appearances. This is the form the mystery takes. The great philosophical question used to be ‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’ Today, the real question is: ‘Why is there nothing rather than something?’⁴⁰

and:

To recover the trace of the nothing, of the incompleteness, the imperfection of the crime, we have, then, to take something away from the reality of the world. To recover the constellation of the mystery [...], we have to take something away from the accumulation of reality and language. We have to take words from language one by one, take things from reality one by one, wrest the same away from the same. Behind every fragment of reality, something has to have disappeared in order to ensure the continuity of the nothing – without, however, yielding to the temptation of annihilation, for disappearance has to remain a living disappearance, and the trace of the crime a living trace. [...] Now, the image can no longer imagine the real, because it is the real. It can no longer dream it, since it is its virtual reality.⁴¹

It is not that narratives of progress and hope for future, better conditions merely support obtaining power relationships. They *create* them. They justify/sustain them.

³⁸ Baudrillard (1983, 1-3). These spheres, representing normative jurisdictions, are for him political simulacra. I will use this term throughout what follows, and this gloss should help clarify their referent.

³⁹ This phenomenon is, according to Gramsci, a hegemonic function of the political apparatus that derives its ability to perpetuate itself at least partly (if not primarily) from the willingness of subjects ‘to be normed’ within that representational construct (1971, 145). He proposes two forms of the normative structure of society. The first is the culturally-encoded hegemony noted here. He calls this “civil society.” The second is coercive in nature, and this he calls the “state” –noting that the state norms those who do not acquiesce to that hegemony. I here reduce both to *due rovesce della stessa medaglia* - two sides of the same coin. This description gestures at the possible ways in which subjects both hold and relinquish power in these contexts as well as reveal their (collective) interests in their actions to either sustain or challenge these representational forms.

⁴⁰ Baudrillard (1996, 2)

⁴¹ Ibid, 3-4. This is a visceral picture of both: 1) the idolatry inherent in the socio-political simulacrum consecrated as privilege’s god, and 2) why privileged agents are uniquely impoverished when critiquing quotients of possibility within normative simulacra that affirm their privileged status. Baudrillard’s reference to destroying and then recreating language informs my intuition that ‘to utopia’ will require a parallel forging of a new utopian dialect. More on this in chapter five.

They re-create them. Lather, rinse, repeat. And in the process, they “take something away from the accumulation of reality and language.” They must ensure that “something has disappeared to ensure the continuity of the nothing.” They destroy in order to self-reify. What they destroy or make disappear, I suggest, includes the agentic status of ‘the other,’ her existence, her autonomy, her justice, her hope qua faith, her *salvation!* Merely-political hope-cum-ideology stands in an eschatological relationship with specific political ends; it manufactures the grounds and animates the impetus for their apocalypse (as an unveiling). It, hope/ideology, is the god of ‘really real nothingness’ – its universe fashioned and perpetuated by worshipping subjects at simulated altars behind which not even the tattered remnants of deity remain. Enter utopian hope.

There is an irony here that is astonishing. If Bloch is right, if yearning for the Absolute recognized within the trace extant within all human experience is part of *Bewusstsein* and *Da Sein*, then utopian hope alone references ontological being *as such*. It is aimed at fundamental (for Bloch, human) existence, and we are now able to see its relationship to normative simulacra. The latter’s function is that of an imposter; it poses as the real and, as a result, it creates and embodies an image, an idol to which appropriate obeisance is demanded. Utopian hope (as the real subsumed within nothingness) can have no other aim than to rupture this simulation (this nothingness disguised as the real). Holding in tension past loss and future possibility, it aims to shatter the present. Ricoeur puts it this way:

[A] utopia shatters a given order; and it is only when it starts shattering order that it is a utopia. A utopia is then always in the process of being realized. Ideology, in contrast, does not have the problem of being realized, because it is the legitimization of what is. [...] ideologies relate mainly to dominant groups; they comfort the collective ego of these dominant groups. Utopias, on the other hand, are more naturally supported by ascending groups and therefore more usually by the lower strata of the society. [...] Ideologies are directed more towards the past and so are stricken by obsolescence,

whereas utopias have a futuristic element.⁴²

Merely-political and utopian hope are then in opposition (in multiple ways) within socio-cultural contexts. This much has already been demonstrated. The latter half of this passage, however, further distinguishes the functioning of these opposing conative states. This can be seen in the observation Mannheim makes concerning the type of hope naturally supported by different strata within these political *simulacra*, and it concerns the level at which each operates.

Recall that Michel de Certeau analyzes spheres of power in his examination of how subjects live within them.⁴³ He divides the levels of operational employment of that power into the categories termed “strategic” and “tactical.” Only those agents holding and wielding political (and thus, normative qua juridical) power can operate at the strategic level. This is to say that the dominant narrative creates and enforces the rules. Subjects, in the practice of “everyday life,” live and act at the tactical level. Every-day actions, many of which must skirt the rules in order to get by, take the form of tactical interventions within that realm of normative jurisdiction. To use the vocabulary used to this point, these normative jurisdictions are political simulacra in Baudrillard’s sense. Once this is recognized, it is clear why those with relatively unfettered agency within any simulacrum have a vested interest its continued existence. They are then part of a

⁴² Ricouer (1986, 273). This is what he calls Mannheim’s “criteriology” of utopia. He adds to this a typology and the movement of that typology towards (to Ricouer’s lights) an inevitable decline of utopia. I set this latter conclusion aside as a charitable reading of Mannheim must include its historical setting (between two global conflicts and domestic political unrest during the formation and rise of the Nazi party). This context should also be considered when analyzing the Frankfurt School’s insistence on a negative construal of utopia as the way in which to address it (see Adorno, 1970, Bloch and Adorno, 1988 (cited in various footnotes) and, as exegesis, Nina Rismal, 2017, for an account of that negativity described as *Utopieverbot*). To my lights, this highlights Bloch’s courage displayed in the insistence on a positive construction of human utopian impulse *despite* his historical context.

⁴³ De Certeau (1980: 34-39, 67-68, 91-110). It is revealing that he shows how everyday know-how *precedes* theory. Theoretical inquiry must “look into” (*voir*) and “contemplate” (*theōrein*) what *people do*. This foregoing knowledge comprises the resources for stories – outlining *performative tactics* or “know-how” (*savoir-faire*).

strategic scheme of maneuver (to use military terminology). They operate from the top down – which means that their resources are those of the prevailing ideology, the product of the storytelling that provides distorted visions of progress supported by merely-political hope.⁴⁴

Those actors relatively restricted on what I have called a scale of agency within that simulacrum cannot deploy the same resources. They must maneuver in a different arena in virtue of their *imagic* (i.e., aesthetically represented) status which is (re)constructed and perpetuated as a result of strategic normative power. Remaining within the military paradigm, these populations can only act *tactically*. Their ability to “jockey for position” consists of isolated acts or interventions, conducted individually or collectively, and these tactics inscribe a peculiar dance (within its respective, normed space) that seeks to rupture or disturb the status quo.⁴⁵ As a result, their vector of utopian striving is from the bottom up. The resources available for this kind of effort thus incur both a penalty and a benefit. On the one hand, the sheer power or scope of achievable interventions available to them are not those of their strategic counterparts. On the other, the possible forms they might take seem relatively unrestricted.⁴⁶

I mentioned at the beginning of this section that a more precise discrimination between these versions of hope would help to clarify their associated dangers and benefits. The elephant now clearly visible in the room reveals the primary danger of the strategic variant. This is the menace accruing to its ability to crystallize existing

⁴⁴ This applies, then, to *all* subjects considered to have relative ‘privilege’ within the *simulacrum*, regardless of their individual claim to political power within it. I explore this in more detail later.

⁴⁵ While Mannheim and Ricoeur seem to prefer the term “shatter,” perhaps due to its dramatic effect, I will refer to these as ruptures. Considered processually and aligning the concept with Bloch’s description of the Real-Possible and the Not-Yet-Conscious (1995, 195-222 and 2000, 188-191), it seems better to depict utopian impulse as a *series of attempted ruptures* that seek an eventual shattering.

⁴⁶ The difficulty becomes less about what might constitute a tactic, simpliciter, but rather what might be *effectively recognized and responded to* as a tactical intervention.

limitations on future possibilities in the case of a prevailing political realm of normative influence. It thus becomes almost trivial for merely-political hope, and its necessarily-linked notions of political progress referenced to a limited set of coordinates, to ‘paper over’ instances of suffering and violence. This is, the reader will recall, the minefield the privileged are faced with when attempting to be allies of processual utopia.

An additional point I’ll make in this context is that I do not want to restrict this phenomenon as being uniquely an ‘American thing.’ As Mannheim claims, although ideology, in its total form, has been solidified ever more concretely since the Enlightenment, its roots and forms of expression are clearly present throughout historical forms of normative representation.⁴⁷ In fact, his description of the collapse of the primacy of religious ideological forms (and its associated assumption of more global, ontological unity) does an admirable job of highlighting the political variables inhering even within religious forms of normative jurisdiction (*canon and practice*). Perhaps what we are currently experiencing is a concentration of certain totalitarian ideological forms that might (now) be mature within democratic politico-economic expression (2020-2021 certainly seems a clear example). These dynamics are thus more accurately located (*historically and contemporaneously*) within a more eclectic context of democratic ideology instead of being limited to a single instance.

Yet it would be churlish not to point out that merely-political hope also has a perceived, and real, benefit. As Gramsci has taught us, hegemony depends on the acquiescence of subjects.⁴⁸ The majority are content to be normed by the simulacrum. While this may sound ominous, from a practical standpoint (and to a certain degree) *it*

⁴⁷ Mannheim (1936, chapter 2).

⁴⁸ See footnote 143

works. This results in what Ricouer refers to as the “inertia of political ideology.”⁴⁹ If the system did not function at some experiential and empirical level, it would collapse with the failure of subjects to worship at its altars. To insist that versions of liberal democracy have not provided positive opportunities to many, and improved marginalized group’s lives in certain cases, serves to radicalize the resultant dialogue such that it becomes more difficult for a theory of processual utopia to gain traction.

This demonstrable benefit of political hope serves, in turn, to illuminate a corresponding danger of its utopian alternative. This is the danger of it collapsing into the political variant as a result of the dialectical radicalization just illuminated. Recall that Manichaeon depictions of opposing ideologies exemplify the totalitarian type of ideological-cum-political conflict explicated above. An unyielding bifurcation of this kind must, given our analysis, inhabit a merely-political arena of contest. It then becomes a battle of ideologies instead of a rupture of utopian hope disrupting ideological rhetoric *from within* – initiating a utopian dialectic.⁵⁰

There is an additional danger of utopian hope that I will only mention here and explore in detail later. This is just what, if anything, could serve as a *constraint on content* for utopian struggle realized within acts of rupture within normative simulacra.

Bloch, while canvassing artistic content for evidence of the utopian trace within

⁴⁹ 1976, 23. The last paragraph on this page nicely summarizes the positive, pragmatic effects of political ideology as a result of its inherent conservatism.

⁵⁰ This clarifies the qualitative difference between these hopes. Bloch positions utopian hope as ontologically present in the ‘stuff’ of human consciousness. Thus its instantiation coincides with humanity, simpliciter. “From within” then takes on different meanings for each variant. Yet the same phrase also emphasizes the joint nature of utopian struggle required for substantive improvement. This possible slide into merely-political forms of hope is particularly dangerous in times like we are experiencing currently. It will clearly require focused commitment and an associated humility with regard to personal/corporate perspectives in order to remain within the boundaries of utopian struggle while navigating such divisive political landscapes. In chapter four, I argue that merely-political hope, and its strategic maneuvers, embodies what Audre Lorde (1984) refers to as the “master’s tools.”

humanity, does little more than gesture at this concern. Perhaps the closest he gets to a contentful characterization of what could be the ‘stuff’ of this affective stance is when he suggests that it is the content of daydreams, over and against night dreams, that bear witness to the Not-Yet-Conscious of utopian imagination present (spatially and temporally) in our consciousnesses.⁵¹ Specific to daydreams are images always indicating a bettering of our condition. We have agency within them (as opposed to night dreams), and we mold their interior worlds in ways that reflect improving possibilities.

This might be linguistically beautiful as metaphoric imagery, but it does little to clarify what could possibly be included or excluded from this struggle. Recall that we have already noted the ethical terms in which Bloch couches the ultimate aim, the Absolute, of humanity’s utopian impulse. It is the summum bonum of human existence. We can grant that utopia always aims at rupturing the status quo without also requiring that the status quo be altogether (and always-already) *evil*. Another way to put this would be to remember that Nietzsche warns against just this kind of ethical recharacterization of non-optimal states of affairs.⁵² I have argued that utopia, conceptually, should be treated as a verb, as an action word in the Blochian sense of actuating utopian hope. This entails a resistance to efforts to crystallize a conceptualization of utopia with fine-grained

⁵¹ See Bloch (1995, 77-106 and 2000, 188-191). This section is a critique of Freud’s dream analysis, maintaining instead a different locus for each type of dreaming. Daydreams, for Bloch, are generated by the Not-Yet-Conscious, while night dreams flow from the No-Longer-Conscious. This latter descriptor applies, for Bloch, to what Freud describes as the subconscious over which we have no control. It also is figured as a “sinking into darkness” accompanied by a lack of agency (on the part of the dreamer) during the dream. For a synopsis of the four primary characteristics he uses to distinguish day from night dreams, see Weeks (2011, 191-193).

⁵² (1887, sections 10-13) The crucial moment in his genealogical inquiry into the creation of morality is when “bad” or “strong” is conflated with “evil” and thus what was originally strong or powerful becomes unethical.

contours. This is not, however, the same thing as opening the floodgates to ‘just anything’ being a candidate for utopian action.⁵³

Despite these dangers, utopian hope has the unique advantage of stemming from the ‘real,’ from within humanity’s being itself.⁵⁴ As such, it challenges the constructed reality (or, nothingness) of merely-political simulacra. It is substance in contrast to image, oasis in place of mirage. While relegated to tactical maneuver, its possible forms are not bounded by the need to reinforce what ‘is.’ It challenges ideological idols from whatever vector it deems effective. This mirrors Certeau’s idea of ‘everyday life’ subjected to the pressures of strategically normed spaces. It also clarifies the opposing directionalities of utopia and dystopia from opposing starting points. Tonka highlights both of these vectors (here reading “simulacrum” for “city”):

The city is the proper place for a revolt, a revolution, for it is there that the banality and triviality of everyday life run their course. *A possibility that arises from a resistance to the class struggles and consciousness found in the residue of the conditioning operations of everydayness.* The city exposes itself as the public dump of social conflicts and dramas. The great ambiguity is lifted: by veiling its strategy with the city and the ideal of the city, *power unwittingly discloses its global project [...]. Rational argument battles the truth of everyday life.* Positivism suffers from a distortion between rational organization and this place of principle and interest which deploys its irrationalism, its utopia again. The functionalist philosophy of Le Corbusier is killed by urban practice. The vacant lot is still filled with old moles and history does not dig itself in. The dump is not useless, *nor is utopia, and contradiction even less so.* The tragedy of Capital plays itself out in the urban forum.⁵⁵

In the remainder of this chapter, I respond to what might be a central objection to the idea of an affective, future-oriented narrative of utopian hope. These concepts, for authors such as Cristina Sharpe writing from marginalized perspectives, are not included

⁵³ One of the goals of my project is to show that an appropriate *direction* is needed for utopian struggle.

⁵⁴ A Christian metaphysics can more easily allow for the image-trace of utopia to be present in the materiality of humankind. The *imago dei*, the ‘image of God’ resident within humans as a result of creation’s design, provides a ready-made container for this theoretical-cum-practical impulse. As such, materialistic challenges to the ability of theological variants of utopia, described perhaps as the kingdom of heaven, to provide explanatory resources for Bloch’s utopian totum, miss their mark insofar as they deny dualistic assumptions. See Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV).

⁵⁵ (2011, 166). This is taken from Howard (2017, 193); emphases mine.

in their accounts of marginalized striving. On a superficial reading, it might seem she would not be sympathetic to the optimistic way in which Bloch situates utopian affect as catalyzing utopian development. I will attempt to show that this conclusion is premature.

2.5 The Past Within Utopian Hope

What of accounts examining marginalized, suffering-filled pasts that must be dealt with in the present? Bloch directly addresses the inherent lack, or null, ever-present within human existence. This concept, however, might seem inadequate to address an identificational deficit in personhood, perhaps in the form of a history of enslavement, etc., existing within *present* struggles experienced as a differently-formed version of that slavery. Cristina Sharpe wrestles with just this kind of existential challenge to black existence. It is no accident that the subtitle of her book is “on blackness *and being*.” The critical conjunction in this case (to my lights) is that of grappling with what “blackness” signifies within a particular subset of “being,” in this case black consciousness. This is my focus in the remainder of this chapter.

2.5.1 The Arcades of Paris, Redemption and Memory in the Ruins of the Past

“History is like Janus; it has two faces. Whether it looks at the past or at the present, it sees the same things.”

- Maxime Du Camp, *Paris*, vol. 6, p. 315⁵⁶

Walter Benjamin’s prodigious rumination on the 19th century Paris arcades, an immense exercise in Parisian *flânerie*, is a testament to the enmeshment of the past within

⁵⁶ Benjamin (1999, 14 - epigraph)

the present.⁵⁷ Indeed the perspective of the detached watcher, focused strictly on sensory investigations of the phantasmagoria of commodity fetishism in the modern city, can only be captured in scenes (photographs, memoirs, etc.) that freeze past moments. Examining these requires a turning away from the future, a focus on retrospection. In this way, the *flâneur* possessed something like a god-like perspective of the city; she could contemplate holistically, over time and spatial distance, the transitivity, motion, and dissolution of observed and (re)constructed images indicative of what Guy Debord would later describe as “the society of the spectacle.”⁵⁸ It would seem an unlikely place to look for evidence of a utopian consciousness. In fact, Benjamin rarely mentions the word himself. Yet by deploying this perspective, he seems to align with what Jameson calls the “ideal mode of reading,” one that can put into conversation multiple temporalities encompassing individual and corporate pasts, presents, and possible futures.⁵⁹ Utopia is, in this way, ripped from limited now-time; it is, instead, no-time.

It is within the ruins of this paradoxical combination of loitering observer and her catalogued/photographed/frozen images of capitalistic finery (within spaces purposefully constructed as mimetic reflections of reality) that Benjamin forges a connection with utopian possibilities. A detailed summary of Benjamin’s thought is beyond the scope of this project. My purpose in this brief detour is to suggest that in his fragmented, unmediated style of historical inquiry we find an approach to the reconciliation (and even

⁵⁷ Primary references from which my analysis here derives include: (*Ibid*) 212-215; 463, N3,1; 471, N8,1; 473, N9a,1; 479, N13a,1; 833, D4; 841, F34; 854, M14; 857, D5; 867, Q21.

⁵⁸ See his 1994 titled as this phrase.

⁵⁹ 2009, 532

redemption) of the past within the present that is similar to what I interpret as happening within Sharpe's work.⁶⁰

Benjamin refers to a specific moment in which the temporal dialectic comes to a standstill. He describes this as a "moment of awakening" in which the "now of recognizability" connects perception with reality – in a luminary moment, as it were.⁶¹ This is in contrast to his observation, referencing a conversation with Bloch, that "History displays its Scotland Yard Badge."⁶² He connects this moment of awakening as a moment of rupture with the sleepwalking, dreamlike consciousness in which the phantasmagoria of commodity fetishism plays out its lifeless, gaudy existence.⁶³ The imagery he uses is dramatic. The Angel of History, facing the past, sees mountains of rubble piling on top of a "single catastrophe" that to him is one, ongoing event. The angel wants to stop it, literally "waken the dead" in order to redeem the past, but the wind of time (described here as the "storm from Paradise") is resolutely blowing him into the future, and as such he is caught, straining to reconcile history, yet arrested and rendered immobile (concretized) by mythological time.⁶⁴

⁶⁰ This is *only* an attempt to parse Sharpe's work in the context of utopian hope's relationship with marginalized existence across multiple temporalities. Indeed, as I will explain later, what I say here should also be interpreted as a 'try' (essayez in French) – one that comes with an attached request for corrective input if needed.

⁶¹ Benjamin (1999, 463-464, N3a,3)

⁶² Ibid (N3,4). One cannot help but note the similarity of these observations to the phenomenon of historical 'silencing' proposed by M. Trouillot (1995). His connection of how these silences shed light on historical erasure and its relationship to the physical environment is very similar to what Benjamin describes here. Cristina Sharpe (2016, 113-130) provides additional examples of this phenomenon in her section on "black redaction."

⁶³ This section is taken from his *On the Concept of History* written in 1940, Theses IX-XVII (transl. by Dennis Redmond, 2005). See also Abensour (2017, 85 and following) for an analysis of these images.

⁶⁴ This aligns with the blog "Pasts and Futures" (link: <https://blogs.ncl.ac.uk/pastsandfutures/>) in that freezing the past using socially-acceptable terminology (i.e., "oh, it was a little bit messy") does violence to that past in a way that hinders healing, both psychological and physical. The particular blog entry in this case discusses the U.K. requirement to provide adopted children with a "life book" to inform them about their biological parents and associated history. This tends to, unfortunately, be glossed in ways that do not tell the truth about the dysfunction of that past. While motivated by a desire to not 'hurt' the child, it does

The idea seems to be that only by recognizing the disaster of the ‘now’ within the phenomenology of waking up from a mimetic, sleepwalking reality can utopian consciousness be activated. This allows a shift in focus to future possibilities based on a more authentic what-has-been (Benjamin’s term). And this can only happen after the past (as myth) is unmasked, after it has been redeemed by its exposure to wakefulness that then destroys it.⁶⁵ It is in the intentional, critical contemplation of the crystallized past can we determine the latent possibilities (and silenced losses) within them.⁶⁶ Mythological history (that is to say, the narrative distilled within commodity fetishism in Benjamin’s case) is focused on forging a constructed unity with the past that it then idolizes and forces to return in various guises as a never-ending cycle. Focused on a suitably normed past, it is thus an attraction to *death*.⁶⁷

Benjamin hammers this concept home with his sections on “Fashion,” “The Eternal Return,” and “Advertising.” In these he exposes the evanescent contradictions within crystallized history’s cycle. One example would be capitalism, as a political and economic simulacrum, requiring a frozen past (based on myth but marketed as ‘what

violence to that child’s identity as well as hindering ongoing psychological ‘peace-making’ as part of the developmental process.

⁶⁵ An example of this shattering might be the current social consciousness in America concerning statues of confederate figures. As Trouillot notes, historical monuments have a powerful ability to (among other things): 1) silence certain historical actors or events, and 2) solidify a historical narrative in the form of an image supporting a normative interpretation of cultural-historical space. For an example of how this silencing functions, see his discussion of Sans Souci – both the person and the castle (1995, 31-70). If history must be unfrozen in order to release certain future possibilities from their current limitations, removing them might be seen as necessary to that process. Care, however, must be taken to ensure that an understandably emotional constituent in these efforts does not precipitate a move from utopian struggle to merely-political combat. One thinks of the recent destruction of monuments to *anti*-slavery advocates and marginalized scholars. Utopian struggle cannot be equivocated with just any unleashing of emotionality as a response to past or present oppression, even if those emotions and their attendant desires are crucial to utopia’s process.

⁶⁶ Abensour (2017, 64-85) refers to this as a “transmutation of utopia,” allowing Benjamin’s angel to make whole what has been smashed by the course of (mythological) history. See also Mariya Ivancheva (2006) for a synopsis of Benjamin’s thoughts on utopia with which I am sympathetic.

⁶⁷ This must be understood in order to parse Sharpe’s past-within-present heuristic examined below. More specifically, it is crucial to Sharpe’s analysis of black being within time to include its associated “non-being” seen within the trivialization of black death. See her 2016, 94-97 for an example of this asymmetry.

really happened') to support its own narrative of progress.⁶⁸ The cycle must be shattered in order to allow a shifting of focus to future possibility. The past-within-present, the what-has-been, must be unmasked by finally recognizing the now. We must awake from an ideological dream world.

2.5.2 The Perspective of 'The Wake'

In order to parse this historical perspective in the context of Sharpe's book, we need to carefully situate Benjamin's conceptualization of the *flâneur*. It is easy to reduce this actor-type to a caricature, one that implies indolent loitering (in perhaps a pejorative form). This is not what Benjamin intends. There is in his concept of his *flâneur* a tension between integration and non-integration. She is detached from the crowd but always a part of it, in this case deliberately choosing to observe 'from without,' yet always-already enmeshed in the observed present.

Benjamin deploys the *flâneur* as a perspectival construct instead of autonomous agent; it is, for him, a technology operationalized for historical-become-present observations. This can be seen not only in the way he chronicles the life and habits of Paris' most famous *flâneur*, but also in how he chooses to 'do history.'⁶⁹ He does not mediate it; he does not censor it. In a monumental collection of scenes, quotes, images, and ruminations he lays a vast variety of 'stuff' on the table for us to consider. This viewing, an act of both anamnesis and mimesis, invites the viewer, his *flâneur*, into a dialectic of the past-within-the-present, a recognition of the what-has-been within the flash of the now, and this is what I think Sharpe is doing in her book. This

⁶⁸ 1999, 62-81, 101-119 and 171-202

⁶⁹ Ibid, 228-387. In addition to his section on C. Baudelaire, see 417-455 on the function of the *flâneur*.

technological perspective shift is, I propose, the function of her ‘wake.’ It is the always-implicated, yet still objective viewpoint from which she presents her vignettes of black being. It signifies without being the signifier. It observes without mediation, provides context without coercion. Its various forms cast differently-shaped shadows on that which it illuminates, and it traces a continuity within black being that refuses crystallization in a normatively-frozen form. Sharpe operationalizes the wake as an artefact in order to ruminate on the substance of black being, as history enfleshed in the present.⁷⁰ She uses it to expose the obscurantist ways in which the dream-walking reality of certain aspects of liberal democracy disguises and distorts this being, marginalizing its value and trivializing black death in the process.

In so doing, she unmasks the 'present-ness' of the past as it resides in black ontology, calling for communal 'wake work' in the context of care within a global community.⁷¹ She deploys sets of meanings framed as metaphors for existence within the wake of black commodification such that personal and collective endings can be identified and then attended to. Without the identification of past endings (those erasing present and future possibilities) currently present in, and observed from, the wake of shared identity, the possibility of mutual aid, mutual hope, and mutual struggle for black utopia is compromised before it begins. Shared existence in the wake, recognized within

⁷⁰ I do not want to misrepresent Sharpe here. In her words, “I want to think “the wake” as a problem of and for thought. I want to think “care” as a problem for thought. I want to think care in the wake as a problem for thinking and of and for Black non/being in the world...thinking and care need to stay in the wake.” (2016, 5). Her spatial and temporal emplacement of the term (behind the ship, before the funeral, disturbing the flow, etc.) *functions* as historical-become-present perspectives on Black being and non-being. This seems to be quite similar to what Benjamin is arguing (and analogous to his own situation of both the Arcades and the *flâneur*). They both, then, can be interpreted as historical technologies wielded to unpack objective, yet always-implicated, images.

⁷¹ Ibid. Here we detect the processually utopian objective within her work. Care, used in the utopian sense, is used by Bloch as an outworking of utopian hope, but the philological form he gives it, *caritas*, experiences its most extensive treatment within St. Augustine’s *Civitas Dei*. For the ways in which *caritas* aids human existence in the *civitas terrena* while working towards, and waiting for, the *civitas Dei*, see Hannah Arendt’s doctoral dissertation (1996 edition ed. by Scott and Stark), esp. 25-35.

communal consciousness from that perspective, enables a new, collective imagination and future possibilities in terms of a *becoming*, as liminal states informed by the past, present, and (contingent) future. Identifying endings *as endings* is, as we saw with Benjamin, central to utopian hope. Indeed, from this perspective, Sharpe's project then also leverages Bloch's idea of the No-Longer-Conscious, and this must be unearthed before it can inform 'picture casting' as images of a better future. As she puts it:

For, if we are lucky, we live in the knowledge that the wake has positioned us as no-citizen. If we are lucky, the knowledge of this positioning avails us particular ways of re/seeing, re/inhabiting, and *re/imagining the world*.⁷²

Aspiration. *Aspiration* is the word that I arrived at for keeping and putting breath in the black body. [p] Living as I have argued we do in the wake of slavery, in spaces where we were never meant to survive, or have been punished for surviving and for daring to claim or make spaces of something like freedom, *we yet reimagine and transform spaces for and practices of an ethics of care* [...], and ethics of seeing, and of *being* in the wake as consciousness...⁷³

Her [Dionne Brand] "Ruttier" writes and contains Black being as it has developed in the wake; Black being that continually exceeds all of the violence directed at Black life; Black being that exceeds that force [...] And she offers us a song, *a map to anywhere, to everywhere*...⁷⁴

Recall Bloch insists that utopian hope resides metaphysically within material human existence (what he calls "*existere*"). This is what Sharpe (and Benjamin) both seem to be excavating from the historical ruins caused by an ideological concretization aimed at reifying a past-become-present – i.e., a merely-political agenda. That project requires a straight-line, eschatologically-justified construction. Unless this is undone, the possibility of looking forward to utopian alternatives is closed. Yet this approach also indicates that the option of looking forward can exist once the wreckage of the past is exposed and defanged. Only in this way can the eternal return (to quote Nietzsche) be

⁷² Sharpe (2016, 22), emphasis mine.

⁷³ Ibid, 131. Second emphasis mine.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 134. Emphasis mine.

derailed. It turns out that Benjamin's Angel of History can indeed redeem the past. In fact it *must* be reconciled in order to operationalize utopian hope.

Sharpe, rather than repudiating Bloch's theory deployed within contemporary utopian literature, offers instead a richly articulated way to approach his concepts.⁷⁵ She, like Benjamin, insists that a certain foundation must be laid *before* a utopian consciousness can be unmasked.⁷⁶ That this approach seems less occupied with utopia initially, in that it remains situated primarily within scenes of past suffering and violence, serves only to highlight the contrast (and the resultant antagonism) between the variants of hope I examined earlier in this chapter.

As a final thought, perhaps what Sharpe and Benjamin demonstrate most clearly is that utopian hope involves hard, messy, and unpleasant work. "Hope," as a word, tends to invoke a positive phenomenology. It makes us feel good. We could read utopian hope as inhabiting a bright frame of mind, full of promising pictures of the future. Even when we add Bloch's insistence that this hope be active and insistent, a tendency to equivocate those action words with cheerful mental states remains. Bloch, on the other hand, insisted on the term "dark-bright" when describing the utopian trace. This turns out to be an impulse within humankind's being indicating *both* loss and possibility.⁷⁷ Benjamin and Sharpe both remind us that utopia comes from a place of

⁷⁵ Benjamin's construct, positioned as a human technology, possesses an agency that was/is denied to the primary audience of Sharpe's book. My point is that they are similar as perspectival technologies. There is an almost eerie alignment with Sharpe's different portrayals of the wake in the context of a temporal analysis of processual utopia.

⁷⁶ I should also mention Hartman's 1997 and 2019 accounts addressing past violence existing within present black being and its ongoing marginalization. She employs an approach similar to Sharpe's, reading history across the grain in order to unmask its instrumental crystallization. Hartman is more firmly focused on utopian imaginings as I have described them here - embodied within physical, aesthetic 'acting out' of affective, Black interventions aimed at rupturing their socially constructed prisons (ironically 'post' slavery).

⁷⁷ 1995, 194 and elsewhere.

loss. If it did not, then it is hard to see what utopia, as a concept, might even mean.

Benjamin refers to this loss as “The Ruin,” and it is a dual-edged sword – one edge for utopian hope’s genesis, and one for reified history’s death. Thus:

What lies shattered amid the rubble, the highly significant fragment, the scrap: this is the noblest material of Baroque creation. For it is a common feature of Baroque literature to heap up fragments – incessantly and without any strict idea of a goal – and, in the unremitting expectation of a miracle, to view stereotypes as instances of intensification. [...] piece for piece, the elements from which the new whole is to be blended. No – is to be constructed. For the perfect vision of this new thing was: ruin.⁷⁸

2.6 Conclusion: Which Way Utopia?

All of this continues to raise a simple question – in what direction should efforts to utopia begin? This is the ‘implicit-but-never-quite-directly-addressed’ question within processual accounts of utopian theory. I have mentioned at several points the conative mental states that seemingly saturate this discussion – indicating the fundamental role that affectivity performativity inhabits. Levitas agrees as she grounds conceptual utopia within desire, specifically human desire, and she relies directly on Bloch’s concept of the utopian impulse for her emplacement of where utopia, flexibly constituted, resides.⁷⁹ These articulations of desire point to what I am attempting to clarify. Levitas claims that these imaginings are representations of socially-emplaced, materially-grounded conative states, and the resultant query then becomes: “*Which* social contexts, *which* material realities, indeed *whose* desires get to count if we are non-trivially seeking to determine an initial directionality for utopian process?”

⁷⁸ 1936, 180-181.

⁷⁹ See, e.g., her 1990 and 2003 accounts attempting to describe just where utopia comes from. I am grateful to Barnita Bagchi for putting Levitas and Kumar (see following footnote) into conversation in this context within the introductory chapter to her (2019) edited volume.

To begin looking for answers, a few starting points will be helpful. First, I conclude (following Bloch, Augustine, and others) that this latter goal (an appropriate directionality) is an ethically binding imperative, informing efforts in pursuit of our most pressing obligations as humankind. If utopia is humanity's summum bonum, if the city of God is what redeems the earthly city, then striving for its instantiation seems obligatory for any theoretical and/or practical construct of moral realism. Second, if Kumar is correct about the narrow genesis and scope of western utopian/dystopian imaginings, then responding to uncertainties about what gets to count in this regard cannot rely on merely canonical conceptions.⁸⁰ This is true even in the case of those theories attempting to unmoor themselves from concrete, empirically-centered, descriptions – if these flow from a bounded set of euro-centric conceptualizations.

To remain with this idea, in addition to arguing for a conatively-grounded characterization of utopia, Levitas problematizes linear utopian temporalities. This certainly cuts across the grain of western imaginings of social progress. The narratives of continuing (capitalistic) progress might be characterized as equivalent to western discourse, considered holistically. Its placement within an Enlightenment-centric body of thought crystallizes the past such that the future is only malleable in the way of an illusionary concept of developmental possibility (all the while constrained by concretized potentialities aligning with the status quo). Levitas is not the first, or the only, scholar to

⁸⁰ Kumar (1987 and 2010) argues against a Blochian construal of utopia, situating both utopia and dystopia as limited, complementarian forms within a classical and Christian (i.e., western) heritage. These inscribe the “boundaries” of utopian and dystopian genres prevalent in literature and empirical experiments. I disagree with his refusal to emplace utopia as a resonance within human materiality yet agree that he clarifies the limited ways in which both states are imagined within canonical accounts. This highlights a systemic impoverishment of utopia's conceptualizations, both ontologically and epistemologically. The vast bulk of utopian and/or dystopian literature, in other words, conforms to a very limited set of allowed constructions. These, then, tend to merely reinforce extant power relationships across fields of social, cultural, and political discourse (e.g., Foucault, 1972).

note this frozen foundationalism within the utopian canon of allowed imaginaries; however, she overtly destabilizes a linear conceptualization of utopian desire, allowing for utopian dreams to be rooted in a newly-liquified past.

Antonis Liakos also argues for the necessity, indeed the *identity*, of utopia within a past grounding for such hopes to even be considered utopian.⁸¹ He claims that this knowledge revealed within narrative histories includes (as a central ingredient) visions of the future (what Levitas might call “the prophetic”) emplotted within past events *as referenced to idealized imaginings within them*. As he puts it, “From this point of view [the horizon of long-term social expectations in writing history], ideas about the future are part of the deep structure of which forms our understanding of *what is historical thinking*.”⁸² It is narrative with a plot, “fall and salvation; desperation and hope.”⁸³ It embodies a stylistically messianic narrative trope – one that creates the content of history together with its explanation.

Apocalypse, as historical-cum-utopian technology, seems central to any account of processual utopia, both in its creation and its insertion into a past-become-present historicity, in order to make it comprehensible to historical actors and erstwhile utopian subjects.⁸⁴ The resulting utopian temporality takes the form of ‘future-within-the-past’ stories, constructing a framework for situating its empirical and interpretive elements.

Benjamin’s “recognition of the now” is again placed front and center. The need to smash

⁸¹ In both his 2007 and 2011.

⁸² 2007, 21, emphasis mine. See his 2011 for an argument for the emplacement of utopian (or, more broadly, idealized) concepts of the future within historical narrative as necessary for that narrative to be a history at all.

⁸³ Liakos (2007, 22) notes that this idea originates with Benjamin. See the latter’s 1940, XVII, A-B for a characterization of messianic references within historicity. He (Liakos) also references Giorgio Agamben (2005) in his formulation of the “future within the past” constituent necessary to historical narrative.

⁸⁴ I will say more in my conclusion about the catalyzing role I think apocalypses, both corporate and private, play within utopian performativity. See also my 2022b for an exegesis of the role of apocalypse within historiography, providing both formative construct and telos for historical narratives.

the reified idol of accepted history becomes imperative if the past is to inform *different*, non-canonical vectors for utopian imagination. Consecrated altars must be desecrated; the continually-ongoing requiem mass must be halted, its liturgy changed, its deity transformed. The clouds of incense within cathedrals honoring instrumentally-restricted ontologies must be cleared by winds from different cardinal vectors. Christ must up-end the money-changer's tables yet again; the temple must be cleansed a second time.⁸⁵ Bloch would agree, I think, yet he would further discriminate the needed 'smashing' of concretized history between *anamnesis* (mere recollection) and *anagnorisis* – renovating memory. This corresponds with the concept of “recognition” in a Benjamite sense – as well as “reflection” for Kierkegaard. Perhaps it is only in a de-stabilized recognition of the past-within-present that a critique of both is possible – one that transcends limits of what is: 1) allowed to be included in those narratives, and 2) how those existences are parsed.

The directionality of accessible utopian imaginings must be decoupled from extant boundaries to their currently-feasible constructions in order to begin anything like an ethically guided, affective performativity in its support. The resultant vectors for utopian effort, while remaining less than perfectly clear, must be unmoored from strictures reified by current normative simulacra. To do this will require a reflexive critique of desire, progress, and enlightenment *in the case of those currently afforded the highest quotients of agency within them*. These efforts will necessarily cut across the grain of strategic discourses of power while originating from sources currently cut off from accessing them. In the terms I have used thus far, expanded utopian imaginings

⁸⁵ Mark 11:15-16

have only tactical modes of maneuvering available to them. The fact that they seem so different is entailed by their genesis and subsequently required tropes.

The very idea of “alternate futures” illustrates this difference. They are alternate. They are not “normal” (qua *normed*). They do not conform to their respective normative power structures. They seem bizarre within them, and as such, they tend to be ostracized from the canon of acceptable possibilities. Yet it is precisely there we must begin. Recognizing the present, in the form of Bloch’s *anagnorisis*, as being merely an idolization of a crystallized past-become-present, presents an opportunity to deconstruct it. Privileged actors will need help in order to do so; however, it remains the only way in which a heretically sanctified present can be unmasked as a self-consecrated idol in order to make different futures possible.

Hope, in the form of utopian longing, is a viable methodological apparatus for utopian struggle. This has required a detailed analysis of its various forms, demonstrating the ways in which diverse constructions operate across multiple contexts. Merely-political hope is chained, existentially, to its associated ideological simulacrum. It can only serve to justify its constructed version of ‘reality,’ and it is focused on freezing the past as a top-down effort reifying obtaining relations of power. It thus inhabits a strategic position of maneuver. Utopian hope, conversely, is focused on rupturing the status quo. It primarily moves from the bottom-up within political simulacra. Its aim is to rupture these in an ongoing attempt to realize humankind’s potential. It is embodied as a processual, affective stance aimed at an imagined future. It focuses on disrupting hegemonic facades of reality in order to make other realities possible, even if they remain beyond current comprehension. It resists any final

description of utopia in favor of ongoing effort to liberate achievable alternatives now, what Bloch calls the Real-Possible, in order to re-open the future to the Not-Yet-Conscious. Since its aim is the rupture of current modalities, it uses tactical maneuvers as its methodology.

In the case of this latter variant, there is a possibility of avoiding the dangers of the former. Although it likewise incurs worries, its greatest advantage is that it reflects a focus on the 'real' instead of an image. This decouples it from a rigidly normed, straight-line conceptualization of history holding it captive to current limitations on what could (or should) be. This is demonstrated in accounts, such as Sharpe's, which explore ongoing vestiges of violence papered over by mythological histories. Unmasking these as false consciousnesses (in Benjamin's terms) permits the possibility of redeeming those pasts.

What I am driving at here is not merely a theoretical critique of extant and/or past utopian experiments aimed at a descriptively possible state of affairs now. Neither am I content with (only) describing why the term should be situated within processual logics, as a verb denoting a particular vector of action. While I believe I am contributing to the conceptual development of processual utopia theoretically, I also want to explore what might be a fledgling methodology for it. To shed light on what this might look like, clarifying the referents of utopia and dystopia (as the objectives of utopian hope and merely-political hope respectively) was necessary.

In the next chapter, I begin to describe this methodology, more deeply analyzing the primary resource leveraged in the literature as its catalyst. The attentive reader will have noticed that I have described the symbology and function of normative simulacra in

religious, even doctrinal, terms. This is because their function and operationalization are permeated with religious methodology and symbolism. Applying the argument of this chapter to that conceptual framework identifies strands of this mystical or metaphysical emplacement of utopian process. What follows will be an analysis that clarifies those differences as well as highlights their ontological roles within processual utopia.

Chapter Three – The Function of Faith Within Utopian Methodology¹

“Historicism contents itself with establishing a casual nexus among various moments in history. [...] The historian who proceeds from this consideration ceases to tell the sequence of events like the beads of the rosary. He grasps the constellation into which his own era has entered, along with a very specific earlier one. *Thus he establishes a conception of the present as now-time shot through with splinters of messianic time.*”

“We know that the Jews were prohibited from inquiring into the future: The Torah and the prayers instructed them in remembrance. [...] This does not imply, however, that for the Jews the future became homogenous, empty time. *For every second was the small gateway in time through which the Messiah might enter.*”

- Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History*²

3.1 Introduction

Theological concepts saturate the literature on utopia, to include eschatological and apocalyptic themes, specifically those concentrating on utopian *longing* within human materiality.³ This is especially the case in accounts that refuse to describe, in any fine-grained way, what the telos of utopia either is or should be. As a review, utopian proposals tend to fall into two broad categories. The first of these can be described as proposing variants of social or political utopias.⁴ These are not limited to antiquated or classical accounts. There is active contemporary debate about the achievability of social utopias among both philosophers and political scientists. The former focus on the ways

¹ A shortened version of this chapter is forthcoming in the *Journal for Cultural and Religious Theory* (my 2022a).

² 1940, *On the Concept of History*, XVII, A-B, emphases mine.

³ This reliance on religious logics is not exclusive to utopian or merely-political ideological structures, as I have described them here. See Schmitt (2005) for a paradigmatic account of theology within politics.

⁴ Examples range from the utopia of Sir Thomas More (1516) to those of Fourier (1971 trans.) and Saint-Simone (1822). I include here attempts to construct contemporary utopias, including the Paris Commune (in 1871) and the Owenite communities (1825-1827). For an analysis of how the Paris Commune has informed utopian imaginings within processual utopia, see Kristin Ross (2015). Gerald Gaus (2016) examines the Owenite experiments (among others) while investigating a practical way to implement achievable (i.e., non-ideal) social utopias. See also Bloch's (1995, 471-619) analysis of certain social utopias. He categorizes these under various names, going back to at least the Stoics, as “scientific” or “rational” utopias. The latter term is unfortunate, as he also argues that utopian hope reclaims rationalism from Enlightenment-based (i.e., capitalistic) logics.

in which ethical theories impact social constructions of utopia. The latter concentrate on the socio-political conditions that help or hinder utopian experimentation.⁵

The second broad genre, and the focus of my investigation, is processual in nature. This isn't a precise term, yet it identifies a dynamic of *movement* within them, especially while emphasizing a state of becoming in their operationalization.⁶ Processual utopia must be allowed emplotment within a metaphysically possible world, but its grammatical placement should primarily be that of a verb. This kind of utopia refers to a militant, affectively-oriented stance focused on the future yet grounded in the past-within-present – what Benjamin calls the “recognizability of the now.”⁷ It is an individual-become-collective process of hope focused on rupturing solidified (and limited) conditions of possibility in order to make Bloch's novum, or the kingdom of Heaven, realizable in a newly liquified future.

The literature emphasizing this latter perspective often trades in religious language to describe its concepts. It relies on future anticipation for something that is not currently comprehensible. As such, it is overtly religious in both its methodology and the eschatological formulations appearing within its technologies. It should not be a surprise that its terminology also tends to be mystical in nature.

Another way to identify the difference between these broad genres of utopian thought is to recall how the ‘merely-political’ was distinguished from utopian hope in the preceding chapter. The former relies on totalizing modes of combat within a political simulation – resulting in one of these being deified by its subjects and then re-created and

⁵ See Rawls (1971), Sen (2009), and Gaus (2016 and 2019 forthcoming). For an ideal-theory variant, see Estlund (2014). For socio-political proposals juxtaposing political and social theory against the concrete achievability of utopias, see Wright (2010) and Gordon, Tilley, and Prakash, ed. (2010).

⁶ See Nora Rismal (2017) for an analysis of processual utopia within the writings of Adorno and Bloch.

⁷ Abensour (2017, 64-85) examines Benjamin's thoughts on utopia in this context.

sustained by the hope-cum-ideology defined by that image (or, idol). Utopian hope originates from within ontological being itself. Constitutive within humanity's essence, it responds to the impulse of that image-trace of the Absolute, and as a result it is always attempting to rupture what 'is' in order to get to what "should be."⁸ It works from the bottom-up. It typically is seen within efforts by marginalized actors to improve their existence, and it is focused on the future (yet remaining grounded in a liquified history-within-the-present). Merely-political hope, embodied as a 'totalitarian' ideological belief system, is concentrated on its own reproduction, it works from the top-down. The variant that wields strategic power reflects the interests of privileged actors, and it is primarily focused on a concretized version of the past (entailing a straight-line version of that history ending in its own 'utopian' telos).

These genres of utopian theory are aligned with these versions of utopian hope. Proposals examining and/or constructing visions of concretized, social utopias are addressing the confrontation of extant ideology head-on, i.e., they are waging a political/ideological battle at the strategic level of power struggle. As Mannheim argued (see chapter two), this entails an 'us vs. them' version of conflict in which the objective is to discredit the intellectual ability of one's opponent to parse reality correctly (i.e., to prove she is not rational).⁹

⁸ As mentioned in an earlier footnote about Peterson's (2016) compilation there is an affinity between this concept and that of the *imago dei*. Conceptually, this trace of the divine in the makeup of humankind grounds such concepts as *esse* (true substance, which exists of its own volition) for Early Modern philosophers such as Duns Scotus, and even earlier natural law theorists, such as Thomas Aquinas. One could make the argument that as far back as at least Plato, the idea of earthly instantiations of just about anything at all are instances of something 'taking part' in the transcendent or 'perfect' form of that thing. This philosophical worldview (participating in the 'essence of pure form') trades on this idea that Bloch calls the "trace of the Absolute."

⁹ Mannheim (1936, 33-54).

Processual proposals move the field of play first to the individual level and then the collective level of *tactical* gesture in order to rupture ideologically-normed spaces. They do not, importantly, confront a socio-political proposal with a competing socio-political proposal; they oppose boundaries on what ‘exists,’ in the hopes of making new possibilities available in the future. Significantly, these might not involve: 1) something we can currently imagine, and 2) an ‘us’ in a recognizable sense. These accounts are shot-through with religious language. Post-Enlightenment rationalism (turned modernism) excised the mystical from political theory. Ironically, it then appropriated its concepts, baptized them with new names, clothed them in new vestments, and then embedded them functionally within the simulated images enfleshing political hegemony. A return to a more metaphysical field of play when challenging those socio-political systems should have been anticipated. To use religious imagery, false (i.e., non-existent) gods, set up as idols and worshiped within a continually-recreated status quo, remain at the same time vulnerable to the Absolute which exists in a possible reality (as the result of processual utopian struggle), even if that end-state remains uncognizable in a concrete form available to those ‘battling’ for it.

In this chapter, I argue that both the idea of religious *faith* has been reincarnated (or even appropriated), for Bloch and those who have followed, as utopian hope. In these accounts, messianic and eschatological narratives are the vehicles for their deployment. This is propelled by a liberation from any need to describe, with any problematic granularity, what the teli of these accounts looks like. “Golden streets” and “cities descending from heaven” aside, an unfixd (and unrecognizable) novum aligns the aesthetic and ethical foci of utopia better with process instead of destination.

Additionally, the move to a language of faith places these theories in direct opposition to *what has not worked*. Both modern and post-modern socio-cultural experiments have only ended in the deification of images, in the consecration of idols that are merely constructions fed by subjects' worship at altars that serve to resanctify them. Processual accounts, in order to to problematize crystallized narratives necessary for these simulacra, challenge them for the wreath of 'human' rationalism. A return to religious frameworks confronts these images on, ironically, firm ontological and epistemological grounds.¹⁰

Allow me a detour to better defend this suggestion. Bruno Latour's investigation of how western concepts of being modern resulted in attempts to separate the nature of reality (i.e., the set of ontological existents) neatly and rigorously into two poles.¹¹ These were the extremes of nature and society. Rationally scientific analyses, according to this dogma, must meet the bar of fully identifying the subject (qua subject) of the analysis in question as belonging to one (and only one) of these poles. This is to say that the results of 'true' scientific inquiry had to be pure; they must be untainted by hybridity – forbidden from remaining either between these poles of allowed existence or, mor accurately, between and *below* them (in a deep field of ontological messiness – what he calls a “field of mediation”).¹² This ‘modern constitution’ guaranteed a number of things, two of which are salient to my project.

The first is found in one of the paradoxes that accompany this constitution (termed “guarantees”) – namely: that we construct nature but grant it the status of immanence. It must remain ‘as if’ we did not construct it. This applies equally (but in a

¹⁰ Bloch (1995, 65-174) argues for a reclamation of the role of emotions/passion in empirical inquiry. Thus, for Bloch (and Kierkegaard, more shortly) rationalism is not mere objectivity.

¹¹ 1991, 13-46.

¹² Ibid, 32

reversed fashion) to the pole of society. It is granted the status of transcendence, surpassing us “infinitely.”¹³ At the same time, however, when considered in conjunction with nature it is our own free construction; it is ‘as if’ we did construct it. This aligns eerily with my analysis in the preceding chapter concerning the ontology of the merely-political. In the case of the prevailing simulacrum the socio-political machine doesn’t exist, yet it is both immanent and transcendent – the personification of both contradictions that Latour unmasks. Hobbes’ *Leviathan* becomes both society and nature, changing identities as often as necessary to survive – *all the while existing only as an image*, an idol of the linear conception of progress fundamental to modernity.

The second aspect of this modern constitution salient to this chapter (and my project holistically) is what Latour calls his “fourth guarantee.” This is required by the intentional contradictions both internal and external to the previous three. To arbitrate these inconsistencies, the moderns needed a God, but one that was “crossed out” and causally epiphenomenal. No one purporting to be modern could mix that God with nature (or society’s) function. The deity cannot interfere, only explain by way of negative inference the incoherence embodied by both poles of existence defined by the modern constitution.¹⁴

The consequence of modern philosophy was that it denied the ontological existence of hybrid entities between the poles. It isn’t as if modernity couldn’t accept them as conceptually available for description, they just cannot exist *per se*. They are limited to being intermediaries as opposed to mediators. They are not allowed to be

¹³ Ibid

¹⁴ Ibid, 32-35

“things-in-themselves.”¹⁵ The problem, of course, is the inability of those purified poles of nature and society to supply the explanatory power necessary to mask these quasi-objects. It turns out the hybridized existences between them are not simply indicatory references. They are referents on their own terms. Progression between them, considered either descriptively *or temporally*, cannot be described in simply linear terms. He puts the idea this way:

Modern time is a succession of inexplicable apparitions attributable to the distinction between the history of sciences or technologies and just plain history. If you suppress Boyle and Hobbes and their disputes, if you eliminate the work of constructing the pump, the domestication of colleagues, the crossed-out God, the restoration of English Royalty, how are you going to account for Boyle’s discovery? The air’s spring comes from nowhere. It emerges fully armed. In order to explain what becomes a great mystery, you are going to have to construct an image of time that is adapted to this miraculous emergence of new things that have always already been there, and to human fabrications that no human has ever made. The idea of radical revolution is the only solution the moderns have imagined to explain the emergence of the hybrids that their Constitution simultaneously forbids and allows, and in order to avoid another monster: the notion that things themselves have a history.¹⁶

Letour argues against the modern commitment to a seemingly *ex nihilo* emergence of ‘things’ (like scientific laws, mathematical proofs, political constructions, etc.) without allowing space for their development through states of (ontological) being between the poles of nature and society. In other words, moderns cannot appeal to history or any type of metaphysical mediation to allow for the ‘stuff’ of current ‘discovery.’ The price to be paid is steep. Future possibilities are limited to what is effervescently emergent in ‘the now.’ Letour describes it this way:

Through this distinction between the contingent and the necessary, the historical and the atemporal, the history of the moderns will be punctuated owing to the emergence of the non-humans – the Pythagorean theorem, heliocentrism [...] – and on each occasion time will be reckoned starting from these miraculous beginnings, secularizing each incarnation in the history of transcendent sciences. People are going to distinguish the

¹⁵ Ibid, 55-67

¹⁶ Ibid, 70

time ‘BC’ and ‘AC’ with respect to computers as they do the years ‘before Christ’ and ‘after Christ’. With the vocal tremors that often accompany declarations on the modern destiny, people even go to the extent of speaking of a ‘Judeo-Christian’ conception of time, whereas that notion is an anachronism, *since neither Jewish nor Christian theologies have had any inclination whatsoever for the modern Constitution. They have constructed their regime of time around Presence (that is, the presence of God), and not around the emergence of the vacuum, or DNA, or microchips...*¹⁷

Modern narratives rely on a reification of *emergence* in order to solidify the past in a frozen present interpreted within concepts of progress-cum-rationality. This phenomenon recalls Benjamin’s crystallized catastrophe that must be shattered in order to allow different ontologies to be recognized. In a remade, anti-modern, constitution, it turns out that God, as newly-resurrected, robust metaphysical functionary, must be uncrossed out.¹⁸ This is why the logics sustaining processual utopia lend themselves to mystical formulations. It is no accident that Bloch refers to the utopian impulse as the “trace of the Absolute.”

In what follows, I examine how this religious framework clarifies theories of processual utopia, both generatively and methodologically. I will contend that their primary catalyst for utopian initiatives, namely utopian *hope*, turns out to be equivalent to religious faith. I begin by analyzing Kierkegaard’s three stages of human development. This will be helpful in distinguishing what is meant by faith as a religious or mystical term and how it is deployed within utopian proposals. It will also clarify some of what has been said here about modernity’s forced purification of subject-object identification and clarification. Kierkegaard persuasively argues for the superiority of subjective truth – as opposed to objective (or purified, to use Latour’s term) truth. I then revisit the

¹⁷ Ibid, 71. Emphasis mine. See also Isaiah, chapter six (ESV). The kingdom of Heaven is, in this scenario, synonymous with the presence of God, yet it does not inhabit coordinates reachable by humankind now.

¹⁸ Ibid, 142. This emphasizes the idea that hybridized existences do the explaining for what modern notions of progress pose as the purified poles of existence. This is why inquiries into a directionality for utopia must look “in different places” (Latour, 1991, 76) than those reified by the status quo.

concept of Blochian hope with this lens, illuminating the necessary inclusion of faith within it. I then turn to St. Augustine's employment of faith in his account of the *civitas Dei*. It turns out that Bloch's instrumental positioning of hope (located within the material being of human consciousness) relies on St. Augustine's earlier methodology. These accounts are then placed in comparison to more recent accounts of 'protopian' process. In the chapter's conclusion, I bring all of these together to definitively show that processual utopia depends methodologically on religious mechanisms, referenced to four aspects of utopian function that Ruth Levitas investigates in her accounts of processual utopia.

3.1 The Knight of Faith

So what is faith? The writer of Hebrews refers to it as "the *substance* of things hoped for, the *evidence* of things not seen."¹⁹ What interests me in this definition is its ontological and epistemological elements. Firstly, it is situated as substance (ὕπόστασις), or *upostasis*. This means, of course, substance, but it also refers to steadiness or support. This is to say it is a *concrete* instantiation of hope. Secondly, it stands in relations to things which are not ascertained by the senses as evidence (ἔλεγχος), or *elenchos*, which indicates something stronger than evidence, namely: a proof. Biblically, faith is given both an ontological existence as well as an epistemological function. It is the signifier as well as the proof of existence for the signified. It grounds religion's referents and its methodology.

¹⁹ Hebrews 11:1 (ESV), emphases mine.

This raises more questions. What does it solidify? If hope is construed as a positive conative stance towards an expectation, then faith can be positioned as the concretization of that affective stance. Concurrently, it purportedly provides a proof for things that not accessible by ‘normal’ sensory perception. As such, it grants epistemological warrant for belief in the case of these unseen existences. This may seem worryingly stipulative to a philosopher and not definitive enough to an evangelical. I will say more about how this meshes with my interpretation of utopian hope below, but as a teaser, I think this definition becomes more interesting if we add a temporality operator to the second clause of the Biblical description.

If the writer of Hebrews is providing a historical retelling of personalities known for their faith (which he or she *is* doing), then it seems more accurate to situate the claim as a temporal one. Faith becomes the evidence of things not seen *at that/this time*. It is thus essentially situated as anticipatory within history, a reference to a ‘not-yet’ located in the past-become-present. What follows is an examination of the famous “Knight of Faith” within Kierkegaard’s writing. What are the defining characteristics of this individual, and how do they relate to humankind, essentially or transcendently?

To develop fully (for Kierkegaard), humans need to pass through three phases: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious.²⁰ He does not construe this final phase as being solely Christian in nature, even if the grist for his mill is a query about how to become one.²¹ Before he introduces these phases, he pauses for a lengthy discussion of “recollection.” This is something he sets against remembering, like merely recalling

²⁰ 1845, VI, 443

²¹ 1846, VII, 484-498. He is clear that the ‘religious’ sphere of human development is not specifically Christianity. He dubs it “Religiousness A” to avoid a dangerous parallel the “paradoxical and the absurd, that is, all the essentially Christian, in esthetic gibberish.”

names and dates. What he means by recollection is ideality, a conception of existence *as eternity*.²² It is the recognition of an eschatological continuity of life coupled with a bifurcation of what is essential and what is trivial (his words). He situates it as a term of theater or art, an ability to “conjure away the present for the sake of recollection.”²³ The effort expended in the reflection necessary for this art to take place is to “redeem for recollection” something once experienced.²⁴ It is a separation of what is remembered from “what is worthy of being remembered.”

The first sphere of human development is aesthetic; it operates temporally in what he terms “the immediate.” It is not a sphere of reflection or recollection, but one of action and reaction. The final sphere is that of religion, or fulfillment (but not in some rags-to-riches, material way). Connecting them is the sphere of the ethical. This middle phase is a conduit – a passageway from the aesthetic to the religious, and he describes it as “the impulse of the motion.”²⁵ It signifies the difference between the first and final phases as representing an external or internal vector of development. Significantly, passage through these phases is a requirement, and this is emphasized in his description of those who attempt an immediate shift from one phase to the next (or try to jump a phase). Doing this short-circuits the reflection/recollection emphasized earlier and results in what Kierkegaard calls a “positive doctrine of obligation” or religion becoming

²² Ibid, VI, 16-18.

²³ Ibid, VI, 19.

²⁴ Ibid, VI, 21. Note the similarities between his anamnestic function with that of Walter Benjamin. For the latter, to discover the flash of “recognition in the now” that connected with the what-has-been is needed in order to smash the forms ideological history takes (1999, 463-464, N3a,3). This results in “bringing the dialectic to a standstill”, which seems to be what Kierkegaard is trying to describe here. Kierkegaard continues after this section with a lengthy analysis of the function of fashion within communal historical mimesis. Benjamin also devotes a significant portion of his work to the analysis of fashion as a fetish with death in that it reifies the past in a cyclical fashion that aligns itself with a bourgeoisie commodity fetish (1999, 62-81, 101-119 and 171-202).

²⁵ Kierkegaard (1846, VI, 443)

“poetry, history.”²⁶ In short, these (overly) positive epitomizations of passages from one sphere to the next emphasize externality instead of a necessary internal focus. In evangelical language this might be analogous to the phenomena of “prosperity gospels” with no doctrinal constituent of repentance.²⁷ The emphasis must remain an ever-deepening self-reflection, a focus on internal over external *foci*.

This leads to Kierkegaard arguing for the primacy of subjective (vs. objective) truth. What becomes important is not what is said, but *how* it is said – and this is not about a manner of speaking but rather the relationship of the individual, existentially, to what is said. Conatively, it becomes a heuristic for discovering (human-cum-religious) truth; *it is a methodology* coupled to a worldview commitment. Ultimate truth is a passion of and for the infinite. But since the infinite refers only to the subjective, it is *only within subjectivity* that we find it. As he puts it:

From the objective point of view, there is no infinite decision, and thus it is objectively correct that the distinction between good and evil is cancelled, along with the principle contradiction, and thereby also the infinite distinction between truth and falsehood. Only in subjectivity is there decision, whereas wanting to become objective is untruth. The passion of the infinite, not its content, is the deciding factor, for its content is itself. In this way the subjective “how” and subjectivity are the truth. [p] But precisely because the subject is existing, the “how” that is subjectively emphasized is dialectical also with regard to time. In the moment of the decision of passion, where the road swings off from objective knowledge, it looks as if the infinite decisions were thereby finished. But at the same moment, the existing person is in the temporal realm, and the *subjective “how” is transformed into a striving that is motivated and repeatedly refreshed by the decisive passion of the infinite, but it is nevertheless a striving.* [p] When subjectivity is truth, the definition of truth must also contain in itself an expression of the antithesis to objectivity, a memento of that fork in the road, and this expression will at the same time indicate the resilience of the inwardness. Here is such a definition of truth: *An objective uncertainty, held fast through appropriation with the most passionate inwardness, is the*

²⁶ Ibid, VI, 452

²⁷ Kierkegaard puts his finger on something central to this project. He is speaking as a member of the privileged class. His description of the need to prioritize humble, repentant self-reflection over positive externality then is directly connected with how I describe the dystopian performativity of privileged actors. The flash of utopian spirit consists of more than ‘feel good’ visions. If there is work to be done, and all of the theories under consideration agree in that assessment, it is possible that an attitude of repentance for past ‘sins’ (perhaps in the form of historic crystallizations protecting privilege) is more appropriate to utopian hope than fantastical dream-images.

truth, the highest truth there is for an *existing* person.²⁸

Kierkegaard cashes this out as a paraphrase (his words) of *faith itself*. It is the contradiction between an infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty. To have objective knowledge of the divine *precludes* faith; thus to have faith means to “hold fast to objective uncertainty.”²⁹ It is a risk that one must take to go beyond the external, to supersede the concretized aesthetic that consecrates itself as host with no need of divine transfiguration. It requires a resolute affective stance towards the Not-Yet involving a movement from possibility to actuality, yet at the same time it is action, a leap that only the knight of faith makes.³⁰

To sum up, faith, for Kierkegaard, is a determined negation of objective certainty coupled with a passion for the infinite. It is the result of passing through three phases of development: an immediate, aesthetic (external) sphere, an ethical passage in which an inward focus emphasizing one’s own lack develops (i.e., attitude of repentance), and a religious phase in which the leap of faith takes place. This entails a profound risk in that it casts us into the unknown such that [we are] “out on 70,000 fathoms of water” and still have faith.³¹ In this frame of mind/belief, the previous two spheres of development (aesthetic and ethical) are held in tension such that they remain balanced and self-reflective arenas of existence. In the next section, I use this model and apply it to my previous analysis of Bloch’s utopian hope.

²⁸ 1846, VII, 168-170. First emphasis mine, all others in original. His footnote to this passage is: “The reader will note that what is discussed here is essential truth, or the truth that is related essentially to existence, and that it is specifically in order to clarify it as inwardness or as subjectivity that the contrast is pointed out.”

²⁹ Ibid, VII, 171. This is *exactly* how (using different terms) Bloch describes utopian hope. It is a militant optimism in something we cannot sense or anticipate with any objectivity (1995, 312).

³⁰ Ibid, VII 297. Kierkegaard here quotes Aristotle’s *Physics*, 200, 201A.

³¹ Ibid, VII, 171.

3.2 Blochian Hope as Mystical Faith

Recall that hope is, for Bloch, more than a conative phenomenological state. It is ontological within matter and instantiated in a relationship vis-à-vis human material existence as such. This is due to the makeup of human being/consciousness, and it is a functional part of our rationality qua human rationality. The ability to investigate ourselves allows us to interrogate our own existence and its corresponding possibilities. We can thus question both who we are (in the form of reflexivity about our ontological status) and where we have been/are/might be going. To put this latter point differently, we can hold in tension the relative necessity of the past and the contingency of the future while grappling with the presence of both in the present. Utopian hope depends on these multiple temporal constituents that make up what Bloch refers to as the Not-Yet-Conscious grounded in the “now” and its corresponding Real-Possible.³²

The emphasis he places on internal investigation and reflexivity mirrors Kierkegaard’s position vis-à-vis the primacy of an internal perspective. This is placed into a material context, that of hope within human consciousness, that parallels the ontological and epistemological functions of faith noted earlier! Recall that the ability to reflect/recollect and then act according to this faith/hope is, for Kierkegaard, an intrinsic element of what it is to be *an existing person* once an individual makes a conscious choice to risk holding “objective reality” in uncertainty.

To expand on this affinity, the ability to conduct self-analysis (both individually and collectively) reveals something else Bloch finds central to utopian theory. This is what he calls “the darkness,” an incomprehensible remainder that is left over within all

³² 1995, 114-180, 195-222 and 2000, 191-196

human experience, accomplishment, events, etc.³³ In other words, there is something missing upon self-examination. This darkness forms a null in the core of our existence, recognized within self-awareness when we attend to it. We somehow know that there is something more, something closer to the Absolute that is the culmination of utopian longing. He calls an “image-trace” that runs through our collective and individual consciousnesses.³⁴ It can be found throughout aesthetic/artistic expression in various forms. For Kierkegaard, this null is the existential recognition that we are not yet reconciled to (for Bloch) the Absolute. It drives the internally focused and humble person, journeying through ethical self-reflection toward the religious sphere, *to repent*. It is an ongoing (even self-deprecating – Kierkegaard uses the word “irony” for this phenomenology) ever-being-refined recognition of our lack of completion in what Bloch calls the “now” (and referenced to Benjamin’s recognition of it).³⁵ This absence indicates that there is more – a Not-Yet-Conscious within future possibility. This way of emplotting hope also protects it from any “overly enthusiastic” characterization stemming from commonplace perceptions of what a phenomenological state of “hoping” might ‘feel’ like. Contrary to simplistic positivity, utopian hope demands hard work in a messy now informed by a lack/null/darkness in the human condition that needs remedying. Thaler, writing about critical dystopias, argues that “bleak dreams” are necessary for catalyzing a “melancholic hope” in the case of utopian affect.³⁶

³³ Ibid 180-186, 189, 193

³⁴ This is referenced to various works of art and aesthetic performativity (*Ibid*, 178 and following). Bloch uses the terms “image-trace” and “flashes” as evidence of utopian impulse. He correctly gives credit to St. Augustine as the first utopian theorist to identify this phenomenon (2000, 195). Thus St. Augustine: “I am aware of something within me that gleams and flashes before my soul; were this perfected and fully established in me, that would surely be eternal life.” (*De Trinitate xii, c.7, n.10*). More on the link between them in the next section.

³⁵ 1846, VII, 436-440.

³⁶ 2019

While discussing the latent utopia present even during a mechanistic age seemingly opposed to such imaginings, Bloch notes that, “there is also utopia in this area where it has the most difficulty. [...] the function of utopia is a critique of what is present. If we had not gone beyond the barriers, we could not even perceive them as barriers.”³⁷ This statement has enormous ramifications for the persistence of utopian hope within the metaphysical substance of human *Da Sein*. It means that recognizing barriers implies that some part of our consciousness has already surpassed them. This recognition of what is not there (in the now) points toward what *should* be there (in the not yet). In a way this amplifies a point made earlier, namely that the negation of what exists as constructed reality always points to what that negation entails. This picks out utopia’s referent, even if it must remain indeterminate. Adorno goes on to say, “[...] the commandment against a concrete example of utopia tends to defame the utopian consciousness and to engulf it. What is really important here is the will that it is different.”³⁸

Utopian hope then is: 1) experientially both individual and collective, and 2) part of the *metaphysical* makeup of human existence. What he suggests is that utopian hope runs through the fiber of every human, no matter her state circumstantially. Not to have this impulse, this trace of something missing, indicates that either we have arrived already at the Absolute, utopian state of existence, or *that we have lost an essential part of what it is to be human*. Kierkegaard would not situate faith as a material constituent within human consciousness; for him it is a choice one makes as part of a developmental process. Yet it still stands in a supporting relationship to the desire for the infinite. Like

³⁷ Block and Adorno (1988, 12)

³⁸ Ibid

Bloch's hope, faith is crucial to becoming fully human in that *only* an epistemology of faith, cultivated by developing fully through introspection, allows a person to situate herself accurately in a metaphysical sense.

The objective of utopian hope is to remedy that lack within human consciousness, even if it cannot concretely describe or imagine what human existence might look like once the Absolute is achieved. Faith's constant companion, we have seen, is a steadfast belief in the infinite. Both hope's affectivity and faith's determined passion should inform our performativity in everyday life (according to these writers). That this striving is an *ethical* struggle for both of them is clear. It is an ever-pending move from what is to what *should* be. The novum for Bloch and the infinite for Kierkegaard are the summum bonum, the ultimate human good.³⁹ What 'reality' might look like as the Absolute or infinite might remain incomprehensible to current apprehension; it might not even involve an 'us' that is currently recognizable. It remains fleeting, a trace, a recognition of human frailty within historical loss and the potential of future possibility combined in a present, pregnant tension. As a result, and like Kierkegaard, Bloch's concept of a utopian impulse within the material being of humankind demands its own requisite faith as the "essence of things hoped for," as a striving grounded in the "evidence of things not seen."⁴⁰ Bloch refers to this as a recovery of uniquely human rationalism (over and against scientifically positivistic, modernistic logics).⁴¹ The entailed subjective end-state, comprised within the "things not seen" of faith qua hope, for both of them is cashed out

³⁹ Bloch (1995, 298-305)

⁴⁰ Hebrews 11:1 (ESV), see section one of this chapter.

⁴¹ Using the closing chapters of both *The Spirit of Utopia* and *The Principle of Hope*, Bloch interprets Marx as providing the theoretical and methodological geneses for a reclamation of utopian rationality – connecting the Marxist economical-materialistic critique of capitalistic logics (reified as rationalism, simpliciter) to utopian hope (1995, 1354-1376 and 2000, 233-278).

as an inverted mirror-image. For Kierkegaard, the infinite represents man's reconciliation to God.⁴² For Bloch, the novum is a culmination of humankind's assumption of that role; God disappears, no longer needed as the image of the Absolute for which humanity was always-already destined metaphysically.⁴³ The inverted nature of these utopian destinations highlights the synonymy in their function. Hope (as faith) grounds a uniquely utopian methodology for both of them. It is the subjective 'how' positioned over and against the objective 'what,' an emphasis on utopian process and a refusal to concretize its future description.

Bloch himself describes how utopian hope is equivalent to Augustinian faith. He claims that utopia performs a 'cosmic function' battling against misery, death, and what he calls the 'husk realm' of physical nature. This results in our (human) desire to know God and the soul, and once the Absolute is found, new metaphysical contingencies can be made possible through the utopian function. Only then can a new type of life begin.⁴⁴ Like Kierkegaard, he refers to the utopian Totum as the 'last leap,' mirroring the role and comportment of the Knight of Faith:

Certainly the wishful image in all religions, and even more powerfully in those of the messianic invocation of homeland, is that of feeling at home in existence, but one which does not see existence as confined to its clearly surveyable and so to speak local patriotic ranks of purpose. So that religion, *in its constant final relation to the last leap and the utopian Totum*, amounts to more than ethicizing and blander rationalizations, amounts to more than morality and clear surveyability even in Confucius, its strongest ethicizer. The wishful content of religion remains that of feeling at home in the mystery of existence, a mystery mediated with man and well-disposed to his deepest wish, even to the repose of wishes. *And the further the subject with his founders of religion penetrates into the*

⁴² (1846, VII 6, 7). These spheres of human development are not referenced to a specifically Christian form; however, Kierkegaard demonstrates that the logic underpinning the positioning of faith as the vehicle to know the infinite entails a uniquely Christian reference to history and its teleology. This is tied to his bifurcation between the (objective) truth of Christianity against a (subjective) individual relationship to Christianity.

⁴³ 1995, 310-313, 1256-1265 and 2000, 273-278.

⁴⁴ 2000, 248. Italics in original. Quote from Augustine is from his *Soliloquies*, Book 1, Chapter 7: "God and the soul, that is what I desire to know. Nothing more? Nothing whatever!"

*object-mysterium of a God conceived as the supreme Outside or the supreme Above and overpowers it, the more powerfully man in his earth-heaven or heaven-earth is charged with reverence for depth and infinity. [...] the Humanum now gains the mysterium of something divine, something deifiable, gains it as the future creation of the kingdom, but of the right kingdom.*⁴⁵

There is unquestionably a core methodological connection between Kierkegaard and Bloch, namely: their insertion of a metaphysical methodology to problematize concretized visions of utopia (and their limitations). Yet neither of them is the original architect of this logic. In the next section, I explore its deployment within St. Augustine's City of God.

3.3 St. Augustine: The Now and the Not-Yet

It was interesting to read *De civitas Dei* across the grain. By this I mean returning to St. Augustine's utopian imaginations on the heels of examining the more contemporary utopian theories of Bloch, Adorno, Benjamin, Levitas and others. I found it fascinating to trace threads of quite similar impulses prevalent in all of these accounts across the span of more than a millennium. Here I will analyze the similarity of the primary constituent existing within the theories of St. Augustine, Kierkegaard and Bloch, setting aside their theological differences. What interests me are the ways in which faith is instrumentally situated within processual accounts of utopia *as method*. This section, in combination with what has already been said, will make it clear that *any* utopian proposal not based on a concretized construction of a specific socio-political vision trades on faith's functionality for its operationalization.

Given Bloch's insistence on the disappearance of God in utopia (replaced by the utopian Totum of the Absolute within humankind), one might ask if St. Augustine's

⁴⁵ 1995, 1196-1197. Emphases in original.

heavenly city, ruled by God, counts as a utopian candidate. Bloch takes up the same question based on what might be a ‘fixedness’ in how the city of God is conceived. If Augustine’s construct is a battle between an already-determined satanic city and a heavenly one, then is it really a striving for a Not-Yet-Conscious in the world? The question, however, devolves into a red-herring, and Bloch admits that, indeed, the *civitas Dei* is a utopia. He explains this as being demonstrated within Augustine’s concepts of the “now” and “not-yet”. Grace stirs humankind not just to do good but to prepare to do so – involving a looking towards a better state of affairs that both supersedes the present yet guides those within it. It is, like his Not-Yet-Conscious, an ‘acquisition of the divine image’ (Bloch’s words), and as such it is a utopia in a Blochian sense. It is transcendent, yet not fixed (in a Pauline sense); it is situated on this earth and thus a progression of *human* history.⁴⁶

Augustine situates the heavenly city’s existence within faith itself.⁴⁷ Its location is thus clarified in what Kierkegaard would describe as inwardness. Augustine refers to faith having “its throne in the soul,” and this is what makes it impervious to external suffering (or, to use Kierkegaard’s terms, the immediacy of the aesthetic). The utopian subject, for Augustine, can hold in tension current marginalization with the hope for future bliss.⁴⁸ Faith allows a suspension of fixedness tied to present conditions of possibility based on “the evidence of things not (yet) seen.” This is described as faith’s ability to overcome incredulity in the case of our inability to conceive of future perfection

⁴⁶ What follows in this paragraph is discussed in his 1995, 504-508.

⁴⁷ *The City of God*, B1, preface.

⁴⁸ *Ibid*, B1, C16 and B3, C20. “suffer[sic] with that hope which springs from faith in Christ – the hope not of a brief temporal reward, but of unending and eternal bliss.”

in the (imperfect) now.⁴⁹ This is how Bloch temporally employs utopian hope, contrasting what can be acted upon within the Real-Possible to potentialize the Not-Yet-Conscious (all the while aiming towards the novum).

Augustine goes on to claim that faith leads us “onwards to the fullest perfection by the vision of immutable truth.” By steadfastly holding to it, faith “might advance the more confidently towards the truth, [...] that there might be a way for man to man’s God.”⁵⁰ The city of God is both telos and eschaton for this faith, and, as Kierkegaard notes, objective knowledge of it cannot be the basis on which faith, as utopian impulse, is founded. Augustine puts it this way: “For faith is then only faith when it waits in hope for what is not yet seen in substance.”⁵¹ In the same passage he claims that faith provides the only way in which to overcome the fear of death which is, for Bloch, the “power of the strongest anti-utopia.”⁵² Kierkegaard’s primary conclusion concerning subjective truth is also presaged here, as Augustine insists faith cannot be tested with a reward (or, objective evidence). Faith requires no immediate reward.

Augustine’s faith also provides content informing utopian action. Like Bloch’s description of hope’s affectivity, and consistent with Kierkegaard’s subjective passion, faith is related to “bearing one another’s burdens” represented within humankind’s We-problem.⁵³ Faith and hope are used interchangeably when describing how the city of God is built both: 1) in the form of a person becoming it’s citizen, and 2) in its eventual, utopian appearance:

⁴⁹ Ibid, B8, C24. See also B21, C5 for the diminution of “objective” truth in the case of utopian hope.

⁵⁰ Ibid, B10, C22 and B11, C2.

⁵¹ Ibid, B11, C8 and B13, C4.

⁵² 1995, 1103-1178. In this chapter his central foil, among other accounts of mythical images deployed to manage the fear of death, is Christianity’s account of redemption. This is referenced to an identification of Jesus’ typology of utopian prophet, not in a transcendental but a this-world, human form.

⁵³ *The City of God*, B15, C6. The way in which Augustine frames humankind’s propensity to err alongside an attitude of faith is reminiscent of Benjamin’s grappling with the reconciliation of the past in the present.

And by faith [sic] is begotten in this world the city of God, that is to say, the man who has hoped to call on the name of the Lord. “For by hope,” says the apostle, “we are saved: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for? But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.” Who can avoid referring this to a profound mystery.⁵⁴

Additionally, and to inform everyday comportment, Augustine insists that it is not sin to inquire into how these acts, oriented by a specific affect, function.⁵⁵ This correlates with what Bloch is doing in both the *Spirit of Utopia* and the final two volumes of *The Principle of Hope*. While we cannot describe the end-state of utopia accurately, it is not a mistake to question how we should orient efforts to instantiate it. Ethically, these hopes-become-actions are, for both Bloch and Augustine, aimed at the summum bonum of existence, what Augustine calls the supreme good:

To obtain the one [supreme good] and escape the other [supreme evil, i.e, death] we must live rightly. And thus it is written, “The just lives by faith,” for we do not as yet see our good, and must therefore live by faith.⁵⁶

It should be clear that the function of faith and utopian hope are one and the same for Bloch, Kierkegaard, and St. Augustine. They form the methodological foundations for processually-oriented utopian theories, and this seems to be essentially, even necessarily, the case. This is *not* to suggest that hope, in the form of faith, constitutes the entire corpus of method within practice-based accounts of utopia. The fact that all three authors canvassed above insist on an active, subjective inquiry for what constitutes the “how” of utopian struggle make this clear. St. Augustine considers the concept of communal love, in the form of *caritas*, to be central to the invasion of the city of God into the earthly city.⁵⁷ In contrast Bloch threw himself into the analysis of multiple

⁵⁴ Ibid, B15, C18. Biblical citation within quote from Romans 8:24-25.

⁵⁵ Ibid, B16, C24.

⁵⁶ Ibid, B29, C4.

⁵⁷ Hannah Arendt, in her (1996 trans.) doctoral dissertation, demonstrates conclusively the primacy St. Augustine gives to *caritas*, or what she terms “love of neighbor” as methodology for the *civitas Dei*.

performative genres of artistic/aesthetic expression (music above all else) in order to hunt for the traces of utopian imagination running through them.

These differences granted, what is clear is the centrality of faith's function in relation to these subordinate methods. Processual utopia, considered against concrete models, presupposes a lack of descriptive contours. This is not only a result of its fluidity but also due to its insistence that fully-descriptive constructions depend on fixed, crystallized histories that cannot help reifying extant relations of power (and their constructed, foundational myths). Troubling these teleologically-limited frameworks requires an untethering of utopia's possible end states from the same limitations. Faith in what cannot be seen, serving as evidence for things hoped for, situates itself in the epistemological gap created between the Real-Possible, the Not-Yet-Conscious, and the novum, between Augustine's earthly and heavenly cities.

3.4 What About 'Protopian' Proposals?

There is a growing body of literature on the concept of protopia.⁵⁸ This is found within debates about ideal and non-ideal theories of justice. In the case of the latter, protopian theories tend to propose accounts of how to go about progressing towards better states of justice. This seems, at first, to approximate what I have described as processual utopia. Given that I go on to suggest a fledgling methodology for utopian hope, distinguishing between these becomes important. In this brief section, I will explain how protopian theory differs from processual variants, theoretically and methodologically. This will also serve to clarify why I have chosen to focus instead on

⁵⁸ See, as a recent example, Gaus (his 2016 and 2020).

alternate futures, explored in chapters four and five, conceived and written/drawn/performed by the marginalized.

Gerald Gaus has recently proposed a protopian account drawing on (and critiquing) the work of John Rawls and Amartya Sen.⁵⁹ Protopia refers to an incremental approach to more just (i.e., in his words “better”) societies. Each increment is comparatively evaluated to its predecessor (and eventual successors) in an effort to guide social reform. Ironically, Gaus’ strategy is grounded in the belief that an ideal society is a (perhaps useful but ultimately doomed) pipe dream. In fact, he claims that aiming for the ideal in one fell swoop is dangerous. To paraphrase him, it frighteningly both: 1) runs the risk of being so far removed from actual conditions that it is incompatible with present reality, and (fundamentally) 2) assumes we can identify (capital “T”) truth about the ideal society in some substantial, uncontroversial way.⁶⁰

Given what he considers the irremediable inadequacy of ideal theory, he suggests a protopian process emphasizes the improvement of societal variables in a measured way. This requires an ability to visualize possibilities that are near enough to actual conditions to be both understandable and accessible. He refers to these sets of possibilities as worlds “in our neighborhood.” He also makes it a requirement that any set of proposed changes to current conditions must be accessible (intellectually and practically) within this neighborhood, referenced to the coordinates of our own.⁶¹ The resultant question then

⁵⁹ 2016. See also Rawls (1971) and Sen (2009) for examples of the theories he engages. His *The Open Society* delves further into the hypothetical construction of protopian projects.

⁶⁰ Ibid, chapter one, esp. 26-41. This highlights the ethical differences between non-ideal theorists, such as Gaus, with ethical ideal theorists such as Estlund. See the latter’s 2014 for an argument in support of ethical idealism even when it is unrealizable given conditions in the actual world.

⁶¹ This is expressed in modal terms. Far off possible worlds exhibiting characteristics beyond our comprehension might be more just simpliciter; however, for Gaus this means little to humanity in the actual world. For a proposal of better social conditions to be meaningfully possible, it needs to be both comprehensible and achievable in our world (2016, 42-84).

turns on which direction is best for each variable in play. How do we decide what ‘best’ means for directionality in this context, given the multiplicity and variety of actors with a stake in the process?

To suggest a way to proceed, Gaus leverages recent research on problem solving by diverse, multiple stake-holders.⁶² (While the benefits of heterogeneous problem solving might be common knowledge within mathematical and economic disciplines, it has not been considered by most utopian or protopian theorists.) Summarized, Hong and Page have empirically demonstrated that diversity is more important than intelligence (in the form of IQ quotients) when solving complex problems. The more diversity that can be applied to the task of identifying ways ahead, the better the efficacy of resultant, synthesized solutions. While this turns out (for Gaus) to not be the panacea it might initially appear (in order to find the “one size fits all” solution across close possible worlds⁶³), it does identify a principle critical to joint ethical inquiry in a non-ideal form.

This is:

The Fundamental Diversity Insight: Any given perspective Σ on justice that meets the Social Realizations and Orientation Conditions is apt to get caught at poor local optima; other perspectives can help by reinterpreting the problem or applying different predictive models, showing better alternatives in Σ 's neighborhood.⁶⁴

I cannot here delve into the arguments for every technical term in this statement; however, it should be clear that as long as ideality in the case of each problem solver's perspective is not a requirement of the joint solution, a diversity of perspectives allows access to better alternatives. There are two aspects of this formulation that I want to note.

⁶² See Hong and Page (2001 and 2004).

⁶³ 2016, 117-133. This is due to the nature of ethical inquiry in an *ideal* sense. As diversity increases across multiple axes of input, ideal conceptualizations of ethical theories diverge to the point of being incompatible systemically. This divergence, however, is less problematic when the ‘tyranny of the ideal’ is discarded.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 133. Italics in original.

First, there is an inherent compromise, held within the initial commitments of non-ideal normative theory, concerning utopia, in *any* formulation. This can be recognized in his assumption that utopia can only-ever be a foil for analysis. Second, implicit in Gaus' theory is the idea that a plurality of perspectives turns out to be a better way to examine conditions of marginalization. This diverse form of problem solving is set against homogeneous (i.e., restricted) types of inquiry. This seems right for all concepts of utopia. Every actor must, at least eventually, get to play.

Despite this seeming methodological support for processually focused utopian theories, there are notable differences between them and protopian descriptions of how to enable more just sets of possibilities. Efforts aimed at gradual change from one obtaining state of affairs (or, as Gaus describes it, traversing terrain to get to different “peaks” of social justice) to another are worryingly restricted to “what is.” As such, they are tied to the present in a way that reinforces a certain concretization of utopian possibilities. They are ‘currently-realistic’ in nature and descriptive (conceived in understood terms) in form. This is not what Bloch and Augustine are about when describing a utopian impulse informing a process of movement towards an indescribable, ever-moving horizon of possibility.

To highlight this difference from another perspective, that of acknowledging the “real-possible” as the stuff with which both protopia and processual utopia must begin, regardless of the present's interpretation in light of a concretized and reified past, we *are* “here, now.” This is unavoidable, and even if directionality for utopian effort can be clarified to allow progress toward a Blochian novum, we must start from where we are – here and now. Protopian theory certainly aligns with (and is predicated upon) this

starting point. What protopian proposals seem to lack is an appropriate reflexivity about what constitutes ‘truth’ within that present. They seem to affirm currently understood notions of progress, leveraging those as valid conceptual frameworks then explored by diverse problem-solving teams. Where their utopian counterparts diverge is in a decision to begin from a critique of that currently affirmed linear history within the past-become-present. Temporally, these approaches are fundamentally different.

This disconnect is not merely semantic. The genesis of the utopian trace is, for processual theories, *only* perceived in the context of a newly-liquified past. This requires the smashing of currently concretized pasts-become-present. The result of these ruptures is to trouble concretized visions of normative starting points and directionality, referenced to current relationships of power, such that they become highly suspect. Protopia’s pragmatism, then, can easily trap it within logics affirmed by current relationships of privilege. This is perhaps largely responsible over the past century or more for the tension between analytical conceptions of social progress when contrasted with ‘continental’ alternatives. These latter worry, correctly I think, about the historical groundings for utopian vision in the sense that the default starting points for any such vision might be fatally flawed.⁶⁵

3.5 Conclusion – Faith as Utopian Technology

The methodological regress from the modern secular interpretations of history to their ancient religious pattern is, last but not least, substantially justified by the realization that we find ourselves more or less at

⁶⁵ See Levitas (2017, 3) for another way to describe these differences. For a pragmatic proposal arguing for the situation of utopian struggle within everyday life and work, see Davis and Wotherspoon’s (2014) concerning locating hope within practice. Their theory aligns conceptually with processual accounts of utopia – indeed, they insist (p. 3) that their influence on ‘pragmatism’ is expansively scoped, and as such their project is not protopian in nature. This said, their emphasis on using market metrics for evaluating ostensibly utopian initiatives seems closer to a narrower, protopian-cum-pragmatic account. Despite this difference, their thesis is that “everyday practice is constantly replenishing utopian potential by providing it with fresh resources and new hope.” Perhaps this kind of approach to utopian hope offers a way of bridging protopian pragmatism with processual image-casting.

the end of the modern rope. It has worn too thin to give hopeful support. We have learned to wait without hope, “ for hope would be hope in the wrong thing.” *Hence the wholesomeness of remembering in these times of suspense what has been forgotten* and of recovering the genuine sources of our sophisticated results. [...] The outstanding element, however, out of which an interpretation of history could arise at all, is the basic experience of evil and suffering, and of man’s quest for happiness. [...] To ask earnestly the question of the ultimate meaning of history takes one’s breath away; *it transports us into a vacuum which only hope and faith can fill.*

- Karl Löwith⁶⁶

I am falling into grace,
To the unknown, to where You are, and
Faith makes
Everybody scared,
It’s the unknown, we don’t know
That keeps me holding on, and on, and on to you...

- Jason Wade⁶⁷

I mentioned in this chapter’s introduction that I would conclude by placing these religious, or mystical, mechanisms crucial to processual utopia’s methodology in conversation with four aspects of utopian function Ruth Levitas proposes in her (1989) account. The central idea of her argument is that utopian hope’s defining characteristic is its function. This is to say that it supplies a methodology for utopia. This method, she claims, displays four aspects: 1) a cognitive function as a mode of constructive reason (i.e., a mode of rationality!), 2) an educative function as a *mythography* which instructs both will and desire, 3) an anticipatory function recognized within a future orientation towards possibilities which later become actual, and 4) a causal function *that acts as an agent for historical change*.⁶⁸

I have noted a number of distinctions differentiating political from processual utopias. These directly correlate to the terms italicized in Levitas’ list. The second of these, mythography, highlights the motivations within hope-based theories that flow from

⁶⁶ 1949, 3-4. Emphases mine.

⁶⁷ Lifehouse, “Unknown” from the album *No Name Face*, released in 2000.

⁶⁸ 1989, 29. Here she references Hudson (1982) *The Marxist Philosophy of Ernst Bloch*. Macmillan: London, p. 90. Emphases mine.

a foundation of distrust for Enlightenment-cum-modernistic ideas of social progress that freeze future possibilities. They support this strategy with a meaning-making apparatus foisted on subjects and characterized as the uniquely valid/rational way of viewing the world. Yet these logics have failed. This is likely due to no malicious intent by any given set of actors, but the insistent way in which they recreate themselves can be charged to their account. The return to a more temporally fluid indeed *mystical*, critique of those logics is warranted. I think it is inevitable, given the advance of consumer consumption in the form (and under the cover) of liberal democracy, despite the evidence concerning their eventual dead-end (e.g., simply in virtue of resource finitude).

Keeping this in mind, future theoretical speculation seems more suited to the realm of the theological and/or the prophetic. This might seem baroque, but I do not think it at all odd – it is, in fact, unavoidable. To briefly consider the latter (the prophetic), we should note that it entails the apocalyptic. As I have argued elsewhere, historiographical narrative trades in the apocalyptic as instrumental to its methodology.⁶⁹ It inserts apocalypses within history as a tool to situate the dialectic. It is wielded as a technology while crafting the story. Prophetic elements within a given history, and their entailed (i.e. prophesied) apocalypse(s), are positioned and described from various temporal vantage points that textually ‘look back,’ highlighting their synthetic role as meaning-makers for religious *and* secular histories.⁷⁰

Apocalypse then functions within historiography as an arbiter in support of narratives of ‘progress.’ Prophets unveil (*αποκαλύπτω*, *apokalýptō*) the future. The

⁶⁹ See my 2022b “Historiography and Apocalypse: an Intimate Relationship.” It can be found at: https://www.academia.edu/38118912/Historiography_and_Apocalypse_an_Intimate_Relationship

⁷⁰ I refer here to ‘modern’ histories, following Löwith’s description (1949, 1-19). This is in contrast to what he terms ‘ancient’ histories, which feature a cyclical (thus, inescapable) form and function to their narratives.

point here, referring to Levitas' claim about utopian hope's *function*, concerns an emphasis on the *form* given to prophetic histories-become-futures. In the prophetic case, an iconic historiographical form predominates. A vantage point is created that positions desired elements to entail their apocalyptic conclusions (within narratives of progress). It turns out that instead of theorizing *about* the future, prophets *construct* futures referencing a given, teleologically-constrained interpretation of the past, coupled with an already-determined telos and eschaton.⁷¹

But what about that element of processual utopia accruing to “the theological?” Here I think we move beyond mere form to ‘real’ content. This chapter has chronicled an occurrence of this phenomenon, and as a reminder, we are now blending what I highlighted above within Levitas' four aspects of utopian hope. The mythographical, educative function intersects with its causal artefacts, initiating an implosion of crystallized histories. Theological, or better: *mystical*, resources seem the natural refuge of those wishing to oppose a straight-line historical exegesis entailing a trivially tautological telos.⁷² Perhaps this explains why even determinedly materialistic philosophers, focused in part on discrediting religion's validity within current political realities, discover their theories saturated with religious symbols and concepts.⁷³

As a telling example, one finds in Marx a (for him, materialistic) cycle (highlighting a 'transcendent' sibling) of birth, death, resurrection, and even a savior.

These are, of course, the ever-more-solidified entrenchment of the bourgeoisie's

⁷¹ That is to say, locating the “ends of history” within manufactured historical “changes”, for Löwith these are: *finis*, *telos*, and *eschaton* (*Ibid*, p. 18). See also Hayden White's seminal (1987) account of the content-laden function history's form inhabits in the context of story-telling.

⁷² Which is why Bloch and others openly embrace the transcendental nature of their theories, even while maintaining their materiality. See also Ricouer (1986, 272-273) and Mannheim (1936, 192-195).

⁷³ E.g., Bloch (1995, 2000), Benjamin (1940a), Adorno (1970), Baudrillard (1996).

dominance of the proletariat hard on the heels of the *Aufklärung*, the pending destruction of that system represented in the concatenation of its structures and values, its reincarnation (or 'trans-carnation') into a society purportedly by and for the workers, and the person of its savior in the guise of the inevitable, and unavoidable, revolution.⁷⁴ The striking resemblance of this cycle to its metaphysical counterpart is hard to miss, and it is significant that many historical analyses since Marx limit their framework to the first two phases, birth and death. Consider that most agree with Marx (and others, such as Althusser) that the Enlightenment and its suppression of certain classes by the bourgeoisie embarked western civilization on a voyage requiring an inevitable settling of accounts, a predestined appointment with Charon and the Styx.⁷⁵ Birth and death are immanent. Yet there is little mention of resurrection and saviors within the cold stream of Marxism, of politically constructed utopias and socially engineered better days. Perhaps this is for good reason.

Marxism, however, also possesses a warm stream. In this we can locate Bloch and those others searching for ways to recuperate both resurrection and savior within a (perhaps ironically Marxist) processual utopia. I have argued that faith serves as a seminal example of theological resources leveraged as method within such theories. As such it also, like my description of apocalypse, is a technology. It is a *utopian* methodology aimed at liberating history in order to unbridle the future. Unsurprisingly (and in contrast to the apocalyptic nature of historiography and the art of crafting histories), leveraging faith as utopian hope requires, instead of a solidification of prophetic histories, a commitment to smashing them. Only in the determined negation of

⁷⁴ His 1932, 1967 ed., and 1996 ed. classically explicate these actors/actants.

⁷⁵ Specifically his (1971) refinement of Marxist theory focused on the loci and function of ideological supports.

an already-determined teleology can the future be held open for possibilities not yet recognizable.⁷⁶ Bloch calls this the “category of Front.” As he puts it:

Man and process, or rather: subject and object in dialectically materialist process, consequently both stand equally on the Front. And there is no other place for militant optimism than the place which the *category of Front* opens up. The philosophy of this optimism, that is, of materially comprehended hope, is itself, as the trenchant knowledge of non-contemplation, concerned with the foremost segment of history, and is so even when it concerns itself with the past, namely with the still undischarged future in the past. Philosophy of comprehended hope thus stand per definitionem on the Front of the world process, i.e., on the so little thought-out, foremost segment of Being of animated, utopianly open matter.⁷⁷

Linearly constrained temporalities can only represent a historicity that is normatively controlled *by definition*. Control, in this context, refers to the process of referential limitation, and this process describes the idolization of the resultant narrative that Benjamin and Sharpe critique so severely. Linear time is, if Löwith is correct, *modern* time. It is Enlightenment time.⁷⁸ It is the official story-teller of bounded, teleologically-constrained histories normed and frozen by strategic tools. In colloquial terms, it wants its cake and the pleasure of eating it at the same time. It solidifies a particular *eschaton* by freezing both historical *topoi* and *teli*, all the while cancelling out their common denominator (what Löwith refers to as “the meaning of suffering as historical action”).⁷⁹

‘Linearly normed’ time is a mix of petrol and oil that satisfies no one and breeds uncertainty about utopian directionality. It blends theological logics with disinterested (or ‘scientific’) inquiry, embodying an example of what Latour refers to as the ‘purifying’ mission of modernity, one governed by a modern constitution that only works as a result

⁷⁶ Preserving, for Bloch and Augustine, the ability to reference the novum or city of God, respectively.

⁷⁷ 1995, 200. Italics in original.

⁷⁸ Löwith (1949, 1-19).

⁷⁹ Ibid, 7

of contrapuntal contradictions.⁸⁰ The purification of history relies, for its survival, on the obscuration of hybrid existences. Ontologies that do not align with the dominant narrative, such as his “crossed-out God,” must be either subsumed by explanation from homogenous poles of analysis (i.e., nature or society) or defined out of any causal relationships from anything obtaining within the canon of modern science. Again Löwith: “It is only within a *pre-established horizon of ultimate meaning*, however hidden it may be, that actual [linear] history seems to be meaningless.”⁸¹ Utopian time, that historic-become-present instantiation recognized as the flash of the Absolute, the kernel of possibility both extant and repressed in the past, must be occluded to hold the past immobilized. Utopian time, what Jose Muñoz calls ‘queer time,’ is different.⁸² It is impure with respect to modernity; as such *it needs norming from the perspective of the status quo*. Linear time opposes utopian time – better, it papers over utopian *no time*. Only in the latter can alternative possibilities, potentialities dissolved within the past, be recaptured, reimagined, and pre-figuratively represented within tropes of image-casting outlining new possibilities.

So what next? I have highlighted an indissoluble link between theological concepts/methodologies and theories of processual utopia. They are, to use a colloquialism, “joined at the hip” both doctrinally and pragmatically. What this link provides us is a *general* methodology for utopia, perhaps even considered as protopian process.⁸³ But can we do better than this general conception of utopian methodology? How do we go about enfleshing the skeletal outline sketched thus far? Do the resultant

⁸⁰ 1991, 31-38.

⁸¹ 1949, 4, emphasis mine.

⁸² 2009, 65-81

⁸³ With the reservations that I noted in the previous section.

schemata demand different vectors of affect and its accompanying action from diverse actors, both individual and communal? If so, what are those vectors and how can we encourage their pursuit?

In what remains, I deploy this general concept in an effort to construct an account of privileged utopian methodology. To do so will require different lenses than those we use on a daily basis. As an introductory segue, Levitas insists that efforts to resist a concretization of utopia's form (in the present) acknowledge the roles that desire, social imagination, and prefigurative practices play in pursuing a utopian cardinal heading.⁸⁴ I agree with this latter characterization, and my aim will be to both highlight problems and suggest initial solutions which might clarify that heading. The directionality of utopian struggle has to be rooted in the present (a present emerging from a smashing of its instrumental role in reifying the status quo). Yet it also must acknowledge the fact that heading towards a utopian future hope might look quite different from expected stereotypes conceived by privileged social consciousnesses.

We must tactically struggle against that kind of descriptive genesis in order to have a chance at illuminating anything like a utopian novum. Abensour would say that a utopian imagination enables people to *learn to want differently* by thinking and feeling themselves into an alternative world.⁸⁵ We must teach ourselves and others a different way to desire in order to make a different future possible. I suggest that we cannot teach ourselves without help, but this does not change the fact that desire must be pre-figuratively practiced and then culturally-ingrained differently. Alternate futures are impossible without that shift.

⁸⁴ 2017, 7-13 and 2013, chps. 1-2

⁸⁵ 1999, cited in Levitas (2017, 6).

Levitas would argue that three functions, or modes, of utopia's methodology then emerge.⁸⁶ The *architectural* mode of this struggle concentrates on alternate imaginings – what I will refer to below as alternate futures – situating them as critiques of the status quo. The *archaeological* mode further discriminates these critiques, identifying which candidate responses are aimed at utopian, or dystopian, ends. Her third mode is, as I continue to emphasize, *ontological*. All utopias have, at bottom, a fundamentally ontological and resultant ethical grounding centered on *what it is to be human*. To pick out an appropriate directionality for utopian method will require an expanded ontology – one incorporating that of the ‘other.’ It turns out that the privileged can't do it alone. If utopian struggle, as an imagined end, is an *ethical* imperative – and this is entailed within any construct of moral realism, then helping the privileged becomes something the marginalized, despite it being fairly non-intuitive, *should* do. I can see no other way out of the morass of self-reification continually recreated by the merely-political theater of action. That realm, and its efforts, can have no utopian result.

While Levitas and I might agree on the broad concept of “utopia as method,” we need to be careful of the tendency of this idea to become “utopia as *only* method.” Levitas concludes that, as method, utopia has no specific content.⁸⁷ I would counter that it must be possible for utopia to have specific content. If there is no possible world in which utopia exists, then what we are about is worse than a fool's game. It provides false hopes of the most insidious kind, an impossibly chimeric state of affairs. This flies in the face of the description of the utopian impulse offered by both Bloch and St. Augustine. We can grant that there might be no way for humanity, in its current state, to populate or even

⁸⁶ 2017, 7-9.

⁸⁷ Ibid

imagine that content. Yet we can remain convinced that it, utopia, still remains (in a robust, metaphysically-possible sense) on the horizon as the target for our collective ‘arrow of desire.’⁸⁸ Pursuing that target on the horizon is what the utopian impulse within us demands! Having analyzed the theological-cum-political logics underpinning the description and instantiation of that impulse, I turn now to their method.

⁸⁸ Weeks (2011, 175-204)

Chapter Four – The Master’s Tools: What Cannot Inform Utopian Process

Our dreams of the future are henceforth inseparable from our fears. Today, reconciled with the terrible, we are seeing a contamination of utopia by apocalypse: the heralded ‘new earth’ increasingly assumes the aspect of a new Hell. But this Hell is one we are waiting for, we even make it our duty to precipitate its advent. The two genres, utopian and apocalyptic, which once seemed so dissimilar to us, interpenetrate, rub off on each other, to form a third, wonderfully apt to reflect on the kind of reality that threatens us and to which we shall nonetheless assent with a correct and disabused yes.

- E. M. Corian¹

Rather than be forced to learn formal rules of etiquette, students learn to be comfortable around such elite tastes and sensibilities and, more often than not, even be indifferent to them. The students at seated meal are not uncomfortable in their formal attire, nor are they anxious about eating dinner with faculty members. In fact, the event is a non-event to them. They could care less. And this ease – which, it turns out, is far more valuable than merely revering and producing expertise – is what students at St. Paul’s learn at seated meal and everywhere else. [...] The nearly ingenious trick – if I may call it so – is that the mark of privilege, corporeal ease, is anything but easy to produce. What appears a natural, simple quality is actually learned through repeated experiences in elite institutions. The result is a near invisible barrier. The apparent easiness of these characteristics implies that if someone doesn’t know how to embody ease, it is somehow *their own fault* – they do not naturally have what it takes. This allows for inequitable outcomes to be understood not as the result of the odds being stacked in the favor of some but as something that simply “happens.”

- S. R. Khan²

4.1. Introduction

In the next two chapters, I make an initial attempt to outline a fledgling methodology for processual utopia. Although I will focus on this primarily from the perspective of those currently favored by the status quo, I will additionally address ethical concerns that accrue to all actors within a given socio-cultural simulacrum. What follows will thus have both positive (what to do) and negative (what not to do) aspects.

This has been the most difficult chapter to research and write. The entailments of my arguments to this point will make what follows quite controversial. What I referred

¹ Quoted in Anthony Vidler (2010, 36). Original is from the author’s 1998.

² Khan (2011, 80-84), emphasis in original. This ethnography of the privilege-making apparatuses within private, elite schools highlights the intriguing goal of making students ‘easy’ with their status and privilege. This objective, according to the author, takes priority over all other, including academic, pursuits. Pierre Bourdieu (1996, 21) comes to the same conclusion in that ease and natural talent are actually products of a “mode of acquisition” accrued by the privileged class. The rapport with constructed culture remains at the level of sub-consciousness, informing the default ways in which the privileged create and defend that culture while, contradictorily, claiming that they are its natural product.

to in the introduction as an ethical minefield will loom large here, and I want to be clear that: 1) I do not have all the answers yet, and 2) this is going to be uncomfortable for anyone to read, whatever her societal status, class, or ideological worldview. This is due, among other things, to a pregnant ethical tension accruing to the nature of privilege or being disadvantaged. It seems correct, on the one hand, that the latter status includes certain rights of redress as a result of being wronged, for many centuries in some cases. Yet I will argue in what follows that certain vectors of power deployment cannot be utopian in their directionality. This goes hand-in-hand with a commitment to (ethical) normative realism. If morality consists, at least in part, of things that are always right and/or always wrong, then the moral status of anyone wielding an ‘always wrong’ implement of power fails to make that action right, no matter the validity of the cause.

This scenario creates difficult challenges, and this chapter will attempt to discuss them overtly, if perhaps unsatisfactorily. The section below on the ‘master’s tools,’ for example, highlights why certain approaches always use *strategic* weapons and, as such, are bent on an opponent’s destruction rather than including her in a discourse aimed at utopian ends. As such, they are targeted at (overall) dystopian objectives vice utopian ones. This will be hard to accept for some, especially during our current (or recent) socio-cultural moment. It will be, on the other hand, *too easy* for others to accept, and from the outset I suggest that, should what I say be received without discomfort, then either I will not have explained myself clearly or more reflexivity might be warranted.

I have demonstrated that the relationships of power existing within political simulacra determine the primary spheres of action available to different actors. Those with greater agency, on a scale graphing their relative autonomy of action and its set of

past-become-present constituents constraining future possibilities, tend to resort to strategic modes of maneuver. Those further ‘down,’ as a result of having to work against the ontological boundaries enforced by the simulacrum, must resort to tactical interventions to contend for higher quotients of personal and/or corporate agency. This caricature helps clarify the default directionality of effort for these individuals, and the groups they comprise, within the context of my project.

This distinction is not merely descriptive. These differences are sensed even within what some might call ‘commonsense morality.’³ Thomas Hurka describes how this reasoning might function after certain injustices have been brought to light:

This general account can explain our attitudes to racial partiality. [...] While we condemn racial discrimination by members of a dominant racial group, we often think it appropriate for minority races to celebrate their distinctness and even to implement discriminatory policies that benefit their members at the expense of others. In current conditions, black and aboriginal solidarity movements have a different moral status than white supremacy movements.⁴

Yet there is a danger in what he claims – that of moral relativity more generally. It is one thing to speak of different movements having a different moral status than another. It is quite another to state that “anything goes” in support of a movement with a putatively ‘higher’ moral status. There is a nuance here that is easy to miss (or to ignore). A majority of the dominant class in, say, Canada (where Hurka was writing), might readily discern this difference within white supremacy initiatives yet remain in the dark as to how the same logics work less obviously within a strategically-affirmed rhetoric supposedly aimed at bettering the lives of all at stake. This tension becomes more apropos to our own moment when we think about practical utopian methodology. What

³ See, as examples, Steiner (1999), Beitz (1983), and Scheffler (1995) for proposals concerning distributive justice that parsing the topic generatively and iteratively from the standpoint of ‘commonsense morality.’

⁴ Hurka (1997, 154)

can be permitted as morally acceptable on its behalf? Merely-political qua ideological struggle tends to be anti-processual utopia, so this will be a tough knot to unravel.

Considering the divergence of strategic and tactical directionality from an ethical perspective, the differences between descriptive and processual accounts of utopia are further highlighted. In the former case, pursuit of utopia using strategic tools will tend to reinforce existing relationships of privilege as a result of being rooted in logics that continually recreate the status quo.⁵ This is true *no matter who owns the hand using those tools*. This means, among other things, that vengeance for past wrongs, if it is deployed using strategic, ideological tools of power, cannot constitute the methodology of utopian effort. Performative modeling of alternate imaginaries must rely on tactical interventions aimed at disrupting strategically-normed spaces. They oppose the status quo differently - in a way that, importantly, might surprise by those who, as Gramsci notes, have largely elected to be happy (or content) to be normed by existing structures.⁶

There are multiple reasons why they must be different. As one example, interventions that fail to rupture current normative space in a manner that directly counters its ontological limitations run the risk of being co-opted within a narrative both pre and proscribing what is 'normal.' Put simply, tactical interventions must be shocking enough to suggest disruptive changes to what 'exists.' Secondly, to intervene within strategic space, to have a chance of unsettling the apple cart, tactical ruptures must be noticed, full stop. Shock value matters in that it garners attention in order 'to shock.'

⁵ This is the case regardless of how 'new' the status quo might be. For this reason, strategic tools remain those of the master's house, even if the master is quite new – representing even a reversal from former master/servant relationships. The logic grounding socio-political relationships of privilege do not require the same actor types inhabiting any given positionality with respect to agentic power gradients.

⁶ 1971, 145

Of course, these ruptures then become identified as ‘targets’ and as such, resistance to them might become more focused. This risk is, however, worth the cost. If they are not apprehended *at all* (by either marginalized or privileged actors), it is hard to see how they can be more than insular expressions of discontent. Put more sharply, if the aim of tactical rupture is to flatten agentic stratification (and, by extension, provide more equitable sets of possibilities), then hidden gestures of opposition are, apart from perhaps a pre-deployment mobilizing function, largely inadequate.⁷ Their audience must be broadened, and the value of interjecting visions of something different becomes clear. (This also reinforces why these ruptures tend to be aesthetic in their modes. Tactical initiatives seem tailor-made for such vehicles as the performing arts, as one example.) They exploit seams of hegemonic weakness while illuminating what has been hidden between the cracks of proscribed existence. They do not confront the simulacrum ‘across the field’ of open battle. They resist from asymmetric vectors; they are tropes of quotidian, guerilla resistance.⁸

This has complex repercussions, not least of which is that for privileged actors to be allies with their disadvantaged counterparts, they must critique their own ontological limitations and respective structural supports. They also must relocate their efforts to an opposing, tactical realm of action and intervention. This is to say that those who are currently advantaged must learn a new skill set, and although this might be easy enough to suggest and perhaps even understand in theory, its practical execution will be more

⁷ Although they might be targeted initially at the marginalized community in question. Garnering a community of support, what Ahmed and Sharpe (and others) call a community of care, may very well require a marshalling of the oppressed before those tactics become sharpened and effective enough to be deployed to ‘shock’ a larger audience.

⁸ Being asymmetric, they (on principle) should not conform to well-worn, linear paths of bifurcated division-inciting performativity I have demonstrated as exemplifying merely-political (or, merely-ideological) struggle.

difficult. Here's the hard part (for *both* privileged and marginalized actors): this move to a different field of play, for the privileged, must be an *internal, ethically-motivated* one. Put differently, it cannot be an ideologically, merely-politically forced move, or the primary vector of socio-cultural travel will remain dystopian, as I argued in chapter two.

Althusser claims that ideologies and their respective state apparatuses are effective at indoctrinating subjects in order to solidify what they sanctify as true, right, and real.⁹ By extension, then, strategic ways of thinking about them will tend to search for how to appropriate and then redefine anything 'new' into that pre-existing set. Those with more autonomy are programmed to support a certain way of parsing the world, with problematic ramifications. How can the currently privileged counter this tendency? What antidote to this encoding will enable a move from the strategic to the tactical sphere of struggle? These questions motivate the subject matter of these final chapters. To begin, I examine a definitive expression of this worry. It turns out that one interpretation of its meaning highlights the ways in which my project is addressed to multiple sets of actors even if its primary objective is to mobilize the privileged.¹⁰ This last statement needs refinement. I will note later in this chapter that those who have been traditionally disadvantaged have upheld their end of the 'utopian ethical bargain' in many cases. The privileged, on the other hand, have tended to fail at their role in this task. They haven't

⁹ 1971, 85-106

¹⁰ I realize this way of phrasing the positionality of the actors concerned is hopelessly inadequate. I use it as a caricature against which to situate my arguments. The reality is that there is an almost infinite level of nuance in the definition of who is privileged or marginalized in any normative context. These contexts are legion in our society, to include what we affectionately refer to as the "white tower" of academia. Quotients of privilege and marginalization are neither static nor inevitable. Much of what has been written in the literature about processual utopia, unfortunately, refuses to acknowledge this complexity, and as a result, societally-accepted definitions of either condition have become crystallized – in the exact way strategic narratives crystallize linear histories (precisely what Muñoz' calls 'straight time'). More reflexivity is needed here – especially as it concerns allegiances to particular political parties and their associated strategic power apparatuses.

been listening. Yet in this chapter I will also provide examples of the ways in which some contemporary initiatives ostensibly aimed at societal change may have run afoul of using those ‘master’s tools,’ remaining merely-political as a result.

4.3 The “Master’s Tools”

“For the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us to temporarily beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change.”

- Audre Lorde¹¹

This statement has stimulated much discussion and action in the years following its utterance. The metaphor of the ‘master’s tools’ provokes reactions across multiple social strata (as can be easily seen with a simple internet search of the phrase). Its profound effect and ongoing relevance bear witness to its influence, yet it also remains curiously mysterious. I do not make this observation lightly. Lorde’s claim seemingly erects hard barriers as to what counts as potentially valid tactics for social improvement, in the form of theory *and practice*, both inside and outside the academy and within efforts to address institutional violence. Clarity about what she means becomes not just a luxury but a necessity in order to avoid using those tools in a way that compromises genuine change. If the master’s tools, and their referents, remain merely metaphorical, it is hard to see how to act in order to support processual utopian objectives from *any* vector of agentic perspective.

As an example, consider that to claim (from a body of cultural evidence and experience) that these tools are artefacts, in the sense that they are physical or functional

¹¹ “The Master’s Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master’s House.” *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, ed. Berkeley, CA: Crossing Press (1984), 110-114.

(e.g., political structures, juridical spaces, etc.) entities, means they must have an *intrinsic* ethical valence (i.e., their own moral essence) that runs counter to most of the literature on the properties of artefacts.¹² The conclusion of this train of thought might be that, as one example, neo-liberal democracy is evil *by nature*. This would mean that there couldn't be a possible world in which neo-liberal democracy exists and does not, as a result of its essential evilness, necessarily marginalize certain groups and perpetuate violence on a systemic scale.¹³ The upshot would be that any simulacrum taking the form of liberal democracy possesses its own, necessarily evil, nature and agency, and we have already seen that the agency of a simulacrum just is the extended agency of its creators as the result of a (merely) political struggle and subsequent victory.

The metaphorical mystery centers on what counts as being tools of the master. Are they specific, intellectual and/or practical, strategies or initiatives? Or do they refer to some more all-encompassing notion of the 'dominant narrative' as something we refer to constantly without identifying, in any precise way, its constituents? To avoid going down a rabbit-hole, let me simplify the point I am making. If someone in a position of relative privilege, reading Lorde's quote and wanting to be an ally, wishes to act in a utopian fashion, she will need help understanding the quote's referents. If these remain unclear, it seems (again) that she is at an impasse. This is the crux of the problem. Can

¹² See Joe Pitt (2001) for how to position technology within philosophical inquiry, to include ethical properties in its case. See also his 2011 for, among other topics, a discussion of the ways in which technological artefacts have an effect on humankind's ethical developmental vector. This latter concept informs my exegesis of the 'master' below.

¹³ This counter-example would obtain for *any* form of political representation; insert any other 'necessarily evil' political construct in place of liberal democracy, if you like. Some level of violence is inherent in every form of civil organization/social contract (e.g., even democracy assumes a majority and minority constituency). But then this claim reduces to a critique of the state of nature and the generative grounding of civil society (and the concept of the social contract) in its most basic theoretical forms. For paradigmatic accounts of the role this concept plays in the foundation of civil society-cum-politics, see Rousseau (1950 trans.), Machiavelli, (1952 trans.), Locke (1952 ed.), and Hobbes (1952 ed.).

(and how do) the currently disadvantaged get asked to meet the privileged? Where do those meetings take place? What do they look like? What gets said at them?

Consider that if we stick to a narrowly (and analytically) logical analysis of her quote, there is a danger of relocating it such that it is trivialized unfairly (and incorrectly, as I argue below). To see this, note that the statement makes a modally closed claim (i.e. these tools can *never* be used for meaningful change), and, as a result, the burden of argumentative proof remains with Lorde. If the statement is put into the form of an argument (in a premise/conclusion way) then it is certainly valid (per *modus ponens*); however, then the question of its metaphorical referents immediately (re)arises.¹⁴ Clarity about what is meant by the master's tools remains paramount.

I suggest that approaching the concept of the 'master's tools' in this narrowly-defined way seems to miss the target. In the first place, parsing it requires navigating the minefield I have been describing. As a (in most cases) relatively privileged actor, my attempts to analyze it could easily misconstrue both its motivations and its target. (I'll revisit this observation later.) The second way in which this approach becomes problematic is that what it identifies as objectionable indicates, to my lights, that an analytical interpretation was not Lorde's intent or method. Let me explain.

Given that her argument follows a valid logical form, it seems unlikely to be the case that the rules of (perhaps referred to as 'western') logic comprise what she is calling the "master's tools." She uses them herself here (both as form and method). The idea that we should locate her target within logical argumentative forms seems to miss the mark. If we widen the net to consider a western tradition of dialectic, to include post-Enlightenment critique of its own precepts, Lorde's remarks again remain ensconced

¹⁴ *Modus ponens*: If A then B, A, conclusion: B; *modus tollens* is the inverted construction of this form.

within that tradition, to include its original elocution and audience. The master's tools, for Lorde, do not, I think, reduce to western, post-Enlightenment intellectual inquiry or its associated argumentative formulations. She seems to be getting at something else. Before I gesture at what might be a more accurate interpretation, however, I will stick with the idea of 'western, privileged tools' for just a bit longer in order to demonstrate why it is so easy to take the wrong exegetical path in these cases.

I think it is a mistake to confine Lorde's charge within an analytical arena of debate in which the argumentative burden of proof and the need for metaphorical clarification *on her part* become immediately apparent. This is, to recall the point made above, a result of the modally closed claim she makes concerning the impossibility of these tools being used for meaningful change. The text is being incorrectly prioritized over context.¹⁵ As the proverb goes, the forest is lost for the trees. This error stems from limited ontological sets and their (also limited) epistemological supports that attempt to force marginalized statements into a specific framework and then go about either disputing or silencing them.¹⁶

Privileged actors have been culturally programmed to parse and/or frame the perspectives of the relatively disadvantaged in a certain way, resulting in interpretations that unfortunately tend reduce them in this analytical fashion. When ontologies crystallized through cycles of normative creation and reinforcement are challenged, the gut instinct for responses by those with relative privilege is to redefine them within

¹⁵ Thanks to Kwame Harrison for suggesting this way of putting the idea.

¹⁶ What I am demonstrating is the likelihood that statements/arguments by the marginalized, no matter how complex or multi-valenced, tend to be treated in this 'all or nothing' way. I am advocating for an argumentative pause on the part of the privileged, one that attempts to allow for diverse constructions of socio-cultural concepts that intentionally challenge privileged structures of power. This effort will require going beyond strictly analytical inquiry. We need to reverse the priority from 'text' to 'context.'

existing fields of discourse that reify those affirmed ontological structures. In the context of disadvantaged actors and their historical experiences, we need to recognize that ‘what exists’ is not a settled (or even contentfully understood) set and raising objections that remain strictly within merely empirical frameworks created and defined by those normed sets of existence misses the point. Privileged programming entails a correspondent need for aid in order to move beyond it.¹⁷

In the next two sections I unpack what Lorde might have been getting at in this context. There are (at least) two crucial pieces to this facet of utopian struggle that she introduces— and these will accrue to all actors and their roles in this drama. They flow from a robust conception of ethical obligations, and their requisite requirements, for *all* subjects in the pursuit of utopia, one that we cannot yet imagine yet demands our pursuit.

So where do we go from here? In the next section, I attempt to demonstrate an expanded profundity of Lorde’s claim within the context (and project) of utopian process. This will help highlight a different set of ‘default’ positions taken by the privileged when ostensibly attempting to be allies. It will also proscribe certain *strategies* (perhaps incorrectly considered *tactics* by those wielding them) that must be avoided if the City of God is the ultimate goal.

¹⁷ This aid will require me to diverge a bit from the more holistic point Lorde is making. In this, the example of Nelson Mandela’s tactics will be helpful. According to him, there will be no way forward and no change if the oppressors and their way of doing things (their culture and what they value) are entirely excluded. Any lasting change and way forward need to help heal the nation (or world) and bring social groups together on grounds that they share (in his case sports, to include the rugby of former oppressors). The idea is to consider each other as human beings, not enemies. It is a hopeful embrace of the ‘enemy’ without revenge, anger, or resentment. As such, *it goes beyond the merely-political*. Thanks to Michael Moehler for helping me clarify these differences. The resultant (and necessary) inclusion of the privileged (and a perhaps unfair, but unavoidable, ethical obligation incurred by the marginalized to do so in this specific context) becomes a joint requirement for utopian possibilities to be potentialized (as opposed to merely-political variants of confrontation and ‘settling scores’).

4.4 So Again – Just Who is This “Master”?

As a first pass, I suggest that Lorde casts in relief a marginalized methodology and way of “being in the world” vis-à-vis hegemonic *strategy*. As the section title hints, the crux of the matter remains the identification of who, or what, is the ‘master’ in these spaces. I will argue in what follows that the master should be identified as the respective normative simulacrum and its strategic ways of consolidating, and recreating, its own position of being the primary power broker in that space.

This might seem contradictory to my previous assertion mitigating against an inherent agency or ethical tendency accruing to any artefact. This is not what I am suggesting. Normative simulacra are, in every case, created and then deified by human agency; however this agency is expressed within uniquely (and merely) political arenas of competition and instantiated within a specific ideology and those societal constructs that support it.¹⁸ As such the simulacrum in question is idealized/idolized as that society’s *god*. It is therefore no stretch to refer to it as the ‘master.’ I continue to use religious terms to describe these phenomena because their functioning closely mirrors theological logic and doctrine. Although mere images, they are both more and less than artefacts. They do not exist, yet they inhabit and exercise (as products of) the agency of their creators, and they exceed the latter in their autonomy while remaining imposters, the always-unjustified arbiters of normative space. There is a subtle distinction between the simulacrum itself and the privileged caste of subjects that are in thrall to it while they, intentionally or not, continue to recreate it.

It requires no willful malice for these actors to tolerate what turns out to be oppressive uses of power. These structures, which sanctify the tools Lorde identifies,

¹⁸ Althusser (1971, esp. 95-106)

enforce the conditions of life and death under which the marginalized suffer and the privileged thrive. As in the case of faith and hope they (the merely-political versions of hope sustaining these simulacra) are operationalized as technologies.¹⁹ They are instantiated within ways of thinking that continue to defend the status quo. That they so coincide does not, however, entail that privileged actors are necessarily: 1) unable to think otherwise, and 2) constrained to use those tools. Recall that strategic tools are wielded primarily within a political arena of arbitration.²⁰ When actors, privileged or not, resort to strategic tools they are, according to Mannheim, de Certeau, and (as we are analyzing now) Lorde, engaged in a life-or-death struggle for political power and domination. This is why the end result of a totalizing reversal (as a result of physical revolution or recriminatory marginalization) of privileged actors' agentic status, *in virtue of resorting to strategic qua political tools*, cannot represent utopian struggle. Lorde gets it exactly right - the master's tools cannot be used to dismantle the master's house.

The tactical level of maneuver is something else altogether. Although it may not be the default field of play for those of privilege, it is a space they *can* inhabit, even if this requires utopian rupture to illuminate.²¹ To situate this concept of tactical rupture using Lorde's terms (in the context of processual utopia), it will be helpful to keep in mind this imaginary of the current simulacrum as representing 'the master.' The master's tools are the strategies perpetuating its ideological supremacy.²² The master(s) are those sacramentally-celebrated realities, those constructed combinations of non-being conflated

¹⁹ Analyzed in chapter three.

²⁰ De Certeau (1980, 34-39, 67-68, 91-110)

²¹ In fact they *must* inhabit it to be part of processual utopian hope.

²² Enfleshed within those in power *vis-à-vis* those simulacra. This set does not coincide with the set of all members of *any* ethic or gender-specific group of actors. Conflating a certain subset with the entire set in this case is a mistake. As I have argued, this results in a dead end to dialogue, both practically and theoretically, and its only conclusion is totalitarian (political) control by one set of actors.

as ‘real,’ that bind subjects in an ongoing worship of the image-become-idol. The tools used to create and sustain them are, in the end, doctrinal supports for something akin to religious faith in a certain cultural imaginary. They go largely unnoticed by the majority of actors within these spaces, resulting in their unfortunate tendency to reinforce/recreate their sustaining practices.

All this seems commonsensical, as these spaces tend to ‘work’ for the majority *qua socio-political majority*. Tendency does not, however, equate to necessity. The point of tactical rupture within utopian hope is to bring the nature of the violence inherent within these spaces to light. This cannot *just* mean the revealing of marginalization to the marginalized (although this may need to happen). It must also include a revealing of those systemic injustices *to the privileged*. This entails a dialogue, even if the tenor of that engagement turns out to be confrontational more often than not.

Benjamin refers to these ruptures as acts which expose the what-has-been in moments of “recognizing the now.”²³ The dialectic comes to a standstill because there is no basis on which to justify the crystallized way in which the present is portrayed by the relevant simulacrum. Its substance as mere idol becomes apparent. The smashing of that frozen past-become-present allows a rediscovery of its constituent bits in order to reconcile them. Recall that the imagery here is to liquify the past in order for Benjamin’s “angel of history” to turn towards future possibilities.²⁴ If ruptures, then, entail engagement with those who “inherit the master’s house,” it can’t be the case that they are dialogically (or otherwise) excluded from utopia’s process. They are integral to it, even

²³ 2002, N3,4 (463-464). See also his 1940, Theses IX-XVII.

²⁴ As an example of a crystallized past inhabiting present possibilities, Cristina Sharpe's “door of no return” (2016, 32 – especially her footnote 10 – and 13, 17, 99, 109, 131) describes a concretized modality of black being that continues to exist and inform the present temporality of utopian effort (for her: *care*).

if the role they play is not the kind of ‘heroism’ stemming from vestiges of imperial narratives clothed with messianic rhetoric. The task that remains is that of identifying *and using* tools that are different. Examples of these, as I demonstrate later, can be found in the work of Ahmed, Hartman, Sharpe, and others.²⁵

As a preview, and beginning with the latter, Sharpe explores a conceptualization of ‘wake work’ that must be done to reconcile the past with the present in an environment of (her word) *care* within that wake (and all her metaphorical representations of it).²⁶ This is a tactic with multiple tropes. It works within strategic realms of marginalization to counter those strategies’ effects. It undermines narratives that freeze Black identity in order to counter them with imaginaries of something better (or at least more livable), cast within an environment of mutual, ongoing “self and community” support. She is writing directly to Black audiences; however, it seems mistaken to think that the imagery of the wake might *not also* be rupture and corrective to white (or other privileged) readers.

This phenomenon is likewise highlighted within the vignettes described by Saidiya Hartman about attempts to break free from the virtual (and physical) prisons of Black tenement neighborhoods in Philadelphia and New York.²⁷ She calls these “beautiful experiments,” and her work presenting these to us *as utopian ruptures* have the potential to expose strategic maneuvers of normative hegemony. Here ‘us’ can be interpreted in various ways. I suggest the approach of (in her words) reading history across the grain, for privileged actors, is a form of *confrontational* dialogue. It forces

²⁵ The brief vignettes that follow are for the purpose of highlighting the ways in which this latter way of interpreting Lorde’s exhortation can be applied to each of these examples. Their accounts are featured at greater length in the following chapter.

²⁶ Ibid, 5. This was mentioned in chapter three.

²⁷ 2019. See especially xiii-xxi comprising her “note on method” and “cast of characters.”

reexaminations of things that might not be attended to without provocation. It is an exhortation to listen – better: *to shut up and pay attention*.

Similarly, I was initially surprised when studying Sara Ahmed’s portrayal of active, confrontational feminist ‘life.’ She challenges hegemonic masculine perspectives by not citing any white men in her book.²⁸ The content of her book, however, was not nearly as startling as the valuable and needed sense of exclusion I felt, as a white man, reading her work holistically. I was intentionally not addressed or included – only obliquely portrayed as the ‘other.’ It was a corrective for me. I am still grappling with its import. This reaction is a response to an intended rupture – a tactical foray destabilizing a simulacrum not questioned strongly enough to this point. Note that for me *it was recognizable* as a rupture. Yet in spite of my positionality in this context, a professor of feminist environmental theory told me something important: “Jay, you don’t have to be a woman to be a feminist killjoy.” Indeed, the tactic of feminist snap and the affective stance of the killjoy will both be central to the ongoing development of my project.

What I introduced at the beginning of this chapter is now clear. One facet of my argument is that the privileged must be assisted by the marginalized to be part of processual utopia’s effort. What I have just glossed about Sharpe’s and Hartman’s accounts demonstrates that in many cases they have been attempting to do just that. They are telling their stories in ways that rupture advantaged, idyllic, status quo affirming trances. The burden of action here accrues to the privileged. We have to shut up. Then

²⁸ 2017, 15-18. She includes a practically and theoretically based motivation for this approach in this section. As a brief gloss, it is directed at an institution of knowledge by an individual (herself) and a community. Thus it is clearly a trope of feminist/utopian tactical vs. strategic rupture. As bell hooks urges in her testimonial, “Everyone should read this book.”

we have to listen. As Christ put it, “He who has ears to hear, let him hear...”²⁹ The act of shutting up here refers to something more profound than that of ceasing to talk. It has to do with disrupting the worship service; it involves stopping the mass and halting the consecration of a dead sacrament.

Am I epistemologically disadvantaged when thinking about and addressing the employment of these tactics in the context of marginalized existences? You bet. Am I then also to be irreconcilably excluded from engaging with them as a result of my whiteness and my maleness? I certainly hope not, because it is otherwise hard to imagine a way forward. The reader will note that I am taking up another concern here – one that asks if the oppressor can ‘speak truth to her own power.’ My response is to say that this is at bottom a trick question. It cannot be simply an issue of speaking truth to oneself. The way idols/symbols currently worshipped die is in the recognition that they are false, that they represent nothing. We apprehend their falsity in a (Benjamite) ‘flash of the now,’ a recognition that the narrative we blindly respond to is at least partially a lie. The only way that ‘now’ crashes into our existence is when we attend to (i.e., shut up and listen to) those accounts, experiences, images, art, etc. put forward by the disadvantaged as tactical ruptures. This process will destabilize the web of ‘reality’ that has served *us* so well while hiding its deleterious effects on others.

The remainder of this project is an unpacking of this way of framing the problem as well as suggesting some possible initial directions. If my assumption of moral realism is a sound one, we have an ethical obligation to strive for the summum bonum, as Bloch

²⁹ Matthew 7:13-14, 24-27; Matthew 11: 15; Mark 4:9-23 (and elsewhere). In the Christian tradition, these passages come from what is known as the “Sermon on the Mount.” In this discourse, Christ explains the tenets of the Kingdom of Heaven – a radically different political, ethical, religious, and economic approach to life when compared to that promulgated by the Sanhedrin (ruling politico-religious council) at the time (or by neo-liberalistic capitalism in this time, for that matter).

describes it, of humanity.³⁰ Phrasing his theory in plain language, we have to start *with what we have* and aim for possibilities that *might* be achievable in the future. I have now demonstrated the problems from varying perspectives when attempting to parse “what we have.” Relying on a privileged ontological set will not be enough.

I am also claiming, as an original contribution to this body of thought, that we need not only a healthy critique of what might be considered default descriptions of utopia’s directionality but also a (possibly) actionable vector to orient this affective stance. Weeks refers to this conceptually as a communal arrow of desire.³¹ I think a fruitful place for aiming that arrow is within tropes of marginalized rupture. Those with more opportunity will have a hard time figuring out the directionality of this vector on their own. To return to our trick question – of course we can’t speak the *content* of this truth (or truths) to ourselves, not because we’re inherently evil but because we don’t access it in the viscerally experiential way required to identify it as the shortfall of justice it is. This is why I contend that it is in accounts of alternate futures, in the imaginings of the oppressed, that we should begin looking for candidate utopian directionalities. The marginalized are trying to paint images of different paths to take – we need to prioritize receiving over transmitting.

Lorde’s challenge, then, should be decoupled from any merely-political dialectic with its entailed totalitarian power struggle.³² This avoids a ludicrously binary positionality limiting its import (and, in contrast, resulting in merely reverse

³⁰ 1995, 298-305 and 2000, 65, 85. He describes the highest good (within musical utopian performativity) as the “Absolute, of love as such”. A recent account by an author of feminist futures (Elizabeth Debold, 2015) also posits love as method to counter the master’s tools. There is a similarity between her account and Augustine’s deployment of love (as *caritas*) within utopian method as explained by Arendt (1996 ed.).

³¹ Or, as she puts it, “demand” (2011, 204-225-213). This requires directionality in a quest to “find a way out.” See also Muñoz (2009, 19-32).

³² Perhaps an instructive contrast in the ‘tone’ these diverse initiatives tend to take can be seen in the different approaches to writing a feminist manifesto represented by Kember (2012) and Cuboniks (2014).

marginalization – a political victory, to be sure, but hardly a utopian one). We *should* not, it turns out, exclude any actor, even privileged ones, from its affective community. The privileged do, however, have to acknowledge an epistemological distance and obscurity when dealing with tactical ruptures. Lorde’s assertion thus becomes even more profound when situated in this way. She identifies the reigning societal idol, and its doctrinal proscriptions as to what might make up ‘true’ ontologies and their epistemologies, as holding the tools that must be discarded to build something new.

4.2 The Resultant ‘Ethical Minefield’

This section will be tough to read. It was tough to write. My interpretation of Lorde’s assertion, however, requires application in the here and now. What import do her words have for utopian, affective performativity in the way I have situated it here? The thorny problem remains those tools of the master identified above. If they cannot be wielded to utopian ends, and Lorde (with others) has seemingly argued that this is the case, then it is irrelevant who wields them. Their use only advances dystopian ends. This presents ethical issues that must be explored in order to discern a way forward.

My objective in this section will be to present some analyses of current situations exhibiting these dilemmas. This will hopefully bring to light the difficulties encountered by different sets of actors. The minefield *all* must traverse here is dangerous. There are tensions in these vignettes that require introspection, even if there might not be one clearly ‘correct’ path ahead after that reflective pause. As noted in the chapter’s introduction, I don’t have all the answers yet. I am wrestling, personally and professionally, with how to negotiate this minefield, and it is becoming apparent that the

effort to do so will outlast my lifetime. Yet the attempt must be made. The messiness inherent in an attempt to bridge positions that are, considered from a merely-political vantage point, clearly opposed to one another cannot be avoided. There is no clean way to invoke their (hopefully) possible synergy. But if Bloch (and St. Augustine) are correct, we are ethically obligated to try. Bloch (with Heidegger) might say that this obligation is rooted in humanity's *Da Sein*...that to be truly human entails being obligated to 'do utopia.' It is increasingly obvious that to do so will require movement and sacrifice from *all* parties involved.

Some of what I say below might seem to indicate a certain defensiveness on my part. I hope that this is not the case. There are surely remnants of socio-cultural programming, and its requisite boundaries to my default ontological set, influencing my thoughts in this context. Yet my primary desire is to propose a methodology of utopian affect and performativity that privileged actors will not discard out of hand. I have argued that the move to 'shutting up and listening' for privileged actors must stem from an *internal*, ethically-motivated shift that is crucially *not coerced by merely-political initiatives and/or power apparatuses*. I cannot see a way for this to happen if the rhetoric and actions ostensibly taken on utopia's behalf either: 1) bracket certain groups entirely from the conversation, or 2) occur in ways that are morally inconsistent at best and vengeful at worst.

To begin, it is hard to imagine how meaningful progress in the process of modeling the city of God can be made without action (indeed, concession) on the part of those with more agency. This is not to suggest that they then inhabit the role of being 'saviors.' It remains a simple question of power ratios (to paraphrase Monty Python). If

these actors enjoy the highest quotients of power and autonomy (agentially), then without their engagement, projects proposing alternate futures might be better described as whimsical fiction. In fact, ‘locking them out’ from the conversation will, given the nature of binary, political struggle, retrench any conversation about creating more just societies (only) within ideological combat.³³ Former President Barrack Obama echoed this intuition in a speech given in South Africa. He said, and this will be crucial to what I will observe below, that “culture is at a dead end when it decides someone has no standing to speak if he is a white man....”³⁴

If the position held by the privileged is agentially more unfettered, *and this constituency is entirely ignored and/or ‘canceled’ in any utopian conversation*, then the prospects for processual utopia seem bleak. To explore this in more depth, I turn now to the concept of ‘cultural appropriation’ as it is often used contemporarily (both in academia and media/politics). It turns out to be a revealing trope of the ethical minefield I am traversing throughout this dissertation.

4.2.1 Cultural Appropriation; Utopian ‘Ally-ship’

As part of my research, I subscribed to a blog by Carl H. Rux, specifically to read his thoughts entitled “Eminem: The New White Negro.”³⁵ He begins this piece by sketching a parallel between the myth of “Pentheus and the Bacchae” and more recent examples of collective identity, most notably in the observance of three things that are in

³³ Processual utopia cannot be reduced to merely-political tactics bent on the rational (or physical) destruction of a political opponent. See chapter two.

³⁴ Former President Barack Obama’s speech (South Africa), July 17, 2018, transcript at:

<https://www.cnn.com/2018/07/17/politics/barack-obama-mandela-speech-transcript/index.html>

³⁵ Accessed at: <https://carlhancockrux.blogspot.com/2008/11/eminem-new-white-negro-essay-by-carl.html>.

The content was originally published in Greg Tate’s (2003) book on white fetishization of black culture. That book, in turn, builds on Norman Mailer’s (1957) work on the topic.

tension in these contexts. The first is that both Pentheus and Eminem dress in the trappings of the ‘other’ (Dionysius and Black identities, respectively) in order to view that other’s reality. Secondly, this appropriation is conducted with inverted aims; Pentheus intends to destroy his foil, while Eminem accepts and glorifies it. The third item is particularly interesting. In the ancient myth, Pentheus is torn to pieces by his mother to protect a specific collective identity. Eminem, on the other hand, lyrically murders his mother and ‘baby mama’ in (to quote Rux) “hit single after hit single.” The opposing ways these archetypes are presented mirrors the tensions I examine here, even if their resolution is beyond the scope of a single chapter sub-section.

The crux of the matter (for Rux) seems to lie in what performances of ‘whiteness’ or ‘blackness’ mean in the current socio-cultural milieux (and situated historically). Briefly glossed, he presents a picture of the appeal of a particular role – something he calls the “outcast.” In Eminem’s case, the performance is genuine as a result of never trying to leave whiteness behind. Eminem embodies whiteness within blackness (or, born and raised within blackness), and, as such, it differs from other superficially similar performances (as he notes, Vanilla Ice, ‘outcast’ roles played by white film stars, etc.). This results in his (Eminem’s) *not* being torn in pieces by a Black community (e.g., Pentheus’s mother) searching to protect a cultural identity.³⁶ This brings us back to his opening analysis about the savagery inherent in protecting a collective, if merely ephemeral, identity:

Their [Bacchean] humanity has been perceived as inhumane, and in defense of their right to preserve an identity and a culture for themselves, an extreme cruelty befitting of inhumanity is enacted. [...] Inevitably collective agreement regarding identity

³⁶ In this context, race and identity are constructed (i.e., idols). They are not ‘real,’ but their influence is actual. Using my terms, they are simulacra, with their own rules for who gets to use strategic or tactical tools of power.

produces a common design for humanity, *or a morality relative to the perceptions of a particular group*. Hierarchical notions of humanity are formed and eventually, once the tracks are laid people will have to make their camps on either side. Conflict. War. Oppression. Somebody or bodies in opposition to the populace will have to be dismembered.³⁷

The ethical tension crackles in Rux's analysis, perhaps all the more so given the turbulent events of the past year. Stated in his terms, do 'whiteness' and 'blackness' then become necessarily opposing 'sides' outlining always-incompatible collective identities? If so, what hope is there for processual utopian striving? More accurately (and provocatively) put, are morally relativistic accounts claiming to aim for utopia fundamentally divisive in their tactics and telic? Are they, at bottom, politically disguised proposals for annihilating a previously oppressive other? What kinds of tools are being aimed at the 'other side?' We need to tread carefully through this terrain. Yet Rux does outline a space in which whiteness can function as an ally of blackness. He makes it clear that the conditions necessary for this complex role are rooted in an ongoing acknowledgment of one's own 'home' emplacement, yet he does not rule out the possibility for 'ally-ship' to exist within instances of cultural appropriation.

This is not the position of all scholars and thinkers on this issue. Kyle Whyte, writing from an Indigenous American viewpoint, argues against the ability of privileged individuals to decouple themselves from what he calls a "counterfactual dialogue with ancestors."³⁸ To support this claim, he references a mode of Indigenous philosophy leveraging a temporal perspective rooted in Native American cultural ways of being. We cannot separate ourselves from our ancestors, for (much as Benjamin asserts) those past constituents are always present in 'the present.' Thus their legacy constrains future

³⁷ Ibid. emphasis mine

³⁸ 2018, 234-239.

possibilities for that ancestral/generational set of actors. In the case of the privileged, Whyte argues that this phenomenon ties current actors to the “fantasies of their ancestors” which might, given my earlier analysis, constitute Benjamin’s ‘now.’ In this present, the privileged hold a level of agency in relation to those less advantaged that our ancestors would consider (with positive conative phenomenology) “fantastical.” The eventual total suppression of Indigenous agency is something they longed for and would see as realized in the present. This problematizes, for Whyte, the ability of the privileged to be allies without *necessarily* continuing to marginalize Indigenous peoples. If this summary seems exaggerated, here’s an extended quote:

Settler ancestors gifted their descendants the capacity to be able to believe to their very core that Indigenous self-determination is illegal. Another privilege concerns people more to the political left. Their ancestors gifted them worlds in which they could feel themselves to be innocent. They can be saviors of Indigenous peoples – as protagonists who can still be heroes to Indigenous peoples precisely because there is a belief that they can do what their ancestors failed to do [...]. Yet, to maintain this belief, these allies must accept that their ancestral fantasies have not yet come to pass, leaving an opening for supposedly innocent people to help Indigenous friends whose lives remain sufficiently – but not entirely – unaffected by colonial and other forms of domination. For example, some seem to believe that merely attending an Indigenous ceremony and mobilization, such as the #noADPL movement, or making social media postings, or doing academic research as a professor, or romanticizing Indigenous wisdom, actually work to transform the levers of colonial power that maintain anti-Indigenous oppression. To believe this, one must assume the nexus of colonialism, capitalism, and industrialization is not as entrenched as it is, which creates the illusion that performing supportive but ineffectual actions is enough to merit and justify one’s feeling innocent.³⁹

Setting aside for the moment what might be a problematic reductive characterization of the actor types occurring here, Whyte seems to leave little room for future action by the privileged *at all*. This would be dangerous in the context of thinking about what to *do* next in a project of processual utopia. He certainly exposes a hidden, perhaps subconscious, valence affecting actions taken ostensibly to ‘better conditions’ for

³⁹ Ibid, 237.

oppressed peoples. Indeed, in the next chapter I will showcase his insights into differences between ‘normal’ science fiction and Indigenous science fiction as they pertain to visions of alternate futures. They are practically informative to the search for directionality in the case of utopian effort. Furthermore, he is correct in that the currently privileged don’t get to be saviors or heroes in this struggle.⁴⁰ He echoes Andrea Smith’s insistence that attempts to “attend ceremonies,” or dispense “indigenous wisdom” actually situate those cultural possessions as artefacts within privileged spaces encoded as flowing from white initiatives.⁴¹ These efforts, according to both Smith and Whyte, do not constitute ways for the privileged to be allies.

Whyte’s apparent position, however, on the topic of “being a utopian ally” worrisomely echoes the binary, and as such destructive, logic of the merely-political analyzed in chapter two. His essentialization of currently privileged actors as, *en masse*, being irretrievably locked into a cycle of fulfilling (or better, inhabiting) ancestral fantasies leaves little room for redemption.⁴² It reduces those actors to the sub-human agentic status I described earlier when roughly defining dystopia. It repeats the logic of societal stratification of opportunity offered at the outset of this dissertation. More crucially, it is limited to a Manichean depiction of the actors in this drama. One either possesses the ability to support utopian goals, or she is prohibited from doing so as an

⁴⁰ To any extent greater than that accruing to *anyone*, of any race or derivation, fighting to increase quotients of justice, writ large. This effort remains ‘heroic’ simply as a result of its targeting a moral good – for Bloch, the *highest* moral good – and as such morally praiseworthy. This praiseworthiness is not mortgaged simply due to the skin color of the actor in question. To claim this is to be recklessly racist and engaged in ideological efforts to destroy an opponent – something that is anathema to any conceptualization of processual utopia.

⁴¹ 1991 (<http://www.thepeoplespaths.net/articles/formlife.htm>)

⁴² One wonders if the descendants of Bartolomé de las Casas would agree that they are living a fulfillment of their ancestors ‘fantasies.’ See Mauro Caraccioli’s (2020) account that troubles an essentializing and necessarily ‘evil’ characterization of early-modern, Spanish natural historians. Put more argumentatively, as Whyte makes a modally closed claim (to the effect that the privileged are locked into a cycle of realizing the fantasies of their forebears), the burden of proof remains with him. Unless a compelling argument is presented in support of the *necessary* nature of his claim, care needs to be exercised when deploying it.

ontological consequence (i.e., in virtue of a contingent and specific, in this case *racial*, identity). To see this, note that the freedom to act utopianly (according to Whyte) depends on skin color or ethnic/racial background. This kind of reasoning, while helpfully exposing certain privileged tendencies, seemingly mitigates against the possibility of utopian ‘ally-ness’ in certain cases. As such, it creates new boundaries to allowed ontologies, and this is something unique to *strategic* tools of power – Lorde’s master’s tools.

There is another concern here, and this is related to Andrea Smith’s articulation of the same argument. She is right to ask that allies not attempt to co-opt cultural practices, etc. in a mistaken effort to ‘glorify’ marginalized cultural identities. This aligns with what Whyte is alluding to in the extended quote above as well. Smith, however, goes farther to urge those of European descent to explore and interrogate their own traditional cultural vectors in an effort to better understand them. Put another way, she suggests that Euro-centric descendants should concentrate on fleshing out their own origin stories and myths instead of attempting to do that for other cultures, even in the context of attempting to be allies with that culture.⁴³ This seems reasonable. It also sounds ethically correct as an admonishment for the privileged to shut up and listen, instead of trying to ‘join in’ immediately (and making a mess of things!). However, it also reveals an inconsistency within speculative fiction initiatives in a utopian context.⁴⁴ These proposals argue for the value of substituting protagonists (and antagonists) within the western historical and

⁴³ 1991, see linked site in footnote 315 above. Smith is quite clear about those of European ancestry needing to delve into their own cultural histories (i.e., European-cum-white histories) to find strength and solace. This sharpens the point I make in the following paragraphs.

⁴⁴ For an excellent description of the methodologies and tactics inherent to (racial) speculative fiction, see “Secondaryworldproblem’s” article retrievable at: <https://secondaryworldproblemsblog.wordpress.com/2016/12/10/five-forms-of-racial-representation-in-speculative-fiction/>

fictional narrative cannons with actors of marginalized ethnicity and skin color. I agree! This sounds like an effective, and affective, way to re-imagine the world and how it could have been (resulting in new ways the world could be).

Yet taken together with Whyte and Smith's arguments, it seems leave no room for appropriate comportment for the privileged in this context – even when exploring their own racial and traditional histories and cultures. Depending on how the concept is applied, it could be interpreted as denying *any* expression of Eurocentric identity and/or agency. Telling a group to explore their own identities while, at the same time, cancelling or appropriating them under different rubrics of discussion or performativity seems contradictory and perhaps unfruitful in the quest for processual utopia. As one (admittedly not great) example, my wife and I recently finished watching the Arthurian series “Cursed” on Netflix. This re-imagining of a pre-Camelot imaginary casts Arthur and his sister, Morgana, as black characters. My wife and I, of course, had no issues with this recasting. In fact, it was refreshing as a change of pace and a way to decouple our imaginations of those roles from primarily white actors.

When this is placed in conversation with what Whyte and Smith are arguing in their respective articles, however, things get a little tricky. The Arthurian myths take place within a clearly Anglo-Saxon set of geospatial and temporal coordinates recognized as central to the cultural identity and tradition of the British Isles (and, by extension, British and other European cultures). Personal approval aside, this re-casting contradicts the anti-cultural appropriation argument they (or at least Smith) are advancing. If we, as (descendants of) Europeans, are being asked to not culturally appropriate (with the motive of being allies) marginalized cultural mores, and, indeed, asked to concentrate on

our own historical roots, it is hard to see how to reconcile these requests. Here the specter of moral relativism raises its head, which is to say that morality, in a stance-independent way, doesn't exist when discussing racial appropriation.⁴⁵

The conundrum in this specific case is compounded by the fact that Smith has conducted a startling degree of cultural violence by her own behavior (and that of her sister). She appropriated a Cherokee identity, used it to gain a platform for academic and cultural publication and influence, and when her deception was revealed by both genetic analysis and rulings by the Cherokee nations, she continued (and continues) to maintain that she is Cherokee against all empirical evidence to the contrary.⁴⁶ Ironically, this kind of appropriation, leveraged to achieve intellectual and demographic credibility and privilege is a trope of the worst kind of 'ally-ship' with the marginalized – one that is not only cultural but also coextensive with a marginalized group's core identity. This has the unhappy result of compromising her argument with respect to admonishing those of European ancestry to restrict themselves to European cultural exploration and analysis. Remember that the goal here is to encourage dialogue with (and a reflective pause on the part of) privileged actors in order to potentialize new imaginaries. Both Smith's personal situation and the argument being made within her article demonstrate the coarse-grained and fluid nature of terms like "cultural appropriation" as understood at the level of everyday society and community discourse. Without getting clearer on what is meant in

⁴⁵ To be clear, I support speculative fiction initiatives. It is a powerful way of aesthetically performing utopia as pre-figurative modeling. The point being made is that contradictions exist within current efforts to describe, and then freeze, positions of either privilege or marginalization, and we should: 1) intentionally address them, and 2) be careful of the idolization or demonization of *any* actor type.

⁴⁶ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/25/magazine/choke-native-american-andrea-smith.html> and <https://www.tech-gate.org/usa/2021/05/25/family-of-professor-who-claimed-to-be-choke-says-she-is-not-native-american/> are two news stories concerning her race-faking.

this case, to include how to allow the privileged to be allies in various scenarios, progress will be difficult at best and stymied at worst.

We can now see that if the default position concerning privileged initiatives to be utopian allies is to categorize *any* attempt at their trying to understand marginalized experience as unwelcome, then we are at an unfortunate impasse. This way of carving up the ontology of human actors in these spaces is not, indeed it *cannot* be, utopian. It is a retrenchment of positionality situated politically in socio-cultural dialogues of power and influence.⁴⁷ It also doesn't acknowledge any relevant conative phenomenology pertinent to any scenario in question. What role do motives play in these initiatives, even if they are mistaken or mistargeted? Is utopian process one of alienation or community-building? If it is the latter, then motives, especially when these are driven by internal interpretations of ethical responsibility, cannot be completely discarded without risking derailment of the initiative in question. Unfortunately, several recent events seem to indicate that some of what might seem to be 'social justice' tactics are, in the end, predicated on merely-political, or strategic, uses of socio-political power.

Two quick examples will demonstrate its anti-utopian nature. The first involves a staff member (and former graduate) of a private, women's college.⁴⁸ The individual, a single mother with two children, had to resign (i.e., lose her source of income) and resort to litigation as a result of being openly shamed on a continuing basis for being white.

She was maneuvered out of a position with upper mobility as a result of her "skin color,"

⁴⁷ As just noted, it also reflects a lapse into ethical relativism. What has been (rightly) condemned as oppression in the past now becomes morally right when its vector is reversed.

⁴⁸ News story and her resignation letter contents available at: <https://bariweiss.substack.com/p/whistleblower-at-smith-college-resigns> Additional content and links pertaining to interviews she has done can be found at: <https://hotair.com/archives/john-s-2/2021/02/20/smith-college-staffer-resigns-citing-racially-hostile-environment-created-wokeism/> While the case here is now under adjudication, it is telling that the school offered a substantial financial settlement in exchange for silence on the matter.

and she was discussed in front of colleagues as an example of “white fragility.” This is an individual who self-describes as a liberal, voting that way as well as being a product of this particular school’s curriculum. The second example is similar. A high school sports coach recently lost his job after he and his wife questioned activities happening in certain classes (some of which required students to ascribe to certain beliefs about police officers, etc.⁴⁹) They outlined their concerns in a letter to the school board, and as a result (and immediately), the coach was terminated. To re-state this in order to be clear – someone with a differing opinion about policies forcing their child to take a socio-political stance on a subject *was fired for voicing their concerns in a letter*.

As a quick aside (and in the context of processual utopia), what these tensions might be bringing to light is the need to reexamine what ‘diversity’ and ‘unity’ mean in this particular space of striving. Perhaps both concepts need to be re-examined and weighed appropriately when pursuing the city of God. With the goal of generating (perhaps confrontational) feedback, I’ll offer that perhaps utopian process seems to require a heavier weighting for the latter term than what seems to be currently given to it in cultural debate.⁵⁰ Valuing and promoting diversity is, of course, critical to protecting, liberating, and elevating the myriad of identities and cultures that permeate our socio-political spaces. This is not up for debate. However, as Weeks, Bloch, St. Augustine, and holy writ argue, utopia requires a balancing of agentic positionality. The concept of processual utopia requires, as Sharpe has taught us, the construction of communities of care. These communities cannot be insularly restricted or stratified with respect to individual cultures. St. Paul gets it right:

⁴⁹ News story and testimony can be found at: https://www.theepochtimes.com/football-coach-fired-after-objecting-to-critical-race-theory-in-daughters-class-sues-school_3701919.html

⁵⁰ See footnote 65 in this chapter.

But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster (the law). For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one [...] ⁵¹

A retrenchment into a singular focus on diversity, without consideration to constructing a unified community of mutual care cannot fail to firmly mire the positions involved into a stand-off aimed not only at ‘winning,’ per se, but at discrediting an opponent’s rationality. The dialectic then devolves into ad-hominem based rhetoric disparaging the humanity, or more accurately, *identity*, of that opponent. ⁵² The way ahead (for meaningful change) seems hopeless if these types of combat remain the primary initiatives deployed in the struggle to change current relationships of power. If utopian effort is nuanced, complex, multi-valenced, messy, and uncomfortable, then coarse-grained, binary categorizations and definitions are insufficient not only to utopian effort but also to its theoretical foundations.

As a result of these observations, I set aside (violent) revolutionary initiatives as being normally indicative of processual utopian struggle. Ideological struggle hinges on proving the ‘other’ to not be fully rational (and therefore, sub-human). Its tools are unavoidably aimed at the marginalization of difference. Since the goal is the demonstration of rational incompetence on the part of the opponent, it is aimed at her destruction. The close relationship of merely-political and (physical) revolutionary violence now becomes clear. Revolution is the (totalizing) physical instantiation of ideological struggle (as political maneuvering). ⁵³ As such, it is fundamentally opposed to

⁵¹ Galatians 3:25-28 (ESV)

⁵² This has happened in all tropes of empire, etc. See Burbank and Cooper (2010) for a survey of world history focusing on this phenomenon in multiple (imperial) venues. The adjudication of difference, or ‘othering’ of the marginalized, has been ubiquitous. This is the wrong field of battle for utopian hope.

⁵³ The ultimate political telos behind military (to include violent revolutionary) force is paradigmatically demonstrated by Clausewitz (1874, 25 and elsewhere).

processual utopia, as construed by Bloch and Mannheim (the former having been leveraged by others, to include Weeks, Womack, and others cited throughout my project).

This certainly does not rule out physical revolution as being justified in some contexts. That would be a difficult position to support. Historically, revolutions have been necessary at times to remedy deeply systemic oppression. This granted, they have been used to advance both utopian and (very) dystopian agendas. Indeed, armed revolution has not (to this point) been uncontroversially successful in precipitating conditions of existence that are clearly ‘better’ for marginalized groups, economically or ethnically defined.⁵⁴ The opposite is, in fact, more often the case, as current, post-revolutionary states (speaking of the past two centuries in particular) tend to feature an oppressively closed set of socio-political conditions of possibility as opposed to those obtaining within, say, the United States or other liberal democracies at the current moment.⁵⁵ It seems highly dangerous to wield a gospel of violent, reciprocal exclusion in support of greater inclusion. My focus remains the construction of a fledgling methodology for processual utopia. Attempting to synthesize that objective with an examination of contingent ethical dilemmas in the case of physical revolutions, seen as tactical interventions by the marginalized, will not be attempted in this project.

This is not, however, the only reason I set violent revolution aside. I have been defending an ongoing, persistent process. It is difficult to imagine the ethical contortions

⁵⁴ There are some that might claim that, say, the French and/or American revolutions provide counter-examples. Yet I counter that in these cases, the primary benefactors were racially homogenous, if perhaps initially poor or oppressed (religiously or otherwise), forming the majority ‘class’ of actors in those territories. Chattel slavery, as just one example, continued unabated within both ‘new’ polities. Indeed, in the case of the former, it took less than two decades for that society to devolve into authoritarian, monarchical rule, and for the latter, we are only now recognizing the extent to which ‘revolutionary’ values continued to adjudicate difference across racial and other identificational sub-groups.

⁵⁵ This is *not* to argue for the justice of American social or economic conditions (see previous footnote). It is intended to suggest the incongruence of a discourse of exclusion with successful social change elsewhere. The fact that we are having these conversations at all is compelling evidence for my claim.

required to insert these into the repertoire of persistent, processual performativity affectively targeted at building a community of utopians. This is not a trivial distinction. It forms the core of the differences between, say, a cold-stream Marxism reliant on physical revolution as a necessary catalyst for change considered against the kind of utopian struggle I am championing. Perhaps this is why neither Marx nor Engels say much in the way of describing any ‘future utopia.’⁵⁶ Marx is clearly ‘anti-capitalism,’ of course, but this situates him squarely on an ideological field-of-play. As such, the resultant contest is always-already binarily construed; it is the championing of a particular socio-political vision against another (or against *all others*). This analysis would come as no surprise to him. In fact, I think he would be happy to be interpreted as waging an ideological battle for socio-political supremacy realized within systemic change. However, this approach is, as a result, *merely-political* in its actions and scope and not processually utopian (and the balance of revolutions overtly based on Marxist principles have, to this point, resulted in precisely that – totalitarian polities).

This logic can be extended to *any* instantiation of merely-political violence. This includes initiatives aimed at demonizing any group. Let me put that thought differently for emphasis. If the goal is to marginalize, in the way of ‘proving’ any groups irrationality or incapacity for being considered fully human, another group of agents, considered politically, culturally, or in any other way distinct from the “attacking” party in question, that initiative has disqualified itself as a candidate for an expression of utopian hope. It might certainly be a vision for an alternate future, but it is not a

⁵⁶ For one explanation of this lack in the context of socialistic, utopian thought, see Al Norton, Eleanor Marx, and William Morris (“the Full Marx” blog) at: <https://morningstaronline.co.uk/article/f/do-marxists-believe-utopias>

processually utopian imaginary. The latter aim for the (eventual) realization of utopia through the mechanism of Blochian hope or Augustinian faith, and as such, all-or-nothing struggles aimed at the destruction of opponents need not apply.

So what might be a positive example of processual utopian struggle? One that immediately comes to mind is the removal of Confederate-era statues from public sites, both governmental and academic. This, I think, provides an example of something that can, and certainly should, be done. In fact, this removal would do more than just open an avenue in which to begin changing the mythical and symbolic landscape in which these monuments are emplaced. It would also create an arena for an aesthetic re-imagination of those spaces. Removing idols to cruel gods seems an excellent trope of the affective performativity I am advocating here.

There are caveats to be noted even here, however, that reflect the siren song of the master's tools. Tearing down these statues as instances of social violence runs the risk (and the certainty, given this past summer's events) of becoming epiphenomenal and disrupting both the focus and intended effect on the population at large. When statues of Frederick Douglas and other anti-slavery figures are destroyed as well, the question is begged as to whether or not these actions, understandable as expressions of the oppressed, are affectively modeling utopia or instead are aimed at something else. To suggest a utopian counterexample, the *voluntary* removal of these statues by extant normative hierarchies would, perhaps, be an example of affectively utopian effort. The fact that this was not done for so long, despite a clear need to do so, demonstrates the way privileged actors tend to protect the status quo.

I was asked while initially socializing this project a profound question. This had to do with who (or what group) I would invite to dinner to discuss my research. My initial reaction was to think about inviting privileged actors into a dialogue about utopian performativity; however, as I researched and wrote I found that my ‘dinner table’ would need to be set for a much larger and more diverse group. In truth, the very idea of a dinner invitation became questionable to me. Inviting someone to dinner can invoke a particular kind of obligation that now seems problematic (as flowing from a privileged actor).⁵⁷ What about meeting in a pub, as an alternative? Does an opportunity to perform ‘utopianly’ present itself perhaps more intrinsically in this kind of ad hoc setting? On the other hand, what about meetings characterized by conflict: a car crash, a fight, a verbal confrontation? The affective infrastructure of conflict-laden moments might turn out to be an especially fruitful field for utopian rupture. There is in the methodology of processual utopia an always-implicated pivot to DeCerteau’s “everyday” comportment. My argument has been that those advantaged by current power structures will need to intentionally look for these opportunities – often with the mindset of being both ready to listen and, perhaps more fundamentally, *be corrected*.

Utopian effort will require compromise (and charity within the resultant dialectic) from and for *all* perspectives. If privileged actors require assistance from the marginalized in order to both widen their ontological set and interpret/parse those new existences in ways that do not simply reinforce the status quo, then they cannot be excluded from the (utopian) conversation. This would be both circular and contradictory. My response to Whyte (or, better, my response to that particular segment of his article) would be to say that these cultural-appropriating efforts by erstwhile allies, while

⁵⁷ Thanks to Kwame Harrison for this insight.

ineffective as he states, *provide examples of the need of privileged actors for the assistance of the less advantaged in being allies*. They highlight conceptual deficiencies that cannot be overcome alone. Yes, the cultural appropriation needs to stop, yet we must also tread lightly lest we crush burgeoning utopian motives underlying some of those gestures. I have argued that an internal, ethically-driven motive must be the generative impulse driving privileged participation. Locking them out only further divides and sharpens the rhetoric, potentializing non-productive conflict and physical violence.

The crucial query seems to be, “What gets said next?” If erstwhile utopian allies demonstrate a desire to change, if they present themselves to listen and be advocates, what is the next step? Appropriating marginalized identities is an incorrect tack to pursue. Yet as a result of that proscription, the utopian ball is, in this scenario, in the court of the disadvantaged. If the question is asked (metaphorically *or* literally), “How can we help without appropriating?”, what might be the resultant response? What gets said next? This is where current cultural discourse and the literature on processual utopias and alternate futures seems to founder. Few practical and community-forging solutions can be found within them. Understandable and valid charges and/or accusations are made, but the research and its resultant rhetoric rush excitedly to the ubiquitous vilification, in most cases, of the same target - the ‘evil, white man’ – and then shut down at that point.⁵⁸ What if a ‘white man’ (or group of white men) asks how to be an ally in a practical, community-forging way? What gets said next?

⁵⁸ Recall Nietzsche’s argument that ethical values are first conflated with those inhabiting strong socio-economic positions and then assigned to those actors in a bid for power (*Genealogy of Morals*, First Essay, parts I-X).

Recent analyses of ethnographic ‘refusals’ might shed some light on this impasse.⁵⁹ It seems correct to respect the right of oppressed groups to refuse to enter into an intimate conversation with those representing, or functioning as a symbol, for previous oppression.⁶⁰ That admitted, we cannot then be surprised if headway in the struggle for processual utopia is derailed, to some degree, by that refusal. Another way to think about this standoff might be to suggest that if silence occurs when asked the question, “what gets said next?”, this is due to the dynamic of putting privileged actors “in their place.” This, again, seems warranted. Yet it also seems odd to suggest that many seeking to be utopian allies need to be “put in their place.”⁶¹ If they are asking how to be allies, and by doing so attempting to avoid a proclivity to appropriate culture or dominate the dialogue, suggesting that they need reprimanding seems a bit odd. The danger then becomes a conflation of that silence or refusal with a merely-political, strategic use of ideological weaponry. Coarse-grained confluences of current actors with their historical archetypes, then, runs the risk of short-circuiting utopian dialogue and its associated action.

In the context of processual utopia, we may need to hold in tension, and respect without question, the *individual* rights of those who refuse to engage erstwhile allies as a negative moral obligation of those privileged parties seeking to be allies. In the *collective* case, however, a wholesale refusal of this kind would be catastrophic to utopian struggle.

⁵⁹ E.g., Simpson (2007) and McGranahan (2016).

⁶⁰ Too often these are characterized as “oppressors,” full stop. This is absurd; most of those asking questions about how to be an ally are not, in the moment of that effort, being intentionally oppressive. The results of their actions might, however, be unwittingly negative. This is where the call to “shut up and listen” becomes clearly relevant. Yet the conflation of contemporary actors with historical oppressors, as being personally responsible for that historical oppression, needs to stop. It compromises valid claims by the marginalized for cultural redress in the present. Recognizing tropes of oppression in the past – in the recognizability of Benjamin’s ‘now’ – is necessary. Levelling those charges accruing to historical actors against *contemporary* groups attempting to find ways of being utopian allies might tend to more sharply bifurcate groups and compromise efforts aimed at processual utopia.

⁶¹ I owe this phrasing to Kwame Harrison.

Recognizing and then navigating the nuances inherent to this portion of the ‘ethical minefield’ of processual utopia will continue to be difficult.

Objection: to engage the privileged in this way seems both a risk as well as an unfair obligation for the marginalized. Why should those often excluded in the past now be required to include those who have historically done violence to them? Response: these are obviously valid and pertinent concerns. I have been at pains to analyze aspects of those risks residing within the nature of the unequal relationships of agency occupied by subjects within a specific simulacrum. Privileged instincts will be to appropriate alternate narratives to serve the dominant variant. Yet conversely, the risk of ‘running this portion of the minefield’ seems necessary if utopian progress is to be made. Without it, we are merely spinning our wheels.

While researching this chapter, I spent months observing ‘right-leaning’ social media platforms in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the 2020 election season. The examples I noted above in which some have been silenced and/or had their livelihoods destroyed have resulted in an alarming exacerbation of both tone and violent content in those discursive circles. This trend is certainly *not* utopian (descriptively or processually) – it is more concentrated on the destruction of current social-political initiatives, and their instigators, which might be considered the ‘other’ from a political standpoint. They (in this case, those on the right) are not alone, of course. Those social media outlets featuring an emphasis on left-leaning narrative are just as terrifying to read. Their inability to engage in community-building dialogue instead of promoting whatever social drama is the “hottest” and most efficient vehicle for virtue-shaming, ad hominem attacks, and further demonization of ‘whiteness’ cannot be utopian. The city of God does

not lie in that direction, and accounts that champion a better ‘not-yet’ have to do more than pummel a well-worn trope of Euro-centric, male, and historically-imperial oppression. Those charges have been compellingly made. Repentance on the part of that paradigmatic actor is needed. Yet remaining in that dialogic and performative place gets us nowhere. More fruitful initiatives pursue utopian directionality in a processual way.

The topic of ‘whiteness’ deserves a few more words in this context. A friend mused recently in discussion that whiteness is an ontological entity on its own. It does not, for example, supervene on all and only people of white skin color.⁶² This seems plausible, especially in the way that it refuses to essentialize an actor to a mere extension of contingent skin color. Yet like I demonstrated above in the discussion concerning cultural appropriation, a contradiction arises when discussing any other type of ‘-ness’ representing a skin color as coinciding a way of being or an affective positionality. To see this, recall that Sharpe’s text, cited throughout this dissertation, is specifically targeted at blackness and being. It seems clear that ‘blackness,’ in her book, travels very closely with the contingency of skin color (as the result of white oppression, of course!). The implied supervenience claim is fairly clear. The dangers of such a putative relationship become apparent, however, when this is placed alongside what my friend said about ‘whiteness’ and the contingency of ‘being white.’ Essentializing actors and their ways of being in the world to limitations accruing to a contingent skin color seems worrisome. It might even comprise one definition of the term ‘racism,’ simpliciter. This

⁶² Supervenience is a co-variance theory about properties connected to states of affairs. If moral property A supervenes on physical state of affairs B (with all that B entails), then there cannot be a change in A without a change in B. Supervenience claims trade on necessity. As such, they posit a connection that putatively occurs across all possible worlds. An easy-to-understand example might be the Rwandan genocide. It is hard to conceive of a metaphysically possible world in which all the physical facts of that event were the same, yet the moral property of goodness was instantiated instead. For more on supervenience see Kim (1993) and McPherson (2015).

kind of reductive identity-politics does violence to both individual and corporate identities by equivocating comportment with appearance.

To put this objection another way, we can agree that Sharpe correctly identifies valences of generational oppression within a specific instance of hegemonic normativity that inform current modes of black being. These certainly identify (as she does) ways of perceiving needs and performing self-care within that identificational construct. But we need to be careful of simply reversing that analysis without the same amount of care in order to avoid essentializing other groups as always-already oppressors, regardless of current, or even recently historical, forms of 'white being.'

Disregarding empirical reality in a desire to essentialize all actors of a particular group in a univocal way is a quintessential tool of the 'master.' This is a tool that has been used over and over again in the past to freeze ontologies such that 'others' are defined outside the limits of 'accepted society' and its accompanying quotients of opportunity. It was, put in the terms of dystopian performativity, an ontological negation stemming from the deification of a specific imperialistic idol. This ideological strategy, as a reminder, can only be dystopian in its directionality. In the case of currently privileged actors attempting to be utopian allies, there are certainly instances of cultural appropriation that should be closed to privileged advance. These can, I think, be sensed viscerally in a way that is more effective than intellectuals or social pundits lecturing about them or virtue-shaming approbations about how they miss the mark. We should be careful of dismissing utopianly-motivated overtures by any actor out of hand.

To come full circle, and to close this section, Rux identifies we might should all think about before rushing to judgement (for the disadvantaged) *or to action* (for the

privileged). If these overtures, made by members of differing social identities, remain grounded in identities genuine to those individuals or groups, perhaps we can map a course to avoid the fate of Pentheus. The key seems to be, in Rux's view, that Eminem remains fundamentally white, unlike those who attempt to appropriate 'blackness' as a fashion fetish or try to inhabit a particular cultural space of either being a 'victim' or of 'protest' that isn't part of their (the appropriators') generational or contemporary identities. Humility and a willingness to accept who, what, and where we are, even if those qualities are contingent, might position the privileged in a more appropriate space from which to approach the marginalized. Attempting to step into oppressed shoes isn't the answer; being available is the right place to start, especially if that availability is characterized by a propensity to listen and not, as is so often the case, rush to action .

This section has also highlighted a worrisome connotation of the primary term under consideration, namely "ally-ship." Relationships of support or resistance, either that of being an enemy or an ally, are grounded on the idea of separate-ness. There is, as part and parcel of this concept, an 'us' and a 'them.' There are implied insiders and outsiders, those in one group trying to assist another or those being asked to accept that aid in the midst of complex relationships of power and influence. There is also a subtle quotient of *need* or *lack* on the part of at least one party in a potential relationship featuring an ally and an aided group. This concern warrants a more thorough analysis, something I cannot accomplish here; however, I will say that the apparent inadequacy of the term to appropriately capture utopian relationships in this context forms part of the motivation for my thoughts on a new, utopian language in the second half of the following chapter.

4.6 Conclusion - Alternative Futures as Privileged Re-Boots

I have persistently remarked that marginalized actors have in fact been trying to meet their oppressors and tell their stories.⁶³ They have historically been required to creatively code these narratives in order to bypass privileged boundaries to their ontological existence – from a place that Sharpe calls ‘(non)being.’⁶⁴ They have been pleading for a perspective shift – in many and varied ways. So we need to realize that in various ways they *have* offered the help needed by the privileged to begin the transition to utopian process. Thus, the central tenet of my analysis remains an admonition for the privileged to shut up and listen. Listening will require a number of things – the most important being that of surrendering discursive control. This is not due to an ‘essential’ lack of anything valuable to contribute. It stems from our bounded ontologies, and the ways in which we parse them, that function to support a constructed, stratified reality. To listen, in this sense, will require more than just ‘hearing’ from oppressed actors, it will require an associated shift of how to interpret their stories. It is not merely the fact that current idol worship must stop, the temple must be rebuilt. This chapter has demonstrated that this rebuilding must be a *joint effort*.

The circle must continue, this time in a productive (instead of vicious) manner. The marginalized must continue to tell their stories, however difficult it might be to make that attempt yet another time. The privileged must learn how to listen; however, the stories themselves must be interpreted through lenses *that can only be provided by those less fortunate*. It also turns out that the answer to “What gets said next?” cannot be

⁶³ Examples abound – two contemporary accounts, those of Sharpe (2016) and Hartman (2019), comprise primary sources for this project.

⁶⁴ For an example of this ‘code-switching’, see Martinez’ (2013) essay on resisting “Academese.”

(always) silence. If it is, those with power will predictably pick up their toys and go home. What is worse, those newly vested with power might simply recreate the same dystopian conditions of existence in an unfortunate (even if understandable) turn to reciprocal vengeance as a strategy for ‘reconciliation.’

Bounded ontologies, normed by strategically positioned power brokers, support idols recreated by cultural worship. The reverse is also true, bounded ontologies also create demons – the scapegoats of cultural critique and approbation. This has been a standard imperial strategy deployed throughout history as a way to dehumanize the ‘other.’ As such, the call to any actor-type to engage in affective performativity aimed at utopian desire does not represent a ‘one-stop shopping’ obligation or commitment. This is not something that anyone, regardless of current agentic status, gets to claim is finished. This is, as I have stressed throughout, the nature of *processual* utopia. It will remain on the horizon, an ever-receding target orienting our struggle.

If the first step of a privileged methodology consists of an intentional effort to step away from default constructions of what might seem ‘better’ societally, towards *what* should that step be taken? As Evans points out, “What marks the contemporary period is *terrifyingly normal*.”⁶⁵ I have argued that the default vector available to strategic maneuvers within normed spaces tends to be dystopian. Unless diverted from its current path, ‘normal’s’ future instantiations become likewise terrifying. This chapter has shown that this is the case *regardless of who is wielding those strategic tools*.

Since utopia entails the concept of a *better* future, it is inherently normative in nature. It makes, as Levitas claims, evaluative claims about what is good.⁶⁶ Since this

⁶⁵ 2013: 1. Emphasis in original.

⁶⁶ Levitas (2017, 1)

future necessarily involves social relationships, the ‘better-ness’ in question cannot simply be individualistically constituted in a stoical fashion. Processual utopia involves emotions and their relative conative states fundamentally in its makeup. This is to say that feelings and motives matter, and the point I am making is that we should be asking the question, “Which actors, individual and/or collective, have their respective feelings and dreams silenced by the status quo?”

Another question also seems apropos. Does this silencing happen in spite, *perhaps even as a result*, of purported attempts to help the marginalized? If the answer to the latter is affirmative, then a re-evaluation of the ability to reconcile conditions of privilege and marginalization within the relative normative simulacra is in order. The strategic tools existing within such spheres, when wielded by those with access to them, merely reinforce the way things are even when trying to help. Yet the results of using those tools remains the same even when marginalized hands wield them. The ethical dilemmas found within understandable desires to turn those implements against former owners should give actors of every position pause. If Lorde is right, devolution into tropes of reverse-marginalization or vengeance can have no utopian target.

So how do we resist them (the tools)? It is easy enough to say, “tactically!”, yet one could object that this is merely a theoretical point. Utopian process needs cardinal headings, and the resources amply available to hegemonic power in a default way are not where we should look for that vector.⁶⁷ The question then becomes where we *should* look. I believe one place to start is within narratives of alternate futures – visions of

⁶⁷ This clarifies the dangers of relying on “charity” as a utopian strategy. Mutual aid comes closer to a tactical response, but as I will argue below, leveling hierarchies of power such that mutual aid can actually occur seems to rely on external events precipitating changes to the status quo. Perhaps these need to be of a magnitude severe enough to force the kind of leveling required. See e.g. Solnit (2010) for examples of what this might look like.

difference, diverse dreamscapes, constructed within an aesthetic of ‘otherness.’ These are often offered by performances – of various types – presented within existences and their meaning-making apparatuses *foreign to those affirmed by the status quo*. This search within vision-casting futures will require conceptualization (and aesthetic pre-figuration) of alternate destinations. A recent account puts it this way:

An alternative, utopian ethics would redefine the common bond of mutuality that should classify worth and right [sic] conduct. This is a wholly agreeable proposition, placing as it does an alternative ethics at the centre of new times. [...] appropriate verbs would include fashioning (and being fashioned by); practising; performing (and being performed by; generating the counter-performative); and enrolling. [...] This position challenges, among others, the logic of completion at the heart of various utopian blueprints of the last centuries, on the grounds that they offer a false universalism.⁶⁸

A different directionality, ethically-targeted and performatively-modeled, is required. Without a newly (if never completely) clarified objective, our dominant tendency will be resort to well-worn paths of reasoning that lead nowhere productive. A corrective to this tendency exists within accounts *written by marginalized actors presenting utopian imaginaries in their respective cases*. This last bit is crucial. Utopian imaginings, as aesthetic representations of contingent possibilities, need justification in some sense to give them warrant. This is to say that a conception of an alternate future requires “something” to identify it at least initially as a utopian varietal. It can’t be the case that, pace Bloch, just *any* day-dream points to a possible state of affairs that is better than that obtaining currently. This highlights a worry I presented at the end of the second chapter.⁶⁹ That was the observation that some kind of constraint on content is needed to

⁶⁸ Davis and Wotherspoon (2014, 4)

⁶⁹ A worry that does not accrue to St. Augustine’s city of God. If God represents ultimate goodness, then the instantiation of his kingdom cannot be other than good. Problems arise, of course, when humans attempt to construct societies, kingdoms, empires, etc. on a putative grounding of the ‘kingdom of God on earth.’ These latter are unfailingly concretely descriptive, oppressive in their makeup, and have little to do with what Augustine writes about concerning the “now and not yet.”

avoid an objectionable inability to rule out such dystopian possibilities as, say, Hitler's 'utopia' in the form of the Third Reich's social and political imaginaries.

A good start might be to consider any candidate in light of what has been presented in this (and previous) chapters. If marginalized actors must act tactically in order to disrupt the status quo, if they have to work from the 'bottom-up' to expand their future sets of possibilities, then accounts of alternate, utopian futures will flow from such a perspective. They will present possibilities that are *not* organic to privileged understandings of the spaces within which we live and interact. They challenge default ways of thinking about being and time.

Processual utopia will, as we have seen, require sacrifices by all types of actors. In this chapter I have highlighted sacrifices of multiple types accruing to different groups. The dilemmas are exposed; the minefield stretches bleakly before us. The risks might seem insurmountable, and the rewards will, if I am right, remain beyond the horizon of current imagination. Yet if utopia is, as Bloch maintains, the highest good, then we must venture into that minefield if we recognize any consistent construct of ethical obligation. Its pursuit trumps that of lesser moral concerns. The accounts that follow take the form of vision-casting – dreams of possible, perhaps better states of affairs. They may not be intended for those with higher quotients of opportunity as their primary audience, yet they remain indispensable as correctives all the same. We must do our best to listen to them, to enter into conversation with them. And we must resist the urge to rewrite them to fit within our own ontological boundaries.

Chapter Five – Alternate Futures, Privileged Utopian Correctives

Thus do I see myself in the end, banished, rejected and banished like a beggar here, ha, ha, ha. I was crowned and adorned to be led to the altar as a sacrificial animal. Even on the last day, they mocked my sole possession, stole my poem from me with flattering words, and kept it. My only possession is now in your hands, that which gained me entry to every place, which would yet save me from hunger. Now I see it all, why I must fall; so my song will not be perfected, so my name spreads no further, so my enviers may find a thousand faults, so I am finally, completely forgotten.

- Goethe¹

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living...

- Isaiah (prophet)²

5.1 Introduction

Different lenses are needed through which to both view and interpret tactical interventions. The time has come for new visions, images from actors trying to pierce simulated realities and unveil different ontologies and their meaning-making apparatuses. The scales must be reversed; the script must be flipped. Without this assistance, we are caught in a vicious circle of merely-political logic, an ideological mortal combat. We are in the grip of an illusion (better, a delusion) that is then, in return, recreated cyclically. In this chapter, my goal will be to present examples of tactical normative rupture that take the form of vision casting proposed by Jose Muñoz.³ That these are presented as theoretical-become-practical imaginings of alternate futures is not a coincidence. They remain grounded in spaces of existing relationships of power, yet they go beyond this to aesthetically represent (or cast visions of) alternate possibilities they suggest *should* be

¹ *Torquato Tasso*, final act

² Chapter 53: 7-8 (ESV)

³ 2009, 19-31, 37-39

made realizable. Daphne Marlatt describes the ontology of these textual approaches to imagining possible utopias like this:

When text becomes context, when it leaves behind the single-minded project of following a singular lifeline, a singular I, when it drops out of narrative as heroic climax and opts for narrative as a relation of context, of what surrounds us, then we are in the presence of a writing that ditches dualistic polarities (the good guys vs. the bad guys, fags, bitches, blacks...you see how many of us there are), dodges the hierarchies (the achieved, the significant vs. the inessential, the failed – which goes to the root of our fear about life: was it all for nothing?). It's all there in the so-called "nothing."⁴

Strategically supported narratives tend to banish alternate imaginings to a realm of 'nothingness.' Tactical attempts to supersede those boundaries attempt to bring them back into consideration. They open roughly hewn windows that shed light into dark spaces currently proscribed from sanctioned cultural viewpoints. These represent opportunities to view reality from different vantage points. Similar to my analysis of Lorde's well-known claim, this chapter is offered as an attempt to move us off 'top dead center' into a place concentrated on a 'becoming' and aimed at something more. We can also think of the following vignettes as examples of how the systemically disadvantaged have *already* been attempting to help us see differently.

One thing must be emphasized from the outset. None of the examples to follow can (or should) be regarded as *the* vision to follow. To suggest this would be just another way of proposing a descriptively-solidified utopian vision, one with concrete contours (and thus vulnerable to countless counter-examples and undermining potentialities). If part of what processual utopia is about is the expansion of a currently-normed referential (i.e., ontological) set of allowed existences, then limiting visions of alternate futures to the candidate examples offered here goes against the logic of everything said to this

⁴ Marlatt (1998, 127). This reflects what I argued in the first two chapters, namely that what consigns these imaginings to the status of "nothings" is, itself, nothing but simulacrum.

point. What I can gloss here will be a sampling that, hopefully, illuminates certain performative elements inherent to utopia's struggle. We cannot imagine what the city of God looks or feels like, but we can try to create opportunities to move our societal targets closer to its place on the horizon. As such, we must consider these visions of difference in the aggregate. No single exemplar can claim unique access to utopian methodological supremacy. The concept of processual utopia demands a constant focus on ever-opening vistas of possibility.

This multiplicity of possible candidates results in another difficult conclusion (which turns out to be a caveat on what I can accomplish). Not every alternative future embodies a vision that *should* be pursued. Opening our imaginations to alternative ontologies and epistemologies might be an effective way to decouple linear histories from their always-already determined futures. This is what I have been arguing in the second half of this dissertation. Granting myself this much, I see no immediately available way of guaranteeing that any specific account of an alternative future aligns uncontroversially with moral 'goodness.' I can think of any number of visions for very different futures that might be univocally regarded as, to put it succinctly, evil. This is the danger inherent within Deleuze and Guattari's 'lines of flight.'⁵ They might lead *anywhere*, and just anywhere is not a destination for utopia, by definition. In fact, the only utopian vision that can claim unalloyed alignment to perfect goodness, harnessed of course to a certain worldview, would be Augustine's city of God. While the metaphysical commitments of this variant of utopia may not be appealing for many, it should at least be acknowledged

⁵ See Vernon's (2014, 208) conclusion on a collection of essays concerning Deleuze and Guattari's claim that philosophy remains detached from the art (qua performativity) that it draws upon when creating concepts. In his words, "...then it seems there are no real limits to philosophical use, or even abuse, of aesthetic (and by extension, scientific, historical, etc.) material, so long as the philosopher can show some manner of consistency [sic] from it."

that it also remains open with regard to its possibilities and imaginaries. Like its Blochian counterpart, its vistas remain uncognizable to us at this time.

One might expect that these accounts would also turn out to also be tropes of Blochian hope-cum-utopian striving. They would be attempts to recuperate that type of hoping as a practical stance orienting utopian efforts. It turns out that they do employ this framework, and as such, provide resources for further refining its pursuit. If performativity is the primary realm of utopian rupture, aesthetic performances of resistance become central. They must be presented to an audience to have their full effect. Art, in its various forms, can perhaps uniquely depict what ‘reality’ might be in an aesthetically pre-figurative sense, but this can only happen if it is decoupled from ontological *proscriptions* limiting its subject (and object) matter. We should not be surprised that Bloch, Benjamin, Sharpe and others concentrate on aesthetic/artistic descriptions in order to expose traces of humanity’s impulse towards utopia.⁶

Finally, these accounts have another predicate in common. They are difficult to fully grasp. They provide us an analytical heuristic indicating possible solutions, yet they remain imaginings “seen through a glass, darkly.”⁷ They resist the urge to definitively outline successful endings. This highlights their function as moral critique. They counter extant norms. They are, and must be, ethical challenges at the level of ontological inclusion. Pintér puts it this way:

The readers’ perception of the most elusive thing, the ‘authorial intent,’ [...], is often crucial in determining the moral tone of a utopian text, and this is no less relevant in case of dystopias. Most modern dystopias strive to avoid this problem by sending clear and unmistakable signals about the quality of their fictional topos: writers of dystopias, especially in the late twentieth century, almost competed to present the most gruesome, brutal, oppressive human society possible, avoiding even the

⁶ Detailed throughout in various passages and notes.

⁷ I Corinthians 13:12 (ESV)

slightest possibility of doubt that their nightmare world possesses any commendable qualities. Such single-minded concentration on the ‘badness of the bad place’ makes many of these works somewhat dull and tedious; moral ambiguity is a necessary condition of [sic] successful utopias...”⁸

as does Benjamin (by way of Pecora):

just as [Walter] Benjamin’s Kabbalistic insight that arbitrary linguistic signs harbored the remnants of mimetic magic and that even the merest commodity may contain redemptive ‘splinters of messianic time,’ it may be the sudden flitting of a moth on a garden path [...]”⁹

Allow me a brief apology (and its explanation) before moving to my first example. I will be constrained to limit the tropes of alternate futures I address here. This is not due solely to considerations of length and scope. Any attempt to canvass the imaginations of the less fortunate more holistically risks would be so unwieldy that a certain level of discouragement might result within an effort to apprehend and digest them, especially for privileged actors desiring to be allies. It might also dilute the topic such that the “forest is missed for the trees.”

Despite this limitation, there is a growing body of literature, often catalogued under the rubric of Indigenous philosophy, that concentrates on unpacking certain challenges to the status quo. One of these (referred to in the previous chapter) would be Kyle White’s representation of native American thought in the context of climate change.¹⁰ He points out that Indigenous peoples, having already experienced the ‘felt extinction’ of their natural world and the relationships inherent within it, see the coming crisis in an entirely different light than the world-ending ways in which currently privileged populations might perceive it. Dystopic change has been their reality. The possibility of environmental and relational loss is something they have lived with

⁸ Pintér (2010, 139), quoted in Howard (2017, 191).

⁹ Pecora, “Be Here Now,” in Ghosh and Kleinberg, eds., *Presence*: 44. Also in Howard (2017, 191).

¹⁰ 2018

generationally, and this, according to Whyte, significantly changes both their mythology (seen within their relationships to ancestors and future offspring) and their ways of situating past oppression and future possibilities into present conversation/dreaming. Put into the terms used here, this temporal perspective according proper place to past loss within future possibilities results in quite different boundaries for what counts as ‘science fiction.’¹¹ The Indigenous science (and philosophy) that Whyte works with problematizes what might be considered ‘pure’ science within a Western paradigm.¹² The reader will recall from chapter three that a return to methods and concepts associated with religious inquiry is entailed by processual utopian logics, and Whyte’s explanation supports this analysis.

Suffice it to say that there are numerous candidates for this effort. I have chosen five, focusing on the tactics that they expose as possible ways to pre-figure utopia. These are revealing in their directionality as well as their situation within power structures supporting a normative status quo. I begin with a feminist alternate future – one redefining work in a way quite different from our default conceptualizations of it as the result of religious (in this case, Protestant) societal normalization.¹³ Following this, I explore a black feminist account of what it means to contemporarily survive in a realm requiring tactical performativity in order to exercise and expand agentic autonomy. This allows us a glimpse into how these tactics are leveraged within quotidian utopian

¹¹ Ibid, 228-234.

¹² Ibid, 225-228.

¹³ There is a danger here of conflating ‘the protestant work ethic’ with Christianity simpliciter. Religion, especially in Christian instantiations, can be a too-easily deployed ‘punching bag within accounts of alternate futurities, yet this coarse-grained identification of what is positioned as an ‘opponent’ seems uncharitable at best, and a *reductio ad absurdam* or ad hominem argument at worst. The gospels are replete with examples of Christ refuting the capitalistic accumulation ethic, and the fundamental basis of the kingdom of Heaven depends on the repudiation of anything like consumer capitalism (or even prioritizing personal gain as a primary life activity). A seminal example would be Jesus’ answer to Martha’s question in Luke 10:38-42 (ESV).

struggle, even if the goal remains beyond the horizon. This will also require us to unpack the concept of utopian ‘gesture,’ a term coined by Jose Muñoz. I then analyze the futuristic vision-casting of Afrofuturism, struggling to reconcile past oppression within reimagined scenes of this and other-worldly science fiction and fantasy. This, in turn, leads us to more temporally ‘gritty’ variants of alternate Black futures, sometimes referred to as either Africanfuturism or Afropresentism. All these, to various degrees, highlight the risks a privileged actor must become vulnerable to in order to become an ally. They also put into relief the relationally messy work that must be done in order to counter ingrained logics of privilege.

5.2 Feminist Problematization of the Protestant Work Ethic

Kathi Weeks leverages a similar reading (to mine) of Bloch’s hope-based utopian methodology to motivate her book.¹⁴ There is, then, less of a need to discover how she attempts to recuperate hope in the utopian sense than there is of emplotting its function within her proposal itself. This is grounded within what she calls a “Marxist feminism redux” as a summary-turn-critique-turn-prescription for the creation of a space within which feminism may have taken root to a certain extent. Feminism itself, according to Weeks, eventually had to be questioned to unmask future vectors for feminist striving.¹⁵

Her way of describing this phenomenon provides an example of a processual approach to casting visions of alternate possibilities, illustrating a communally-based reflection on various initiatives. This reflexivity requires that its proposals work with the ‘stuff of the here and now’ (Bloch’s Real-Possible) to make possible a Not-Yet-Become

¹⁴ My characterization of utopia in the first chapter fits, like her 2011, into what might be called a ‘warm stream’ Marxist (cum-Blochian) utopianism.

¹⁵ 2011, 24-30

in the future. She argues that this requires a change of emphasis from demands for equality within the workplace to a questioning of the concept of work *per se*, including its definition and function, within normative, ideologically-controlled space. This progress would not have been possible without the initial iterations of feminism. Their limitations, as Weeks portrays them, affected the outcomes they achieved; however, it was through their various articulations that ongoing analysis and eventual correctives were (and continue to be) identified and addressed.¹⁶ Her book moves beyond the most expansive of these to: 1) problematize *all* aspects of the work ethic itself, to include the ways it is reified even within ethical conceptualizations of feminist theory, and 2) begin to imagine a post-work society as transformation (instead of simply evolution) of society.¹⁷

It is in this latter effort we see an example of a utopian tactic, in this case a literary *and processual* one, to problematize the status quo. It is a prescription, flowing from the analysis of current conditions (repression in the form of subjugation to a Protestant work ethic and its associated ideology) to an alternative. This alternate possibility is one that shifts the discussion to new ground instead of just re-hashing well-worn territory. Her proposal is based on an expression of utopian hope and referenced to ongoing cycle of becoming. As she puts it:

Concrete utopian thinking must approach it as a more contingent development, with possibilities for significant ruptures and unexpected developments. [...] And herein lies the challenge: to think the relationship between present and future both as tendency and as rupture. The future is at once that which we must map cognitively and *that which necessarily exceeds our efforts at representation*. [...] More specifically, wanting a different future and making it may not hinge on knowing what it might be.¹⁸

¹⁶ Ibid (24-28 and Chapters 3 and 4)

¹⁷ An example is that of sex work advocacy, in which the ethical debate over the legitimacy of that work gets shifted onto different moral ground that still affirms the legitimacy of the “work ethic” (Ibid, 67-68).

¹⁸ Ibid, 197. Emphasis mine.

Her thoughts can be used to outline what a utopian subject might be. Weeks' summarization of the temporal underpinnings of Bloch's theory argues that a *collective* practice of hope, indeed a persistent imagining (informed historically and open futuristically) coupled with action towards the Not-Yet-Become, will embody steps towards making this new subject possible.¹⁹ What Weeks is describing (as historical development present within future feminist utopian imagining) is an ongoing, collective response to an ever-evolving arrow of communal desire.²⁰ This is what I glossed earlier as the primary definition of processual utopia.

She suggests that increasingly more unrecognizable social visions become the eventual products (and ever-shifting goals) of this collective agency. She also notes the importance of *poiesis* within utopian hope.²¹ It is an imagining of new differences, forging alternate possibilities at the limits of conceptualization, and this ever-evolving situation of utopia's target informs the contents and objectives of tactics deployed in its support. Recall that Adorno (with Bloch) puts utopia's definition, as "the *determined* negation of that which merely is," which then points, "to what should be."²²

Weeks broadens both the ontological focus of feminist futures beyond what might be the default set of concepts envisioned when the term "feminist futures" is invoked.

¹⁹ Bloch affirms the collectivity inherent in the processual nature of utopian hope's functioning (2000, 203-206). The problem utopia is supposed to solve is the "We-Problem" (c.f. 2000, 188, 248).

²⁰ Towards, in this case, the novum. Weeks argues for this when contrasting mandated modes of production (and reproduction) with an emphasis on 'what we will' (206-213). Utopia is always represented within desire. The uniqueness of her project is the proposed transformation away from (other feminist) proposals still rooted within the dominant ideology (see footnote 48 and pp. 29-30). She also seems to avoid the temptation of aligning with a specific political position or party and thus collapsing into the realm of the merely-political.

²¹ See Shapiro (2013: 25-29) for an account of the relationship between poiesis and the process of creating different worlds through aesthetic performativity.

²² See Bloch and Adorno, "Something's Missing: A Discussion between Ernst Bloch and Theodor Adorno on the Contradictions of Utopian Longing," in *The Utopian Function of Art and Literature: Selected Essays* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1988: 12) emphases mine. Bloch goes even further in *The Principle of Hope* and insists that utopian hope requires a "militant optimism." (1995, 312)

Put more dramatically, she blows the doors open for a plethora of societal arenas, allowing opportunities for utopian reconstructions of those spaces to be considered anew. These are illuminated by previously marginalized feminist epistemologies. The canon of ‘what exists’ for reinterpretation in this context is destabilized together with the means for parsing how it might be situated within normative space. We can now begin to see how literary ruptures (describing a process of iterative struggle in this case), when applied to empirical possibilities imagined within newly highlighted horizons of existence, attack the crystallized idols of the status quo. This has the effect, which I explore below, of problematizing existing linguistic referents as well. In this case ‘work,’ as both term and concept, is re-situated in a way that resists current limitations. Accounts such as hers clarify the need for a new language, a utopian dialect if you will, in order to identify targets more clearly for arrows of utopian desire.

5.3 How to be a Feminist Killjoy: or, Leveraging Utopian ‘Gesture’

Sara Ahmed, describing in a practical, day-by-day, way how to live a feminist life, introduces two tactics that I will focus on in this section. One of these is (relatively) isolated in time and space, while the other is more attitudinal in nature and thus more flexible temporally. These are her descriptions of a ‘feminist killjoy’ and ‘feminist snap,’ interpreted as instances of utopian struggle within everyday life.²³ I’ll begin with the latter after some preliminary thoughts about these tactics and their possible employment.

One characterization of feminist struggle that Ahmed spends a good deal of time discussing is her description of “sweaty concepts.” This seems complementary to my claim that utopian hope is less limited (compared to merely-political hope) in the forms it

²³ Ahmed (2017: 187-212, 263-268)

can take. It also means that those forms utopian struggle might take not being as ‘clean’ or easily categorized as strategic tools available to those with power. They are hard to grasp and even more difficult to hold. This testifies to their flexibility, but it also highlights their fungibility.²⁴ They can be modified to suit the purpose needed. They wrestle with current states of affairs from a variety of vectors and as such are hard to pin down. They are not pure, binary, easily grasped, fully graphable, checks-in-a-box, or even wholly predictable. They are instead elusive, multi-valanced, interpretive, and not-completely-definable imaginings turned into actions.

I interpret Ahmed’s tactics as instances of what Jose Muñoz would call utopian ‘gesture.’ These are attempts to disturb normatively crystallized spaces in order to potentialize new possibilities at a more primal, perhaps less verbal, communicative level. Muñoz argues that these are moments of rupture that pierce linear time so differences militating against the previously determined progression of that time can be unveiled. Their apocalypses are necessary in order for them to be available for new imaginaries.²⁵

As one example:

Gesture [...] signals a refusal of a certain kind of finitude. [...] I look at the dance floor as a stage for [...] *performativity* that *is integral to everyday life*. [...] I wish to concentrate my focus on the precise and specific physical acts that are conventionally understood as gesture [...] Concentrating on gesture atomizes movement. These atomized and particular movements tell tales of historical *becoming*.²⁶

²⁴ Of course, strategic tools are also fungible, in that it is easy for any actor or actor group to take them to hand. This granted, utopian tactics seem more flexible in a number of ways, to include scope and or targeting. As such, their fungibility becomes more prominent as modifiable to the context in which they occur and/or are needed.

²⁵ 2009, 65-81. Utopian temporality can be represented in the same way. In the way I have described opposing versions of hope, gestures function as aesthetic tactics disturbing currently affirmed normative realities. Their most likely location within artistic forms of expression (in music, dance, painting, etc.) is not surprising.

²⁶ Muñoz (2009: 65-67), emphases mine.

Gestures are bodily actions that disrupt hegemonic relationships, creating new possibilities while putting others at risk. These interventions are tactics exploiting vulnerabilities within strategic spaces constructed and controlled by normative simulacra. Much like Weeks' critique of past feminist 'waves' of resistance that served to reinforce existing work ethics, Muñoz resists characterizations compromising the 'otherness' of his proposal.²⁷

The concept of utopian gesture highlights the physicality (in the context of performative affect) so common to utopian proposals grounded in Blochian positivity. It is no accident that he (Bloch) devoted a large portion of his magnum opus to the examination of diverse genres of artistic expression. Fruitful targets of analysis of utopian impulses, he suggests, exist within individual works within those genres. Indeed, the lion's share of *The Spirit of Utopia* is dedicated to the pursuit of the utopian spirit within compositional musical works. Artistic gestures representationally 'perform' on large and small stages of being such that they introduce new and 'other than normal' states of affairs. They seem odd because they are *at odds with the status quo*. This is the function of utopian hope. It undermines the simulacrum to allow new possibilities to emerge. Muñoz focuses on the dialectic between Adorno and Bloch concerning utopian hope within art.²⁸ Adorno rails about proscriptions against "the casting of a picture," and it is this loss in the present that Muñoz uses to situate past and future temporality within utopian longing. For him, casting a picture recalls past utopias that are now dissolved, yet they continue to form the basis for future possibilities that are not yet realized.

²⁷ Ibid, 28-32, 54-56

²⁸ Ibid, 35-40. I will say more shortly about how he situates this conversation.

With this description of utopian gesture in hand, I turn first to Ahmed's concept of feminist 'snap.' She deploys the term as a verb, even when its grammatical use in her book is that of a noun.²⁹ As she puts it:

And then there is the secretary, Anna, described by her boss as his right hand; smart, fierce, willful. They are at a meeting. They are seated at a table. She makes an intelligent suggestion. The men do not hear her. She is the secretary; she keeps their secrets; she is not supposed to contribute her thoughts. Another man says the same thing she just said. The other men rush to congratulate him for his good idea. Sexism: how women are passed over. Sexism: how women's ideas are attributed to men, as if an idea cannot be heard unless it originates from a male body. When she makes a sound (she stirs her tea with a spoon), she causes irritation; she becomes a disturbance. Then, only then, they turn to face her.³⁰

And:

One time, again at a table – so much of life is assembled around tables – there is a dinner. And she and another woman – they are both wives – are listening to the men talking to each other, hearing how they are absent from the conversation; watching themselves disappear [...]. Janine cannot bear it anymore; she bangs the cutlery. Maybe it is an act of sabotage, maybe an accident; the men stop talking. She has their attention. Sharp, crash, bang. This sound, her sound.³¹

Snap, characterized by action, movement, sound, or disruption, catalyzes a visceral phenomenology to represent moments in which repressive power structures can be confronted. Snap is not only situated within realized potentiality (i.e., action), but it also must be held ready within not-yet-here possibility.³² This is what Ahmed calls 'being snapful.' Failing to attend to those moments requiring snap risks their being either misunderstood or miss-targeted (or simply missed). Being snapful indicates a readiness to trouble ideological norms and thus actuate a utopian perspective of hope.

²⁹ Ahmed (2017: 188). My thoughts on utopian snap rely on this section (187-212).

³⁰ Ibid, 201

³¹ Ibid, 202

³² She does not reference Bloch; however, her description of feminist tactics demonstrates a similar kind of affective stance, tied to relevant action, aimed at rupturing the status quo. As such, it fits the working definition of Blochian/utopian hope offered in the first two chapters.

Feminist snap also helps us understand Ahmed's broader definition of being a (feminist) 'killjoy.'³³ This includes employing snap against vulnerable seams within normative *simulacra*, but it also requires a holistic attitudinal adjustment. 'Killjoy-ness' involves a restructuring of one's comportmental set. Ideally situated within a community of killjoys, the choice to occupy this role is at first individual. It cannot, however, remain alone.³⁴ It must become a shared effort, a collective cause, a community of hope, a *community of utopia*. She expresses this developmental process in terms of survival:

But the experiences we have are not just of being worn down; these experiences also give us resources. What we learn from these experiences might be how we survive these experiences. [...] Here survival is *how I begin; it is the start of something*. Survival here refers not only to living on, but to keeping going in the more profound sense of *keeping going with one's commitments*. [...] we need a robust and transformative redefinition of survival. Survival can also be about *keeping one's hopes alive*; holding on to the projects that are projects *insofar as they have yet to be realized*. You might have to become willful to hold on when you are asked to let go [...] Survival can thus be what we do for others, with others. We need each other to survive [...] Survival thus becomes a [...] *shared project*.³⁵

Her portrayal mirrors my earlier summary of a utopian subject (derived from Weeks), namely: an individual-become-collective reaching towards an as yet unrecognizable future. This reaching requires the destabilization of prevailing agentic restrictions. Since tactical tools are the primary ones available to utopian subjects, utopian hope depends on their operationalization. They create ruptures that destabilize realities perpetuated by narratives of merely-political hope. These ruptures put extant relationships, predicated upon existing relationships of power, at risk. A less formal way

³³ Ahmed (2017: 235-268) provides a lengthy description of the killjoy's "survival kit." Being a feminist killjoy does not require an agent to 'be female.' It does, however, require a commitment to utopian struggle. To be a killjoy is to be an ally. See also Weeks (2011: 197-204) for an analysis of these reflexive attitudes and actions within utopian hope.

³⁴ See, again, Bloch (2000, 187, 191-206) for a description of this progression from the "Self-Problem" to the "We-Problem."

³⁵ Op. cit. 235-236. Emphases mine.

of putting this would be that, especially for the privileged, the process of looking for, and creating, opportunities for utopian ruptures of the status quo will be a 'gut check.'

This is to say that being a utopian killjoy and deploying utopian snap bear a cost for both wielder and recipient, one that is relationally risky and perhaps even catastrophic. These tactics possess the potential to warp and/or destroy extant relationships, both individual and corporate. This is how it becomes a gut check. The move from noun to verb in the employment of utopian concepts signifies a shift from a merely (verbal) argumentative position from which to construct the descriptive contours of utopia (as a noun), secure in the knowledge that arguing for any such state of affairs is the only vulnerability incurred. Familial, personal, romantic, communal, even political relationships need not be threatened in the latter case. As such, arguments for concretized utopias are limited to a theoretical field of play.³⁶ To utopia, as affective action, takes its motivation from theory yet must remain in the realm of 'action guidingness.'³⁷ There are no facades of political representation behind which to hide. The actions necessary to the poesis of utopian creation require being 'out there,' exposed, potentially offensive, and unpopular. They require a sacrifice of previous bonds (which may need 'snapping') in order to articulate utopia's demands. They create uncomfortable

³⁶ As a result of remaining a merely-political debate (no matter the terms in which it is couched). As Baudrillard (1981) has argued, political forms of representation are only that, representations. They are mere simulations and thus unjustified ontologically or epistemologically. It is the meaning (and practical import) given to them by participating subjects that affords them their import and efficacy. As long as utopian tactics remain in a realm of descriptive representation, they are limited by extant logics simultaneously prohibiting their concrete realization. This is intuited by many, in that interlocutors in these kinds of debate might march, use harsh words, throw rocks, riot, etc. yet these efforts remain situated within political modes of expression and interpretation. They are then, inherently, *impersonal*. Snap is more than this. It makes both snap-er and snap-ee vulnerable to one another without the political simulacrum behind which to hide and 'impersonally' preserve personal relationships (even while remaining antagonistic politically). The vulnerability inherent to utopian snap is not, on the other hand, simulation but, instead, reality that pierces simulation. It is relationally dangerous. It will be a gut check.

³⁷ And thus is thoroughly *ethical* in its nature and import.

spaces because they intimately touch us and affect our personal worlds, to include those close to us.

Yet these tactics must also not submit to the temptation to limit themselves to a purely (or merely) political bifurcation (when considered over and against current conditions of existence). This is another example of the dilemmas that must be attended to when navigating the ethical minefields always present within processual utopian proposals. If these gut checks devolve into a demonization of the ‘other’ such that she is relegated to a sub-human status, then the previously leveraged snap or ‘killjoy-ness’ is not utopian in nature – it is merely-political. This is a worry that travels with the messiness inherent to utopian imaginaries. It illustrates why these concepts are ‘sweaty.’” Balancing the scales cannot reduce to reverse oppression. This is a missing element within the contemporary accounts providing the grist for the mill of my project. They are marvelous at uncovering the sinister machinations supporting a reified status quo. They are less than marvelous at suggesting a nuanced way ahead that does not resort to a mirror/inverted image of previous violence.

Before moving on, I’ll note that Ahmed discusses a notion of care described as supportive within any practice of tactical rupture. She emphasizes the need to find both communities of care, as well as to develop personal ways in which to conduct self-care.³⁸ Perhaps one way to understand alternate futures as ‘utopianly’ crossing certain cultural demarcations would be to situate an ethics of care so that it applies across swaths of social and demographic contexts. More formally, an ethics of care quantified over both living and non-living domains of existence seems to run counter to stultified normative

³⁸ Ibid, 235-240

goals within neo-liberal systems.³⁹ This aligns closely with accounts of feminist futures (like those of Weeks/Ahmed/etc.) centering on relationships and *private* spheres of community instead of a more stereotypically public emphasis within male-dominated accounts. Yet its scope seems to apply to even more than this narrow emplacement. Coupling Ahmed’s portrayal of communal care with accounts such as Robinson’s (2017) *New York 2140* yields a concept of planetary care that extends beyond merely human beneficiaries.⁴⁰ This highlights the inclusivity inherent to her concept of care – extended to a larger set of actors. Thus the trick becomes balancing the need, indeed an ethical obligation, to be a utopian killjoy, to find opportunities to ‘snap’ within current regimes of oppression, within a more holistic target of utopia, at a macro level, as a process that seeks the betterment of social conditions for *everyone*.

This conceptualization of care also challenges feminist proposals to question the ontological limitations of their own projects. Rupturing epistemologies concretized around restricted sets of what can exist destabilizes those ontologies in a radical fashion. Thus alternate care imaginaries situate utopian effort such that its possible constituents can be radical in nature. This aligns with the idea of a Blochian novum that remains currently uncognizable to ‘us’ currently. The pregnant complexity that utopia, as method *and* objective, presents those determined to set sail on the journey to get there, should keep its advocates humble.

³⁹ For examples of care ethics theory in the context of feminist thought, see Gilligan (2011) and Williams (2011).

⁴⁰ See Levitas (2017, 10) for more on this extended definition of care ethics. See also Van Dooren’s (2014) monograph exposing relationships of survival and extinction generally ignored between human and non-human existences, resulting in the relative obscurity of “other than human” accounts of utopian struggle. I have limited myself to an anthropocentric investigation in this project; however, that should by no means be taken as an implicit argument for *only* valuing such a limited construct.

I turn next to an account of Black futurity rooted primarily in fictional genres of representation.⁴¹ Stemming from places of artistic and technological creativity, Afrofuturism gives us imaginaries ranging across various strata of performativity. These extend into the distant future – in order to visualize quite different societal spaces.

5.4 Afrofuturism –Utopias of the ‘Supra-Real’

Ytasha Womack sketches an array of imaginaries, generated within diverse arenas of performance and communication, to present visions of new worlds radically different from current reality. In what she calls a “dance through time travel,” she connects temporally disparate existences from the past (“soul retrieval”), present (“depths of the subconscious and imagination”), and future (exploring the “uncharted Milky Way”).⁴² The emphasis in her account on representational artefacts common to science fiction and fantasy can be mistaken for a lack of attention to the traces of utopia in the past and present. This would be a mistake. Womack’s images of an alternate reality, a ‘supra-real’ reality, are grounded in the *lack* of black and feminist imaginings represented within the allowed ontologies for heroes and heroines, protagonists and antagonists, enfolded within those artefacts. The lack of diversity in extant, fictional accounts of future (and past) fantasies fuel a desire forming, “seeds [that] were planted in the imaginations of countless black kids who yearned to see themselves in warp-speed spaceships, too.”⁴³

⁴¹ Van Veen argues that it is hard to reconcile the logic within Womack’s account (explored below) if the futurity discussed is (only) alternate Black futures. What she seems to be referencing applies more generally to those populations currently left outside the representative narrative of opportunity or recognition most often employed within accounts of science fiction or fantasy. This can be seen within the explicit post-human thrust within her exegesis of various accounts. See his 2013, 156 for more. We need to be careful when insisting that this is what she is intending to say given my earlier argument.

⁴² 2013, 2

⁴³ Ibid, 6

This genesis of alternate imaginaries, birthed in the recognition that normatively bounded fictional existences do not normally include a variety of marginalized ones, is why I am choosing to refer to her project as a utopia of the *supra*-real. It challenges those limitations by attempting to destabilize, through innovative imagery introduced both textually and visually, currently affirmed role-descriptions, specifically their *limitations*, within societal norms. Scenes of alternate possibilities are presented in order to force their position out of subconscious imaginations, liberating proscribed identities from the prison of past longings stemming from a place of collective loss. What is latently real becomes supra-real, requiring new conceptual frameworks to both situate and parse its instances. The limits of the past are not allowed to bound Afrofuturism. As she says, “a cosmic foot has to be put down.”⁴⁴

Her emphasis on technological, indeed digital (to use her words), media for the representation of these future visions provides insight about the seams of strategic normative space she is exploiting. One of these is, of course, the ever-present mechanism of imagination leveraged as a ‘world creator’ for these futuristic, radically other imaginaries. The empowerment of authors, creators, artists (and musicians, as Womack emphasizes) within the realms of science fiction and fantasy are avenues that Afrofuturism invades in order to flip the script. Fiction becomes, as it always has been, a metaphorical reality, in this case one that explodes reified limitations of what reality is permitted to include.

All this might sound accelerationist in tone. If the idea is that ever more powerful technology will enable different, less exclusive futures, then what is the difference between Womack’s explication of Afrofuturism from, say, Nick Srnicek and his

⁴⁴ Womack (2013, 7)

#Accelerate Manifesto of Accelerationist Politics?⁴⁵ As in the case of believing that Womack is rigidly tied to a temporally futuristic approach, this also would be a mistake. Afrofuturism is undoubtedly focused on casting visions of different futures, often fueled by technological possibilities. Womack, however, goes beyond a reliance on technological vectors of scientific development to weave an interdependent web of both artistic and other-worldly performance-focused imaginaries. It is here she employs present *and past* creations of black and feminist origins – stories that often do not include an ‘earth’ as we would currently recognize it.

The power fueling these transformations is often artistic and even musical in form, and this points to a unique type of performativity inherent in Afrofuturistic visions of the future.⁴⁶ This is, to use Blochian terms, an alternate mapping of the utopian trace within the Real-Possible in order to begin sketching the Not-Yet-Possible. This latter potentiality is *not* tethered to current limitations of technological empowerment. As such it orthogonally opposes their past vectors as much as it paints pictures that are, to use an Italian phrase, *fuori realta’*.

These scenes of blended black and feminist futures are aesthetic representations of ‘possibly possible’ utopias – destinations that, as Munóz argues, remain on the horizon. They point to a different set of referents than those we typically consider. They destabilize neatly categorized ways of thinking about technological advances and how those will impact and/or facilitate more just social conditions. They force us to recognize other possibilities – and here I refer to recognize as the act of re-cognizing – including

⁴⁵ See, e.g., Williams and Srnicek (2013) and (2015) for both an open-source manifesto as well as a monograph examining accelerationist post-work/capitalism possibilities within a Marxist framework.

⁴⁶ E.g., Sun Ra’s (1974) “Space is the Place.”

those referential sets actively suppressed or excluded within a tightly controlled narrative of the past. Womack describes one of the avenues to accomplish this as “cosplay”:

The imagination is the greatest resource that humans have. Cosplay builds on that. Cosplay puts imagination and desire into action in a way that *allows people to look at things differently*. [P] What do black geek conferences, geek confessions, space warrior princesses, and excitable black fans dressed like Green Lantern and Blade have to do with progress? Everything. [P] *Afrofuturism unchains the mind*. “It gives our young people another way out,” says Melorra Green, visual arts coordinator of the Sargent Johnson Gallery in Oakland. “They need to see people *stepping outside of the norm*.” [...] At its heart, Afrofuturism stretches the imagination far beyond the conventions of our time and the horizons of expectation, and kicks the box of normalcy and preconceived ideas of blackness out of the solar system. Whether it’s sci-fi story lines or radical eccentricity, *Afrofuturism inverts reality*.⁴⁷

Afrofuturism is thus an attempted tactical rupture of strategic normativity. It focuses on using the representational power of artistic images, music, and cosplay performativity as processual utopian methodology performed on a variety of stages. Leveraging imaginaries of a sci-fi futurity to counter strategically limited referentiality, it comprises an account of the supra-real. It surpasses contemporary reality to illuminate what has been intentionally suppressed or forgotten within futuristic imaginaries marketed as entertainment yet serving to continually reinforce limitations on what can be allowed to exist, both now and in the future.

Womack’s account hardly exhausts this concept of the supra-normal. Vandna Gill’s thesis on African-American utopian critique also focuses on science fiction as a communicative technology. This tool is then deployed by black authors attempting to shock readers out of a default satisfaction with certain portrayals of utopia that turn out to be, after all, dystopian from marginalized perspectives.⁴⁸ She argues that merely

⁴⁷ 2013, 14-15. Emphases mine.

⁴⁸ 2003, unpublished. She highlights the problematic nature of relying on technological development as a support for marginalized utopias. In this, she echoes my intuition that Afrofuturism problematizes accelerationist accounts that are insufficiently reflexive.

“escaping the limits of the body” is not enough to escape the limits of the current simulacrum. The writers she analyzes eventually resort to cyborg constructions that explode the possibilities available to marginalized bodies in ways that sidestep (better, step-over) a narrative of ongoing technological progress that remains hegemonic in its formulation *and application*. Put in terms of what I call tactical ruptures, she claims that these writers insist on “ensuring a jarring sense of discomfort in the reader that preempts any feelings of consolation or complacency; a discomfort that is meant to incite action and change.”⁴⁹ This requires the construction of “fascinatingly outlandish plotlines.”

I will say more about dystopian and utopian possibilities within science fiction and fantasy in my conclusion. Dystopian fiction, especially apocalyptic or post-apocalyptic versions, has the potential to identify utopian potentiality in a less ‘linear’ sense. Utopia, within accounts of disaster, might be illuminated (in a photo-negative way) such that it escapes the coloration it inherits systemically within overtly utopian constructions. In any case, it is clear that fictional vehicles have much to tell us about affective performativity in the service of these opposing vectors.⁵⁰ Mathias Thaler agrees when he argues for the role of critical dystopias, most often fictional in nature, as effective catalysts for spurring a “melancholic hope” for better futures. There is, in speculative fiction, an interplay between the recognizable and the not-yet-cognizable that is both familiar and foreign in a way that makes us, in the present, uncomfortable about

⁴⁹ Ibid, 56-57

⁵⁰ See Beil, Freyermuth, and Schmidt’s (2019) investigation of digital gaming as constructive within a media narrative of possible future imaginings. This initiative is outside the scope of my project; however, their analysis instructively categorizes these as cultural *constructs* – imagined both within and without the rules of normatively affirmed characterizations of society.

the past and the future. Utopian imaginaries can then be created within fictional-yet-almost-literal imaginaries, alternate histories with different, hopefully ‘better’ futures.⁵¹

These alternate futures demonstrate that contemporary constructions of processual utopia rely on utopian longing aimed at rupturing those strictures to which they owe their existence. In this manner, and because they are generated from within humanity’s being as such, they avoid the requisite dangers that beset narratives of progress based on versions of hope motivated by all and only hegemonic considerations.⁵² Their content is dependent on the survival of their related *simulacrum*, and to the extent that marginalization inheres within that *simulacrum*, it must be ‘papered over’ in order to ensure their (and the *simulacrum*’s) continued existence.

These alternate futures (or potential ways-of-being), are aptly described as existing on the margins. They straddle borders and defy limitations. In part protected and in part exposed, they trouble ‘hard’ borders on accepted ways of being and their limits. Gloria Anzaldúa describes the ontological messiness of these ‘borderlands’ like this:

Borders are set up to define the places that are safe and unsafe, to distinguish us from them. A border is a dividing line, a narrow strip along a steep edge. A borderland is a vague and undetermined place created by the emotional residue of an unnatural boundary. It is in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. *Los atravesados* live here: the squint eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the half-dead; *in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the ‘normal.’*⁵³

Her evocative imagery parallels my description of alternate futures (*to include their utopian function*). On the margins of accepted referentiality, they are refused acceptance

⁵¹ 2019, esp. the “Atwood principle” and its requirements for speculative fiction (section three, 616-620).

⁵² In St. Augustine’s city of God, the directionality of utopian struggle avoids entanglement with power relationships established and maintained in the earthly city. The politics of the latter are, in the final analysis, inconsequential.

⁵³ 2012 (originally published 1987) *Borderlands/La Frontera*. Cited in Raiskin (1994, 159). Final emphasis mine.

into the canon of (normal) normativity. Strategic ontologies struggle to accommodate them, and the simulacrum's reproductive logic is unable to understand them. Its subsequent refusal to affirm them should be expected.

5.4.1 African-futurism

Two recent pieces about alternate Black futures highlight a problem suggested within each of the proposals above. This turns out to be a critique of the extant corpus of language, and its associated referents, limiting the canon of acceptable norms. These articles explore differences between Afrofuturism and *Africanfuturism*.⁵⁴ Both analyze, as their muse, the fiction of Nnedi Okorafor to exegete problematic constituents within the term “Africanfuturism” and examine its problematic nature as a term orienting utopian striving.⁵⁵ In brief, Africanfuturism (a term coined by Okorafor) is distinguished from Afrofuturism (primarily) in its geo-temporal location. Instead of concentrating on what I have called the supra-real, the former develops fictional imaginaries/stories of African possibilities *within African spaces*.

This is not merely a geographical disparity. Afrofuturism, according to Wabuke, relies on western-centered epistemologies for its descriptions, depending on technological and socio-cultural sets of descriptions that are rooted in a prison of (generational) resource extraction (i.e., the diaspora). Referencing these futures within the moniker of Afrofuturism subtly compromises them. From a certain perspective, it chains them to an overarching dependence on the simulacrum of western superiority – even while (and

⁵⁴ Väättänen (2019) and Wabuke (2020).

⁵⁵ Namely, her (2010) and (2014) novels. Shorter works (written for Marvel Comics) discussed also include “The Magical Negro” (2004) and “Mother of Invention” (2018) where the former is Afro-futuristic and the latter African-futuristic. Other African-futurist authors mentioned include Akwaeke Emezi and Buchi Emecheta.

because of) describing them in terms of technological possibilities beyond those currently realizable. Using the arc of technological prowess to ground these supra-real accounts of a possible future allows the ‘west’ to continue as the center of the resultant imaginary.

The motivation for the distinction seems to be the freedom to cut ties with the west in the construction of alternately imaginable worlds situated within African spaces, fictional or otherwise. (This has the possibility of mitigating Cristina Sharpe’s ‘wake’ to an extent in that Africanfuturism might offer a way to sidestep the necessity of that monolithic presence within the essence of black being.) It could liberate accounts of black futurity from a foundational reliance on diasporic slavery. This seems to be Okorafor’s motivation for coining the concept. In her words:

It [Africanfuturism] is a subcategory of science fiction that is similar to Afrofuturism but more deeply rooted in African culture, history, mythology, and point-of-view as it then branches into the Black diaspora, and it does not privilege or center the West. [...] Afrofuturism: Wakanda builds its first outpost in Oakland, CA, USA. Africanfuturism: Wakanda builds its first outpost in a neighboring African country.⁵⁶

This approach might divert an initial, and inherent, othering that occurs in the spaces often used to describe Afrofuturistic possibilities. As such, it is a powerful place from which to imagine a directionality for processual utopia.

Yet I would note that this distinction also runs the risk of refusing to challenge *current* spaces of oppression for Black existence. There is something here that seems to retreat from confrontation with the west – a standoff (or a shocking) that seems necessary for utopian process. While attempting to resolve this specific dilemma is beyond my scope here, its makeup highlights the problematic nature of the language available to use in this case. The search for an appropriate term under which to appropriately classify any

⁵⁶ In Wakube (2020)

example of alternate futurity highlights the limitations of our current set of terms and referents.

5.5 Afropresentism: A Temporal Grounding for Utopian Rupture

[...] so I replied that if anybody enters into the Bush of Ghosts he or her would not fear for anything within a week he or she had entered it, because he or she will see Fear personally [...] I told them further that it is in the Bush of Ghosts the “fears”, “sorrows”, “difficulties” all kinds of “punishments” etc. start and they end.

- Amos Tutuola⁵⁷

If we are the future that past artists and activists dreamed of, how much freer were we all supposed to be?

- Emily Lordi⁵⁸

There is another perspective on Black futurity that needs to be mentioned. It flows from and within a persistent striving framed by oppression. The foci of this struggle are constituents of certain identities emplotted as temporal coordinates referencing the contradictions that striving highlights. This way of describing the struggle for more just agentic positionality is an example of utopian rupture. It describes another alternate imaginary ‘breaking into’ tautological history.⁵⁹ Less formally, it is like ‘boxing out’ in basketball, or ‘checking’ in hockey. It features a physical jockeying for position in order to retake control of the present.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ 1954, 174

⁵⁸ 2020, 163

⁵⁹ ‘Tautological’ as a result of the historiographical technology of apocalypse – an ‘unveiling’ of an already-determined future (framed within the past). This is the structure, or form (to use Hayden White’s term), to linear, frozen histories. Utopian rupture aims to shatter this “if A, then A” type of historical narrational logic.

⁶⁰ The use of “physical” here is intentional. The performativity expressed by those authors and story-tellers advocating for Afropresentism is visceral, affective performances contained within aesthetic vehicles (art, poetry, vision casting, music, etc.). I will look at two examples of this kind of alternative theorizing in this section.

Emily Lordi is, I think, the first to coin the term “Afropresentism” alongside her effort to demonstrate how a trope of this struggle, soul music, remains aware of, and focused on, past radicality to re-imagine both the present and its possible futures. The role that temporality plays in the identification of those constituents informing instances of ‘musicking’ (recalling how Small describes it) is similar to the way how utopia, while remaining in principle and possibility the ultimate “good place,” has to simultaneously be the “no place” that comes from a space of loss. Afropresentists “figure the present as the yet unfulfilled future of a radical past.”⁶¹

While not objecting to Afrofuturism as a valid construct for Black futuristic thought, she positions her vision-casting as challenging its seeming primacy within Black cultural theory. This is due, ironically, as a form of resistance against the idea that some kind of science fiction fueled, technologically different ‘somewhere else’ is necessary for change to take place.⁶² Much like Africanfuturism, Afropresentism then counters the notion that something supra-real must circumscribe spaces of Black utopian striving. Her analysis flows from a motivation to provoke change in the present, chronicling the ways in which soul artists have attempted, within aesthetic vehicles (in this case, songs), to rupture hegemonically controlled imaginaries of what society should be. There is a theme of ‘overcoming’ that she unearths within expressions of soul music, a commitment to a messiness in the present creating contradictions that must be recognized within Black existence and struggle.

I’ll make one quick observation before moving to a different example of Afropresentism. It concerns the controversial topic I wrestled with in chapter four:

⁶¹ 2020, 154.

⁶² Ibid, 154-155.

cultural appropriation. As she claims, soul music doesn't 'work' without conditions of Black existence undergirding it.⁶³ This was, and is, sensed viscerally by the artists and their audiences. No scholar or theorist of cultural thought is needed to describe why soul music doesn't 'feel genuine' unless those kinds of experiences ground its performances. As Lordi claims, white attempts to perform soul music are perceived as fundamentally disingenuous.⁶⁴ I suggest that this might be an identifiable cultural (and *aesthetic*) artefact we can easily pick out that does not brook cultural appropriation as a result of its identity-forming relationship to the community represented. Recognizing this dynamic as flowing from felt experience, at the level of what philosophers might term 'folk ontology,' is helpful in order to more accurately balance utopian initiatives aimed at humankind's *unity* while simultaneously giving proper place (and *not* appropriating) cultural *diversity*.⁶⁵

As another example of this temporal perspective (and half a century earlier) Amos Tutuola's stories about Black being and movement within colonial spaces of oppression are powerful examples of Afropresentist tactical ruptures. Situated in colonial Africa and centered on a struggle for negotiated identity, his narrative is in the first person and, remarkably, in English.⁶⁶ Within a jealous, polygamous household located on the western coast of the continent, each person struggled not only for identity as an African

⁶³ Ibid, 10-15 and elsewhere.

⁶⁴ Ibid. Yet even this wording is problematic. The better word would be 'privileged,' as I demonstrated in chapter four. Using "white" in this case essentializes 'being white' as 'whiteness' simpliciter. This would be, recall, a mistake in the case of any 'colored-ness' as it pertains to contingent skin appearance. Perhaps it is easier to explain a position if an essentialized 'bad guy' is always assumed and forms the foil against which to theorize. Yet this way of arguing is, as a result, logically fallacious and thus undermines otherwise valid points being made.

⁶⁵ See Goosby-Smith (2014) for an investigation into how unity and diversity can be balanced by leveraging a 'garden' analogy. See also I Corinthians 12:18-26 (ESV) for a Biblical description of how diversity and unity *must* be balanced for a body (speaking of the church) to be effective.

⁶⁶ This book, first published in 1954, is the second by Tutuola describing a turbulent cultural and political era using metaphors connected to traditional customs.

but also for recognition within the family. The catalyst for his story is that of fleeing before invaders into the ‘bush.’ Yet this bush is different than any he has experienced before – it is a bush inhabited by various ghost towns – fantastical in nature yet grounded in African culture and highlighting the intertwined nature of colonial Christianity with African religious traditions and characters.

His protagonist is, for years, punished in various ways by different groups of ghosts. Yet after years of punishment (and being married twice), he eventually wants to remain in the bush permanently. Tutuola brilliantly uses the metaphor of the ghost’s bush to highlight the normative dysphoria blended in the ‘now’ (then) of colonial Africa. Refusing to write in his mother tongue, he insists on using English to describe both the bush and its intersection with the current (for him) western coast of Africa’s cultural and political coordinates during a time of debilitating exploitation and displacement. Returning to Lordi’s description of referencing a radical past to inform present struggle, Tutuola’s stories are most certainly examples of Afropresentist dialogue crafted in a poignant way.

As with Lordi, we should pay attention to how the narrational contortions required to represent his blended (fictional and literal) reality highlight the inadequacy of any extant language for his task. His past, to include that of his people considered more holistically, intertwines with the penetration of external normative foci, yet Tutuola takes control of these latter and bends them to his own purposes. His ability to balance heterogenous past and present constituents in a way that does not relieve their tension displays a tactical ability to ‘dance’ within the seams of ‘purified’ sets of existences. His Afropresentistic vision catapults the past-become-present into confrontational dialogue

with hegemonic narratives – whether of progress or pain – and demonstrates the ways in which it creates its own expressive uniqueness. As such, it possesses an ability to give shape to alternate imaginaries in ways that cannot be effectively appropriated by privileged actors.

To compare these two expressions of Afropresentism in light of processual utopian struggle, Lordi at times situates her analysis referencing merely-political coordinates at times.⁶⁷ One consequence of this phrasing is that it could relocate her message of Afropresentism’s past-become-present progressivism and unnecessarily reference it as a confrontation with a specific political punching bag.⁶⁸ This is unfortunate, given her focus on musical expression motivated by a struggle for agentic autonomy experienced (collectively) in the past, within times of even more blatant oppression occurring under political leadership representing all extant political parties. Put another way, the scope of her subject lends itself to a more holistic characterization instead of a narrow definition situated ‘against’ contemporary political parties/figures. This is in no way intended to question the profundity of her work, yet it might limit its impact when considered outside the current cultural moment.

In contrast, Tutuola refuses to represent his socio-cultural struggles in any politically binary way. His search to paint a picture of ‘blended’ African identity in a colonial context, using himself as both protagonist and foil, gives us a less ‘politically-loaded’ instance of Afropresentist imaginations. The current contradictions that Lordi

⁶⁷ E.g., 2020, chp. 1 (i.e., “miserable Bush years” and other such characterizations).

⁶⁸ Ibid, 159-160. In a summary of her analysis of several female soul artists, Lordi writes that, “Afropresentist works do defy progressive narratives that frame the present as the result of having overcome.” This locates Afropresentism within ongoing, unfinished struggle. Describing it in light of a contemporarily considered political foe limits its scope, and it masks historical oppression by members of multiple political parties within multiple geo-political contexts. It unfortunately limits the idea to a particular foil of ‘now’ instead of, to use her terms, revisiting a radical past to highlight current contradictions experienced by Black people within American society.

speaks about as integral to Afropresentist thought are poetically woven into the warp and weft of Tutuola's journey through the ghosts' bush. Places of loss from which utopia can be re-imagined from Black perspectives are rampant throughout his stories. He casts visions that develop in the reader's mind from within. This is emotionally and figuratively internal, as he stimulates the reader with images that are beyond easy representation. He forces a confrontation of fiction and reality that remains enmeshed in both genres, and these are full of both tension and release. This is, to my lights, a powerful way in which to evoke an Afropresentist aesthetic that is pregnant with utopian rupture without succumbing to the siren song of merely-political tools.

Lordi references Cristina Sharpe in her book briefly, yet as I read her explanation of Afropresentism, I am even more convinced that Sharpe's work is Afropresentist in the way Lordi describes it. Although she (Sharpe) does not refer to it in those terms, her work exposes a foundational trope of what Lordi is describing. In fact, she seems to more broadly frame the ways in which past identity constituents inform present 'beingness' in the Black community as well as using those to instigate and guide initiatives of community care. When she decides to bring political personalities into her account, she chooses a (the first) Black U.S. President in order to show how even his rhetoric continues to define, and limit, Black being to the 'wake' of slavery and the 'hold' of the slave ship.⁶⁹ Instead of leveraging an ad-hominem argument against a ubiquitous 'republican white man' target, she argues that the work to be done, the imaginaries to be constructed, require struggle in the present *by all* to overcome past programming that simply reinforces the status quo.

⁶⁹ 2016, chps. 1-3

Afropresentism provides a framework to more fruitfully examine what constitutes problematic cultural appropriation. In the previous chapter, I troubled the idea that simply seeking to be a utopian ally entailed problematic appropriation. I stand by that argument. The answer to those overtures, if processual utopia is the objective, cannot be (better, remain) either silence or ridicule. In Tutuola's and Lordi's cases, however, we see ways in which certain instances of 'presentist' performativity by historically marginalized groups cannot be mobilized by the privileged without appropriation of the former's identity. Another way to say this would be to note that there are no referents for those signifiers within the canon of privileged experience. Purified sets of signifiers and things signified, or, hegemonic constructions of language, are inadequate to the task of describing, or pre-figuring, the city of God.

The Absolute is beyond the set of referents allowed for inclusion in current, and former, societal imaginaries. This is precisely what Latour is arguing when he insists that modern conceptualizations of the world discount a deep field of hybridized existences occupying the gap between nature and society.⁷⁰ They also dethrone God unnecessarily in the process. After we destroy our progressive idols so hopelessly incapable of inhabiting the role of the summum bonum of existence, we can no longer 'cross-out' the Absolute. God must be restored to his (causally-efficacious) throne. The canon comprising the limits of our self-affirming systems of 'talking' turns out to be a mirage. It's time to start trying to describe something *real* – an oasis in a post-modern desert full of re-hashed gibberish.⁷¹

⁷⁰ I analyze Latour's thought in this context in chapter three's introduction.

⁷¹ See Bäcker epigraph below.

5.6 A New Utopian Language

We are in the middle of the night. I once tried to combat it with words... At the time I learned that whoever fights against the night must move its deepest darkness to deliver up its light and that words are only a way station in this major life struggle: and they can be the final station only when they are never the first...

- Benjamin⁷²

New poetry creates a new language. It separates itself from the usual gibberish.

- Bäcker⁷³

What seems common throughout the proposals summarized above is their creative confrontation, and subsequent re-definition, of certain referential limitations enforced by the status quo. This bounded set of referents can be seen in a variety of aesthetic, representational genres of expression to include literature (linguistics), performing arts, futuristic fiction/theater, etc. In brief, sets of pre and proscribed ‘things’ are allowed, indeed normed as acceptable by the status quo, as the only valid subjects of representation, full stop. This results in what Broodthaers refers to as a ‘merchandising’ superimposed on art (or aesthetic performativity more broadly construed):

What is Art? Ever since the nineteenth century the question has been posed incessantly to the artist, to the museum director, to the art lover alike. I doubt, in fact, that it is possible to give a serious definition of Art, unless we examine the question in terms of a constant, I mean the transformation of art into merchandise. This process is accelerated nowadays to the point where artistic and commercial values have become superimposed. *If we are concerned with the phenomena of reification, then Art is a particular representation – a form of tautology.*⁷⁴

These examples of alternate future visions challenge the limitations accruing to these crystallized (or, to use the quotation’s word – reified) sets of permitted referents. As such, they open seams between affective performativity’s equivocation with normative merchandising. They cut across the grain of well-trodden by-ways policed by

⁷² 1940b (quoted in Stephen Polsky, *Walter Benjamin’s Transit: A Destructive Tour of Modernity*. Palo Alto, CA: Academica Press, 2010: 34). Cited in Howard (2017, 202).

⁷³ 1973, 84. In Greaney (2014, 94).

⁷⁴ Ibid, 62. Emphasis mine.

existing, discursive ‘rules of the road.’ They repudiate this stifling tautology, this mirrored image-doubling, which comprises the spectacle of which Debord laments.⁷⁵ Taken in the aggregate, accepted artistic-cum-commercial representations comprise a network of interlacing barriers mitigating against the different, the imaginative, the *non-normed*. Art is thus enlisted as a strategic weapon, an instrument of aesthetic, performative idol worship. It helps to consecrate the sacramental rituals comprising ‘orthodoxy’ for the faithful, yet it is also recognized as the ‘mark of the beast’ for the marginalized, the dreamers, the *utopians*.

We should note that the creation of alternate languages, often constructed (as resistance) within the linguistic structures of accepted sign as dividend of signifier and signified, has been a tactic leveraged by oppressed groups for some time. Henry Gates famously presents the case of the “signifying monkey” in the case of African-American ‘English’ (or, in his words, “vernacular”) as a Black “trope of tropes.” On his account, antanaclasis, as homonymic pun, tactically inverts the meaning-making axis of “Signifyin(g)” so that it relies on rhetorical coordinates rather than the usual, and normatively accepted, semantic (perhaps, ‘white’) alternatives.⁷⁶ This repurposing of language from within its own ‘game’ (to use Wittgenstein’s term) is a paradigmatic example of what deCerteau proposes as tactical, quotidian warfare against strategic normative structures. It demonstrates the potential language possesses as tactical rupture within utopian process. Yet ‘Signifyin(g)’ can only get us so far. If what is lacking is an

⁷⁵ 1994. See also Adorno and Horkheimer (1944, 94-136) for how performing arts (as the culture industry) reinforce Enlightenment discourse (and its requisite negation of anything else; anything ‘other’).

⁷⁶ 1988, 45-49. Thanks to Anthony Kwamē Harrison for bringing this work to my attention. Signifyin(g) is compared against ‘signifying’ such that the former is perpendicular to the latter within linguistic tropes in order to colonize the oppressor’s language from within, maintaining equivalency of the terms referenced to different meaning-making axes.

appropriate language for utopian referents, then it cannot remain a resistance-oriented “trope of tropes” accessible only by a certain actor group – existing within simulacra of oppression and colonizing the privileged’s meaning-making apparatuses.

Gates provides us a fascinating example of the tactical initiatives deployed by marginalized actors in order to expand their opportunistic (and holistically agentic) set. Yet it is also problematic as a signpost for utopian language directionality. The primary reason is that this colonization of oppressive language is only ‘noticed’ by the marginalized.⁷⁷ As such, it doesn’t quite rise to the level of utopian rupture explored thus far. It certainly might possess that potential yet given how Gates describes the practice of “Signifyin(g),” this ‘language’ is meant to be hidden from the privileged while, at the same time, colonizing the latter’s set of terms and their referents. Utopian rupture must ‘snap’ (to use Ahmed’s word) in order to draw attention to itself from those oppressing those that must resort to such tactics in order to expose the ways in which they are being disregarded (or actively repressed). It might certainly be a precursor to such a rupture, but as an isolated language game, it remains just that. Indeed, contra Gates, the shifting of the epistemological axis actually does involve a change to the ‘sign’ – namely that the ‘thing’ signified just is different than that signified by “signification” (i.e., what he would refer to as “white language”).⁷⁸ As a result, we do wind up with two different language systems, despite the claim that homonymic pun ‘targeted’ expression maintains equivalency with its dominant competitor.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 74-83

⁷⁸ This he tacitly admits, whether he intends to or not (*Ibid*, 65-66). If the answer to “Who is buried in Grant’s Tomb?” is, for society as a whole, Grant, but for Signifyin(g), “your mama,” then the sign certainly has changed.

As a result of the impasses incurred by linguistic systems formed on the logics Gates analyzes, a return to the purview of pre-verbal, imagic linguistic development seems in order to consider an effective way for a utopian dialect to emerge. This brings us back to the realm of utopian performativity, particularly to pre-figurative, affectively targeted actions-become-symbols. This is to say that artistic expression will play a central role in its construction. To see how art's contours might layer onto utopian language development, we could begin with the linguistic implications of the accounts just canvassed. Each of these goes over and against the allowed meanings of certain terms and their conceptual, perhaps even colloquial, emplacement (effectively enlarging the available ways in which the world can, or could, be) in order to both problematize their current limitations while also suggesting alternate possibilities. As such, they liberate imprisoned sets of linguistic referents in order to permit broader conceptions of reality (the ontological flank of their advance) as well as destabilize the way current normative space is interpreted (the associated epistemological flank). I use military terms here intentionally. I am discussing (marginalized) guerilla attacks against current referential limitations.

This suggests that what makes up the reified canon of language (that body of signifiers and signified 'things' allowed by reigning discursive power brokers) is incomplete when determining a rough directionality for utopian struggle. It also illustrates, in a physical sense, the limitations privileged actors incur when trying to apprehend and parse these alternate futures. This is the result of being hampered by language that conforms to the default sets of rules we accept and then reinforce. These rules enforce bounded possibilities. They demand obeisance.

Deleuze and Guattari describe the normative nature of language this way:

Language is not content to go from a first party to a second party, from one who has seen to one who has not, but necessarily goes from a second party to a third party, neither of whom has seen. It is in this sense that language is the transmission of the word as order-word, not the communication of a sign as information. Language is a map, not a tracing. But how can the order-word be a function coextensive with language when the order, the command, *seems tied to a restricted type of explicit proposition marked by the imperative?*⁷⁹

This imperative function of command, as order-word, entails something else as well. Seen from a reversed perspective a requisite negation of unallowed referentiality is required, and this effort cannot be passive or accidental. What does not, in truth, exist, the ever-norming idol of normality, must proactively conceal those existences that threaten the revelation of its own non-existence. This need demands its ever-new, yet unsurprising, reincarnation as the object of subjective worship. Michel-Rolph Trouillot refers to a variant of this kind of ontological warfare as “historical silencing.”⁸⁰ It can be seen in various scenarios, particularly in the appropriation of ‘other’ identities hidden within those referents sanctified by the canon of (‘holy’) normative writ.

Trouillot is not the only one to comment on the power of silencing wielded as ontological negation. Sharpe provides us with multiple examples of “black redaction” in the effort to ‘hold’ blackness in a space of non-being.⁸¹ Indeed, she does not solely rely

⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari (1980, 85), quoted within Howard (2017, 191). Emphasis mine.

⁸⁰ See his (1995, 31-69) analysis of the Haitian revolution for an account of the name “Sans-Souci” as it pertains to three separate referents. These monuments, in the form of physical edifices, provide effective ‘containers’ in which to swallow up former identities (or referents). This way of thinking about silencing is instructive when considered in light of the monumentalization of certain mythologies considered across various genres of material, aesthetic (indeed: artistic) representations of reality. These become overt examples of artistic merchandising within a socio-cultural (hegemonically normed) marketplace.

⁸¹ Sharpe (2016, 113-130). She begins by noting “textual” redaction and annotation (annotation being the privileged ‘corrective’ to Black narrative); however, her first example is that of a photo and its accompanying annotational artefacts. The multi-sensory nature of marginalization in the context of an accepted (default) referential set immediately appeals to various media and genres of imagery to illustrate various tropes of its instantiation. (“Hold” is in scare quotes to honor her use of the word. It directly refers to the slave ship hold and its oppressive, ongoing function/role within current black existence.)

on linguistic methods to illustrate this phenomenon (even if the subjects of her photo-analysis, and their accompanying descriptions, are linguistic in form).⁸² The visceral impact of the imagery she presents, while rooted in the treatment of words, provides a bridge to a more expansive notion of aesthetic performativity in the context of referential language. This can also be situated within the mechanism of utopian rupture. The pictures of Black redaction, shown to us as constructed or captured images, are more startling for the visceral ways in which they jar our (multi) sensory experience. They destabilize our perspectives and our self-soothing justifications. They pick out instances of a negation of existence in a way that simply (verbally) describing ontological erasure cannot. They impact a broader set of receptors, changing how we re-construct them.

Just in case there are any doubts as to the ‘negation of being-ness’ vector of this strategic referential stance (here I am referencing its impact on marginalized existences) Sharpe relates a response to its censure this way:

I hear in Zabou’s [character in *Timbuktu*, a film about Black Haitian experience. Note that she is a real person represented within the film] outrage an echo of the outrage in novelist Fatou Diome’s interview. I repeat, here, the words from Diome that began this section: “These people whose bodies are washing up on these shores, - and I carefully choose my words – if they were Whites, the whole Earth should be shaking now.”⁸³ I hear an echo of Danticat [...] capturing the insistence with which Haitian women *speak themselves into the present*. Their greeting: “How are we today, Sister?/ I am ugly, but *I am here*.”⁸⁴

This vignette showcases a denial of agency enshrined within sets of performative referents acceptable/allowed by the status quo. Sharpe and Truillot bring into sharper focus the broad, aesthetic fields of discourse these sets normalize, destabilizing

⁸² Ibid, 113, 114, 119, and elsewhere.

⁸³ Oumar Bar, “When Senegalese Writer Fatou Diome Kicked European Union Butt,” *Africa is a Country*, April 2015, <http://africasacountry.com/2015/04/that-moment-when-senegalies-write-fatou-diome-kicked-european-butt/>. Emphases hers; in Sharpe (2016, 130).

⁸⁴ Ibid, quotations in original, emphases mine. Quote from Danticat taken from “We are Ugly, But We Are Here.” *Caribbean Writer* 10: n.p., <http://www.thecaribbeanwriter.org/view-volume/?id=586>.

approaches to describing utopia mainly linked to textual formations. Utopian struggle becomes at bottom the construction of an altogether new language, one that illuminates (un) acceptable referents by showcasing various performative vectors (which include, of course, textual ones).⁸⁵

The idea of a new, utopian language is not new. Neither is the concept of dystopian competitors. These constructions have, however, tended to be situated within fiction and/or fantasy as iterative from, some claim, its generative impulse within the biblical account of Babel and the confusion of language that putatively occurred there.⁸⁶ Dunja Moor, for example, locates specifically feminist critiques of phallogocentric linguistic limitations, within such accounts as Margaret Atwood's fictive world-creation, as part of a process aimed at unearthing a 'perfected' utopian language.⁸⁷ This, by itself, is fascinating in the context of processual utopian methodology; however, what aligns with my intuitions in the context of alternate (and not solely fictive) futures comes through clearly in her conclusion:

By reminding us readers of the potentials and dangers of language looked at creatively, utopian and dystopian literature *exposes the limits of our way of thinking*. Even if the limits of language do not fully represent the limits of the world – to paraphrase Ludwig Wittgenstein – language and thinking are our filters, our means, to perceive the world. If language divides the world into different chunks, literature at its best aids us in perceiving alternative chunks, real or fictive, of various realities and in *thinking*

⁸⁵ Thanks to several architectural professors at the University of Vicenza (IT) for this insight during a writing retreat in 2019. They suggested that what I am doing is beginning the construction of a new kind of language – i.e., a new way of situating symbols of utopia such that future formulae can be constructed. Their analogy was that of Andrea Palladio – the 16th century Vicentine architect who developed the symbology and math of modern architecture – a 'language' still used today for much of that discipline. I am not problematizing textual-only vehicles as appropriate forms of aesthetic performativity to support utopia. I am beginning with linguistic forms and showing that, 1) textual devices do not exhaust the ways in which a utopian broadening of recognized ontological-cum-referential sets can act as utopian rupture, and 2) if we are discussing a language of utopia (or dystopia, for that matter), its grammar will involve a broader set of performative, pre-figurative practices.

⁸⁶ Genesis 11:1-9 (ESV)

⁸⁷ 2009. Examples include her 2014 and 2015 critically acclaimed novels. For another analysis of Atwood's work problematizing patriarchal logics within fictional imaginations, see Rebecca Fraser's (unpublished) 2016 thesis.

*beyond the confines of language.*⁸⁸

This is not an insight unique to utopian theory. Chris Knight, a linguistics scholar writing about the function of deception in the evolution of language, is forced to acknowledge, indeed support, the role of the visual arts, to include dance and other ritual performances, as being central to this struggle. This is seen in the meaning-making evolution of linguistic referents and their critical position in the construction and solidification of member/nonmember hierarchies of power.⁸⁹ Social cooperation and, importantly in the case of marginalized rupture, *non-cooperation* form the bases of socio-political development, to include the function of signifier and signified within cultural artefacts. These make up what Knight dubs ‘symbolic culture.’⁹⁰ The creation of this culture “requires the invention of a whole new kind of things, things that have no existence in the ‘real’ world but exist entirely in the symbolic realm.”⁹¹ Linguistic terms-as-symbols become communal constructs. This process “structures the universe.”⁹²

As societal interests converge (speaking developmentally), the need to question communal constructs (seen as referents of performative communication) wanes. Speakers can reduce transmission effort into what can be called “conspiratorial whispering.”⁹³ Receivers can act on trust, minimizing response times. The process of arriving at this juncture, in turn, plays a major part in creating and establishing *identity*. This is similar to what I have demonstrated to be the concretization of a referential set

⁸⁸ Ibid, 245. Emphases mine.

⁸⁹ Knight (1998) is just one example of the scholarship examining the symbology, and functional employment, of language within an evolutionary context of cultural performance. This is part of an ongoing discussion about Darwinian game-theoretical perspectives on social development it pertains to linguistic theory.

⁹⁰ See Chase (1994) for an archaeological take on this phenomenon.

⁹¹ Knight (1998, 69)

⁹² Ibid, his words.

⁹³ Ibid, 71

wielded as an ideological technology in the recreation of the status quo. This pattern of epistemic solidification results in the simulacrum dictating what can be recognized as acceptable existences permitted for individual and communal “topics for discussion.”

Outgroups must, of course, break into these conspiratorial circles of established trust (reflecting privileged statuses) in order to engage with them. They are, positionally, excluded from the relationships of trust reinforced by limiting the set of ‘real’ symbols recognized by acceptable worship-cum-deification. Bourdieu explains the resultant disconnection this way:

The power of words is nothing other than the delegated power of the spokesperson, and his speech...is no more than a testimony, and one among others, of the guarantee of delegation that is vested in him. The words of some derided ‘nobody’ have no weight; we may accuse such a person of ‘talking through his hat’ or ‘talking off the top of his head.’ Words emanating from such a source lack [...] ‘illocutionary force’ – that efficacy which attaches to words when they are accepted as trusted, authorized. [...] To promise is to enter into a communally sanctioned contract [...] To ‘do things with words’ is to *play by the rules of the whole congregation*, as if mandated by ‘the gods’; only thus authorized does any utterance work.⁹⁴

Speech acts (and *all* performative, symbolic rituals) have their power as a result of collusion with a wider system of ceremony and ritual (which is to say, *worship*). They sustain the simulacrum’s fictional, which is then conflated with moral, supports.⁹⁵ This is the monolith the marginalized face. It is not simply that they find themselves in positions with less financial or educational possibilities. It is not merely that they are numerically outmatched (perhaps) within a community of aesthetically different, majority groups of actors. The foundational moral constructs of these spaces are constructed and then

⁹⁴ Bourdieu (1991, 107). Emphasis his.

⁹⁵ Knight (1998, 77). Emphases mine. See also Mauro Caraccioli’s (2018) account exploring the role of Spanish missionaries conducting natural historical inquiry in-situ. He notes the importance placed on controlling the classification and naming of ‘things’ – especially from the perspective of identifying and then proscribing the existences and meaning-making apparatuses of the ‘demonic’ naturalized within the landscape and culture of the New World. This is another example of the primacy given by normative power structures to efforts aimed at controlling (or ‘fixing’) their respective referential ‘set’ through (re)naming and repurposing extant ontologies.

reinforced to deny their existences, their experiences, their ways of parsing the world, as ‘real.’⁹⁶ They must resort to tactical forays as a result of these being the *only* methods available to them for the purpose of shedding light on their *being*, on their agentic status such as it is, or to use Heidegger’s term, their *Da Sein*.

Knight is then also correct when he insists, “A status-conferring ingroup admits members only at a price.”⁹⁷ As he and Bourdieu put it, allowing others to be authorized speakers essentially permits them to act “in God’s name.” If the simulacrum is the deity continually consecrated on culturally sanctified altars, then concatenating that ‘metaphysical reality’ by its exposure as idolatry is an existential risk. There is a considerable cost to permitting intrusions.

It is thus unsurprising that the pressure to exclude outgroups is insistent and persistent. As Knight puts it, “a costly, *multimedia*, deceptive display is now being staged by an ingroup to impress and exploit outsiders.”⁹⁸ He uses the example of feminist dance in a tribal context as an example of leveraging, within performance, paradoxical concepts (such as the Kalahari “Eland Bull” or the aboriginal, gender-ambivalent “Rainbow Snake”) in order to:

Dancers are here asserting counterreality through counterdominance – a strategy of sexual resistance. Challenges would amount to harassment. But while the audience must neither probe nor question, literal belief is equally impossible. Consequently, ‘mindreading’ takes over; belief is displaced to another level. Behind the vivid, dramatic lies, listeners are invited to discern a simple idea [...] On this ‘metaphorical’ level, the message indicated by the dancers is certain truth.⁹⁹

Note the similarity here to the tactical vector employed by Womack when describing various attempts by alternative accounts of Black futures to imagine a reality quite

⁹⁶ This is what Sharpe (2016, 5, 132-134) seems to be emphasizing when referring to Black being as non-being.

⁹⁷ Knight (1998, 78)

⁹⁸ Ibid, 80. Emphasis mine.

⁹⁹ Ibid, 81.

different from the obtaining one. They are, on a literal level, impossible to believe. Yet they convey, to use Knight's words, "certain truth." They rely on the tension introduced by the introduction of an alternate (counter) reality. They speak perhaps even more clearly than any 'semantically valid' kind of explanation could afford. They bypass an accepted yet limited referential set to create and employ new ones that explode the boundaries of deified normative space. In fact, mindreading through such fictions is necessary for symbolic language to develop beyond the level of literal, instantly verifiable utterances. Creative speech demands metaphor – literally, an untruth – to give rise to the ability to imagine what turns out to contain more validity than currently accepted norms of existence.

And isn't this what utopia, as a verb and signifier of processual action/struggle, is about? What these accounts of alternate futures are attempting to do is present other symbols, other metaphors, *other realities* as counters to currently bounded sets of linguistic/artistic signifiers. They *perform difference* by rupturing the boundaries of normed social imaginaries. They are, at some level, 'literal' lies – but this turns out to be a feature, not a defect. The status quo's divine status is also, at bottom, a lie. The fact that it is nonetheless worshiped clarifies its instrumentality as a technology in the service of certain actors or groups of actors. Each set of dancers, privileged or marginalized, are in the end performing rituals of respective creation and/or destruction which, in turn, en flesh their respective imaginaries. If utopia is, from one perspective, the city of God, then its referential set must go beyond current limits to ontological boundaries to reach the realm of the metaphysical. Utopia then *is* divine, both in its nature and its

relationship to the status quo. Augustinian faith provides warrant for the belief in St. John's Logos, the word and son of God.¹⁰⁰

Derrida also argues for a performative frame in which to situate the concept of language in perhaps a reversed vector to his overt intent.¹⁰¹ When he discusses the concept of the "word" (i.e., the Logos) as: 1) being central to a language's teleology, and 2) defining the boundaries of what can be considered truth, he identifies the speech *act* as superior to the written word. A layer of representational error is unavoidably added when translating the Logos to print. Of course, his emphasis in this passage is that the Logos, so interpreted, marginalizes and represses all 'else' not contained within its canon.¹⁰² His argument concentrates on reclaiming what remains on the margin (and rightfully so). I want to focus, however, on the priority placed on the 'act' of speech, the performance inherent in communication. This highlights the need to reclaim/include that information within (to use Levitas' term) pre-figurative *performance*. The set of accepted symbols must be expanded, certain proscriptions flaunted, as intentional forays embodied in aesthetic performativity. This will demand a new dialect of ontological possibilities, a utopian, 'other' language constructed and acted out within pre-figurative practice – one bent on the expansion of affirmed 'realities.'

Muñoz' concept of gesture also supports the necessity of language reconstruction in this context. For him, gesture is torn from existing referentiality in order to be

¹⁰⁰ John 1:1-2 (ESV)

¹⁰¹ 1997, 27-29

¹⁰² As such, the Logos' function can be glossed as sanctifying prevailing normative power structures. This is, contra Derrida, different from a Christian situation of Christ as the Logos in John 1:1 (ESV). Christ's invasion of time-space as the God-Man is the ultimate utopian shattering of a global simulacrum. The alternative imaginary, speaking socio-culturally, that Jesus introduced was diametrically opposed to the 'dominant narrative' and its power relationships. See Matthew chps. 5-7 (ESV) to understand the hatred those supporting the status quo had for his new 'kingdom.' It is no surprise that they decided he had to die. This is also why Bloch recognizes Augustine's city of God as a candidate utopia for human existence. It fundamentally involves a shattering of 'the now.'

repositioned within a context of utopian striving. It goes over and against (and above) current limitations applied to the ‘proper’ use of the term to intentionally position it outside the canon of acceptable ways of being. As such, it undercuts normative strategy from within the simulacrum. This exposes the incompleteness inherent (and *enforced*) within status quo compilations of terms and their approved referents. Utopian tactics make use of a different referential set. They have a language all their own. They refuse to reify a limited ontology of that, in its turn, requires a compliant definition of what it is to exist, *to be*.

Positioning gesture as aesthetic rupture coincides with the way Small glosses linguistic analysis and how it pertains to the communicative avenues within performative art (in his case, music). Ironically, this is a result of the nature of spoken/textual language (with a linear, logical structure). Gesture, as developmentally older yet more holistic with regard to the vectors available to it (for the purpose of conceptual transmission), is a powerful tactic for queering the relationship between concept and text/word, between referent and reference. Consider:

In contrast, verbal languages as they have developed, uniquely among human beings, have equipped us to deal with and communicate about things and persons that are both present and absent, as well as with past and future and even hypothetical or imagined events and relationships, to discuss the contexts in which these occur, or occurred, or may occur, or fail to occur. But unlike the gestural language of biological communication, words deal with matters in sequential order and only one at a time. [P] This is both a strength and a weakness. It is a strength in that verbal language has made it possible to develop those analytic capacities, that step-by-step logic, that ability to compute about things, that have proved such powerful tools in gaining what mastery we have over the material world. But it is also a weakness, in that verbal languages have proved on the whole less than adequate in articulating and dealing with our highly complex relationships with one another and with the rest of the world.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Small (1998, 57-58). He summarizes several analyses of communicative theory, primarily unpacking Bateson’s (1979) investigation of semiotic phenomenology. See also Bordieu’s (1990) analysis of symbolic “codification” as the *logos*, culturally emplaced as *mythos* and referenced to a particular *habitus*. This aligns with Muñoz’ conceptualization of gestural utopian rupture in that: 1) perceived codes must be perceived (to be meaning-makers), and 2) perception involves gradients of difference when considered

He contrasts this straight-line characterization of formally developed language in a way that aligns with Muñoz in his (Small's) characterization of gestural paralinguistics:

But we have not lost the older gestural language of biological communication. It remains with us, today called paralinguistics—and the use of the prefix *para*, signifying something subsidiary, something to one side or altered, even improper or wrong, suggests the extent to which this older mode of communication has been devalued in today's highly verbal societies. The languages of bodily posture, movement and gesture, of facial expression and of vocal intonation continue to perform functions in human life that words cannot, *and where they function most specifically is in the articulation and exploration of relationships.*¹⁰⁴

The dynamic within which gesture flourishes as a complex apparatus of conceptual meaning-making co-varies with the relationships on which it is predicated. It is in the ways its culturally resistant, phenomenologically-encoded instances *impact perceivers* that it can become utopian rupture. Utopian gestures cut across the grain of dystopian discourse. Representational guidelines, prescribed as normal, come under fire as they are attacked from a multiplicity of vectors not limited to verbal language's linear formations. The affinity to guerilla warfare is more than metaphorical. The asymmetry of utopian gesture turns out to be its strength.

These accounts of alternative futures give us examples of utopian pre-figurative practices. They offer divergent perspectives on normed spaces. They can, in fact, be described as art as they attempt to imagine, or to paint a picture of, a broader ontology currently unaligned with extant politico-doctrinal precepts.¹⁰⁵ They oppose limitations applied to the allowed referential sets of what we might call the “language of dystopia.”

against cultural norms. What these theories indicate is that tropes of Muñoz' gestures encode ontological difference situated against 'straight time' in a given (i.e., 'straight') cultural context. The reaction to them will be informed (as Small represents Bateson's theory) by the relationships between sender and receiver and their context.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 61. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁵ I.e., the 'approved' epistemological framework. These precepts are 'doctrinal' in that they perform the same norming function as doctrines do within religious rites.

They call for another kind of language, a utopian language. If this new language can be created, it will result in an implosion of the existing simulacrum as a result of exposing its always-unjustified non-existence.

Each of these visions, considered singly, cannot determine the length or breadth of a new, utopian ontology. This is to be expected if what each illuminates turns out to be a small, hidden, and proscribed space of existence negated by the status quo. Taken together, however, the language they collectively introduce begins to display more fully developed contours of utopian imaginaries. Each additional referent adds to its strength and illuminates the deficiencies of currently enfranchised pseudo-divinities. They expose cracks in ‘the spectacle.’ These cracks become Benjamin’s “splinters of messianic time.” They are the stages on which efforts to utopia must perform.

5.7 Conclusion

For that reason the future did not, however, turn into a homogenous and empty time [...]. For in it every second was the narrow gate, through which the Messiah could enter.

- Benjamin¹⁰⁶

In considering texts as potentially containing or performing a messianic function, we have been maintaining a disconnect between authors and their texts. This disconnection is evidence of something particular (although not unique) to the texts we have examined, a quality whereby the authors’ own authority is subverted by the text they themselves have written. Here, the text voids its own pose as meaningful or ‘true’ in a way that delivers the author (and the reader) from a particular and fated perspective. To understand this as a messianic delivery must be read as happening without the author’s ‘permission’ or intention coming into play (if it did, we would be right to suspect this as yet another false prophecy, another form of self-denying idolatry). Its course is external, miraculous (to us). It comes unexpectedly and, as we have seen, without being recognized for what it is.

- Martel¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ 1940a, Addendum B.

¹⁰⁷ 2011, 238

If these accounts of alternative futures make up part of a larger effort to forge a new, utopian language, they simultaneously must expose the nothingness behind altars dedicated to the status quo. To paraphrase Baudrillard, to unmask the unreality of what is worshiped as real, language must be destroyed word by word (or, better, symbol by symbol) and then recreated the same way. It exposes the allegory inherent in the image.

Gilloch notes:

Allegory is a mode of representation in which each element of what is said or depicted stands for something else. In allegory, the apparent or surface meaning is a veneer which conceals the actual, hidden sense. One narrative appears disguised as another; it is a palimpsest. Each object represented may have a host of competing possible meanings. Meaning is elusive and multiple. Benjamin points out that 'any person, any object, any relationship can mean absolutely anything else. With this possibility destructive but just verdict is passed on the profane world; it is characterized as a world in which the detail, the forms of nature, in that they can mean anything and everything, come to mean, precisely nothing. Allegory involves the hollowing out of meaning. Language becomes an expanse of empty signs 'signifying nothing.'¹⁰⁸

Allegories come in many modes. They are certainly not restricted to linguistic instantiations (as if linguistic tropes ever bounded the toolset of language). I will say more about allegory and its functional connection to certain genres of dystopian-cum-utopian imaginings in the final chapter. For now it is enough to say that utopia and dystopia fight an affective war of praxis on battlegrounds of everyday life, everyday love, everyday relationship, and everyday discourse. To utopia, then, must be a performative, affectively-targeted stance informing pre-figurative modeling – aimed directionally by an arrow of desire. To aim that arrow utopianly will require different lenses, different realities, different futures. To understand those futures, those constructing them must expose the nothingness behind currently empty idols, they must help us to open our eyes,

¹⁰⁸ 1996, 135

ears, hearts, minds in order to ransack the temples dedicated to them. We must replace the null with the Absolute, the earthly city with its heavenly counterpart.

Recall that for Benjamin, integral to the ‘recognition of the now’ was the realization that history, deified as graven image, was an edifice built from a series of catastrophes, all piling up on the foundation of an initial catastrophe. This turns out to be a single, continuing disaster which throws rubble at the feet of the Angel of History, Klee’s *Angelus Novus*. The storm holding the angel back from smashing this monument’s empty claim to ontological consecration rages to keep the angel from the task – blowing him into the future incessantly as the monstrosity grows. But what is this storm? As he puts it, “That which we call progress, is this storm.”¹⁰⁹

Our current symbols, reifying progress in the way of a sacrament consecrating the always-empty image of our simulacrum, comprise the language of dystopia. To oppose it, the Messiah must come through a splinter of time, a spark of hope uncovered in a newly concatenated past, something real currently invisible. This messianic trace, this flame of utopia must be reunited with ‘real’ referents – and these cannot be allowed to exist within reified, privileged ontologies. Perhaps potential ruptures in the way of alternative futures, affectively pre-figured in intentional imaginings-cum-practice, are a way to begin this process of shedding light on those spaces intentionally darkened and concealed by the status quo. Julia Kristeva expresses how language, seen as relationship between symbol and signified, comprises a potential ‘ground zero’ for tactically sabotaging the status quo:

Now the situation becomes clearer. As the text constructed itself with respect to an empty place [...], it in turn comes to be the empty site of a process in which its readers became involved. The text turns out to be the analyst and every reader the analysand.

¹⁰⁹ 1940a, Thesis IX.

But since the *structure and function of every language take the place of the focus of transference* in the text, this opens the way for all linguistic, symbolic, and social structures to be put in process/on trial. The text thereby attains its essential dimension: it is a practice calling into question (symbolic and social) *finitudes* by proposing new *signifying devices*. In calling the text a practice we must not forget that it is a new practice, radically different from the mechanistic practice of a null and void, atomistic subject who refused to acknowledge that he is a subject of language. Against such a 'practice,' the text as signifying practice points toward the possibility – which is a *jouissance – of a subject who speaks his being in procession/trial through action.*¹¹⁰

I noted in the introduction to this chapter that no singular vision of an alternate future can uniquely outline the contours of directionality for utopian struggle. This would inevitably create winners and losers, those with opportunity and those without. A narrowly-defined vision would collapse into the merely-political necessarily as a result of its non-inclusivity and us-against-them makeup. The visions presented here do, however, destabilize current ways of envisioning, and normalizing, strategic political imaginaries. As such, they are perhaps uniquely suited to provide perspectives on possible ways ahead, keeping in mind the need to engage others as they emerge in an ongoing conversation, reorienting the way ahead in an iterative fashion. This approach is integral to the concept of process over and against a much easier, and risk averse, selection of some singular way ahead that cannot fail to unequally distribute vectors of opportunity and power. We are left, as shown in the previous chapter, with a tension that must be intentionally *not* resolved when thinking about current, and future, action. Only in this way do we retain the possibility of preventing collapse into merely-political hope.

I have not analyzed metaphysical counterparts to the variants of alternative futurities canvassed in this chapter. Yet, ironically, they might speak the most directly to the ethical minefield entailed by processual utopia's pursuit. This is to say that St.

¹¹⁰ (1984, 210). Quoted in Howard (2017, 198). Emphases hers.

Augustine's attempt to paint a picture of the City of God directly addresses the danger of non-inclusive visions:

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, *who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility* by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. *And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near.* For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also *are being built together* into a dwelling place for God [...] ¹¹¹

And:

For in Christ Jesus you are all [children] of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one [...] ¹¹²

The way ahead must remain open to additional, and cumulative, tactical interventions in its directionality. This is to say that we do not, nor might we ever, get to say that we have 'figured this all out.' Utopia, the kingdom of Heaven, the summum bonum of existence, must remain on the horizon. Its contours for us will always be, to some degree, a mystery.

¹¹¹ Ephesians 2:12-22 (ESV), emphases mine.

¹¹² Galatians 3:26-28 (ESV)

Conclusion – Personal and Collective Apocalypses: A Way to Pursue Utopia?

What are we to do, if we can move neither forward nor backward? Displace our attention. We have never moved either forward or backward. We have always actively sorted out elements belonging to different times. We can still sort. *It is the sorting that makes the times, not the times that make the sorting.* Modernism – like its anti- and post-modern corollaries – was only the provisional result of a selection made by a small number of agents in the name of all. If there are more of us who regain the capacity to do our own sorting of the elements that belong to our own time, we will discover the freedom of movement that modernism denied us – a freedom that, in fact, we have never really lost. [...] We can go on to other things – that is, return to the multiple entities that have always passed in a different way.

- Bruno Latour¹

6.1 Introduction

So how should I end this investigation of utopia and a processual methodology to pursue it? Reflecting on what I have called a gut check, a different kind of empirical investigation might be useful in order to highlight phenomena that illustrate facets of what I am trying to describe. Recall that in chapter four, I described a dystopian affectivity required in the case of those more fortunate. This required a propensity to sacrifice privilege, to move ‘left’ on the scale of agentic positionality, as a necessary focus. Without it, even those initiatives aimed at improving conditions of existence for all tend to become appropriated within current logics supporting the status quo, resulting in the solidification of agentic stratification.

If we agree that a balancing of agentic privilege is required to begin to make possible better social conditions for more inclusive sets of actors, then a historical, if liminal, example might be helpful. In the following section, I gloss a journalistic analysis by Rebecca Solnit. In her book, she aims to demonstrate that in times of mutual vulnerability in the wake of collective catastrophes, humankind’s reaction tends to be more utopian, in the sense I have defined it here. Perhaps this vulnerability is necessary

¹ 1991, 76. Emphasis in original.

in the form of either corporate or personal apocalypses. These indicate the possibility of future relationships between various actors being made more equal, resulting in an expansion of opportunities for those less privileged.

6.2 Mutual Aid and Mutual Vulnerability; Charity and Hierarchical Reinforcement

In this section I consider a utopian community created in the aftermath of a large-scale tragedy. Rebecca Solnit calls it an example of a "community of hope."² I will focus here on the effect the disaster had on existing hierarchies ('classes' if you will) and their comportment with respect to each other. I will also comment, and extend, her contrast between charity and mutual aid. Both of these foci support the reading of Lorde's quote I proposed in chapter four, and my objective will be to situate them within the process of utopian hope I am exploring. Indeed, they model a scalable way to move forward, despite at least one caveat.

As fires burned within the city of San Francisco after the 1906 earthquake, a different sort of 'town' came to life in Golden Gate Park. Its population ebbed and flowed in direct response to the devastation occurring in the city proper, as might be expected given the timeframe and scope of the disaster. The strangeness of this gathering, however, was not in its spontaneous beginnings or the fact that it lasted for a relatively short time. What was stunning was the lack of panic, disorder, despair, crime, inequality, privilege, rancor, and even of sorrow.³ Simply stated, the citizens of San

² (2009). I refer specifically to the community she describes as existing after the early twentieth century fire in San Francisco (13-48); however, that scenario is just one of several she investigates.

³ Ibid (29-40; 105-111). Her research, infused with an analysis of Charles Fritz, seems to indicate that communal response to disaster, when not dictated by extant normative power structures (i.e. those holding power pre-disaster), is *ubiquitously* characterized by a lack of panic, crime, looting, etc.

Francisco got down to the business of taking care of one another in a way that was egalitarian and needs/means (within a community of care) focused.⁴

We should not ignore the fact that the earthquake and resultant fire caused real tragedy and death. The response, however, to this challenge was one of nearly total cooperation. It was as if this was the way things were supposed to be, as purpose-driven as if it had been planned. The flies in the ointment turned out to be police and military responses, which were oppressive and physically violent. While this description alone lends credence to foregoing analysis, I want to focus here on the interactions occurring within that strange, yet purposeful and calm community.⁵ What were the reactions to disaster embodied within both individual and collective comportment in the wake of destruction? As a preview, what appears to have been necessary to the affective and performative demeanor observed was a relative flattening of social, political, and economic hierarchies resulting from the disaster's destruction.

Importantly, the ubiquity of *vulnerability* in this case seems to have resulted in a shift from previously obtaining hierarchies of privilege to more egalitarian ones. In fact, the citizens of San Francisco organized around (and prioritized) meeting the needs of community members. Solnit refers to this as mutual aid, or (tellingly) a falling *out* of disaster, and she characterizes it as a state of affairs in which each participant gave and received acts of care that forged and reinforced relationships of mutually reciprocal need and response.⁶ This specific disaster is the starting point for describing her “paradises in

⁴ It is worth recalling here the way in which Sharpe asks us to think about the “wake” and its impact on Black being (and non-being). This is, as a reminder, intended to inform a community of care (2016, 5).

⁵ And highlights the ways in which the master’s tools, that is, the apparatuses of political power, were used contrasted with people of all, including privileged, classes of *victims* in these scenarios of communal disaster.

⁶ Solnit (2009, 86, 107-109)

hell,” and it is an empirical example of the contrast between strategic and tactical realms of affect. In this case (and others she investigates) the normative simulacrum is suspended, even if only liminally, as a result of a catastrophic event – which, by the way, turns out to be an apocalypse. Yet this apocalypse was also an unveiling in the word’s classical sense – it *unveiled a prevailing socio-hierarchical disaster*. The collapse of these simulacra constitutes a suspension of the master’s tools. This can be seen in the difference between mutual aid and charity within contexts of communal care.

Solnit’s conception of mutual aid as a two-way street is situated against that of charity. This difference is worth sharpening. Charity, as a one-way vector on an axis referenced from more to less privilege, reinforces and perpetuates the relationships of relative privilege on which it is predicated. The ability to provide charitable aid underscores the giver’s privilege. Perhaps the widespread aversion to receiving it expressed by many socially and economically marginalized cultures is better understood when seen through the lens of the recipient (in that her status as oppressed is highlighted by aid intended to mitigate it). This dynamic permeates conversations between the privileged and the less advantaged, as the ethical sacrifice I argue is necessary for the latter highlights the negative conative valences within non-privileged reaction to charity. It ironically turns out to be a trope of oppression, cloaked in the trappings of ‘assistance.’

On the other hand, and returning to the San Francisco post-disaster community, mutual aid seems to entail a level of *mutual vulnerability*. As a result, much of what is often called mutual aid is not what it purports to be in virtue of the lack of mutual vulnerability obtaining between giver and recipient. Framed this way, even altruism, while critically needed at times, is different from mutual aid. Like charity, it remains a

singular vector of support without the reciprocal and relational dependencies typical of mutual aid (though perhaps possible without the same reinforcement of privilege). Now comes the hard part. For the privileged, the most effective way in which to participate in relationships of mutual aid is to lose or sacrifice, to a certain extent, their positionality (and its accompanying reality) of privilege. As in the San Francisco vignette, mutual aid is most easily worked out in the wake of mutual vulnerability, according to shared need. Whilst these acts of care are instrumental in meeting needs, they do not reinforce gradients of privilege and extant power structures. Mutual aid might be defined then as “vulnerable humans helping other vulnerable humans,” full stop.

For Solnit, disasters of some type are the catalysts for these communities. The point I am emphasizing here is that when existing hierarchies are suspended as a result of disastrous events, the majority of the agents involved (privileged or not) tend to become part of the solution without needing enforcement by some policing or punitive function. The decision to act from a more equal set of ‘starting places’ was, as it must be in the case of processual utopia, an *internal*, ethical decision to do ‘the right thing’ given the disaster. In fact, those who did not form part of the mutually-sustaining community tended to be identified within state (that is, political) apparatuses characterizing the situation in terms that emphasized privilege and reinforced difference. (Bluntly put, they defined the less well-off as riot-inciting troublemakers and thieves and gave orders to shoot them on the spot should they be caught obtaining supplies). These uses of strategic and tactical tools are instructive in order to correctly parse Lorde’s exhortation (which I examined earlier) in the context of Solnit’s research.

Yet is the existence of an ending, alone, enough to unsettle limitations on future possibilities? The mere presence of one cannot be all that is required, as they occur on small and large scales all the time. To put the objection differently, it clearly seems possible for disasters to also energize dystopian struggle. What then makes certain endings so well suited for precipitating a *utopian* response? Could such endings not alternatively result in redoubled efforts to reinforce current hierarchical relationships? The short answer is, of course, yes, they can. One does not have to look far to find examples of this sort. A paradigmatic example might be post-World War I Germany on both a communal and national/international scale.

My initial response is to point out that Solnit does not argue (and I cannot do so here) for the *necessity* of any one particular ending's (or even certain type of ending's) precipitation of utopian action. She does, however, characterize these examples as contingent opportunities for disrupting currently affirmed relationships of privilege, and this has the effect of shifting the emphasis from the endings themselves to *the way in which individuals and groups interpret and react to them*. It is in these affective reactions, and the performativity that follows, that we can distinguish utopian qua tactical hope from dystopian qua ideological responses.

Beginning with the latter, if individuals or groups interpret an (approaching or projected) ending as potentially placing at risk their (individual or communal) security or privilege, then their reaction could very well be (and, arguably, typically has been) to interpret the situation as an erstwhile apocalypse necessitating socio-political *retrenchment*.⁷ This results in a strategic (recalling de Certeau's use of that word) effort

⁷ One might question whether or not the endings that have resulted (or could possibly result) in dystopian struggle are actually endings in Solnit's sense. It is difficult to imagine dystopian reactions in any case

to solidify concepts of difference so they are thrown into even sharper relief and are, as a result, more easily enforceable. This dystopian reaction is also scalable in the same way I have described utopian alternatives. Dystopian, ideological struggle occurs at both the personal and (inter/intra) national level, and these appear to be similarly tied to affectively performative spheres of action.

Utopian reactions to experienced endings, on the other hand, seem to follow on the heels of (real and/or intuitively recognized) hierarchical flattening resulting in (or characterized by) joint vulnerability. *When these are interpreted as such by the actors involved*, they provide opportunities for communities of hope as Solnit describes them. A kinetic ending is not necessary for this response to occur. One could experience an end to her particular way of thinking (i.e. represented within a personal, or communal, mode of subjective representation) as a result of a marginalized, tactical rupture and experience a personal apocalypse (an unveiling of the status quo — a Benjamite trope of the recognition of the now) potentializing utopian hope and struggle on her part. There is certainly more to be said about the way experienced or projected endings encourage utopian or dystopian efforts, but I must leave it there after a parting observation.

In previous chapters, I argued that privileged epistemological lenses are clouded, yet not completely obscured, when apprehending marginalized realities. In the context of Solnit's disasters, we see that, in a certain sense, marginalized groups are *always* in a

other than as a result of *the perception/construction of possible future endings*. This is true even in the case of Hitler's Germany, for the post-World War I economic sanctions by Allied powers resulted in the fact that Hitler, and the German citizenry as a whole, perceived a future implosion of national survivability. The rise of the Third Reich was predicated on this future contingency engendering a nationalistic uprising. Endings having the possibility to precipitate *utopian* action seem to be 'real' (i.e., concretely experienced) endings, even if they are intrapersonal in nature. Sharpe's metaphor of being "in the wake" applies equally well here. Utopian effort seems to require an experienced or recognized vulnerability such that current hierarchical modalities are, in fact, disrupted.

relative state of disaster.⁸ Tactical maneuvers, both in the way of getting by (for de Certeau: *savoir faire*) and utopian rupture, dominate their ways of being in the world.⁹ Thus they are more effective at ‘doing’ processual utopia. If reactions to endings rely on the affective way in which they are interpreted, then marginalized populations appear well situated to respond to them from a perspective of mutual assistance coupled to a utopian imagination. In Solnit's scenarios, disasters of some type are the catalyst for these communities based on a framework of mutual aid. Notably, however, her scenarios are transient in nature. In the following section, I offer a different formulation. Perhaps this alternative reading will support more sustainable future possibilities.

6.3 Small "a" Apocalypses

Limiting these kinds of events to the category of disasters seems problematic. If *only* disasters can precipitate the changes Solnit describes, utopian struggle might require effort to *cause* them. In fact, this might seem to be the most effective tactic available to that end. While disasters can certainly precipitate utopian change, what interests me is the possibility of an alternate, scalable rendering. If we can tease out a formulation that supports a construction of communal spaces based on mutual aid, then we might be on the road to a more lasting (process-focused) utopian vector.

Was it the earthquake and resultant fire that caused the Golden Gate Park community to be created, or did they result in something else taking place, something extendable to other contexts? While the earthquake was one of the causal vectors in play,

⁸ This is what Whyte argues concerning Indigenous American reactions to climate change. They have lived, and are living, in the wake of disaster. The ‘next’ disaster is perceived, and parsed, differently in their case.

⁹ De Certeau (1984, xi-xix and 34-38)

even more central was the resultant flattening of hierarchical relationships replacing previously steep gradients. Even though this flattening was relative (i.e., it was not as if all inequity simply disappeared), *everything changed*. Absolute destruction of all societal hierarchies was not necessary in order to expose the mutual vulnerability required to rupture former relationships of privilege. This, in turn, allowed the possibility of alternative agentic interaction and communal effort. The move of utopia (the term) from noun to verb is also highlighted here. No concretized characterization of utopia or dystopia was needed to define or 'reach it,' and an affectively-driven performativity was the methodology employed.

The concept of 'mutual vulnerability' deserves a few more words in this context. I began this dissertation with a personal story – one in which I traveled to a meeting with local sheiks near Al Q'aim in a Mine-Resistant Armored Patrol (MRAP) vehicle. I was, additionally, also clothed in battle armor and carrying an M-4 assault rifle. I think the imagery of the MRAP is instructive to this idea of shared vulnerability. That vehicle was designed to decrease the vulnerability of its occupants. While not a perfect analogue, it is relatively easy to think of it as an example of structures and hierarchically-protected spaces that shield those with power from exposure to less protected realities. Choosing to remain inside the MRAP sharply delineates the separate, and safer, conditions of existence for those within it. I have thought deeply about the problem of engendering trust between the privileged and the marginalized in this process-driven approach to utopian striving. It seems to me that a first step towards that objective must resemble 'dismounting from the MRAP' provided to the more advantaged in these spaces. Perhaps incurring this kind of risk is crucial to potentializing opportunities for trust development.

Leaving the relative safety of the MRAP becomes a necessary, if not completely sufficient, condition for creating this possibility. This 'leaving,' of course, must be an intentional, irrevocable decision. There is, I think, a phenomenological finality to that step that is needed in order for authentically experienced mutual vulnerability to occur.

The better term then might turn out to be "endings" instead of "disasters." It is in the endings of hierarchical gradients controlling agentic positionality that the possibility of new beginnings is found. Conditions of mutual vulnerability enabling communities built on mutual assistance can be possible when certain coordinates of power and privilege are extinguished.¹⁰ Endings, in the form of small "a" apocalypses, can be large or small, catastrophic or personally challenging, world-smashing or intimacy-ending. Anyone can be instrumental in ending her own ways of representing these structures, or she might voluntarily sacrifice her own privilege within them. This, again, highlights the internal ethical valence necessary for processual utopia to work. In religious terms, a change of heart must occur. Repentance, necessary for salvation, is the only way to tack the ship away from running before the wind of the normative simulacrum.

To use Ahmed's terms, endings can be found within personal and/or corporate 'snaps' when the refusal to affirm oppressive forms of violence results in moments exemplifying both hope for different futures and action/struggle to make them possible.¹¹ We have seen that these snaps potentially break relational bonds, putting them at risk. They also possess the potential to catalyze different sorts of endings. This is, after all,

¹⁰ Even if incompletely. Any totalizing or reductive characterization is proscribed by the re-characterization of utopia from noun to verb. It is not a destination but a journey. This bypasses objections based on the impossibility of avoiding all relationships of privilege. It is not necessary that they disappear, yet they must be weakened relative to currently obtaining modalities so that other possibilities are potentialized.

¹¹ See Ahmed (2017, 187-203) for personal examples.

what being a utopian killjoy is, isn't it? Can it be anything other than to rupture (or *end*) currently affirmed futures through *self* (or other) affirmation and *self* (or other) mutual aid, concentrating on what *could be*?¹² Recall that these actions constitute what I called a 'gut check' for the privileged. It is a blending of both sacrifice and the refusal to deify that sacrifice. Privileged actors don't get to play the part of the 'hero.' Our actions should flow from our ethical obligations and our response to them.

I will not try to identify all the forms these endings can take, but it should be clear that the set of possibilities is wider than what is normally meant by "disaster" (to use Solnit's word).¹³ More importantly, framing endings with the potential to motivate utopian struggle reopens the possibility for these to be *sustainable*. Initially, the durability of Solnit's communities of hope (i.e. interpreted as *only* post-disaster) appears problematic. If tragedies are ameliorated with charitable aid (as they often are), then that response can also be interpreted as justifying the status quo. Opening the field of play to endings, on a scale from world-ending to intrapersonal sacrifice, creates a seam in which diverse tropes of utopian action can be inserted, even if (for now) the prevailing power structures retain sway.¹⁴ As such, the scope of utopian tactical engagement has been expanded almost infinitely.

¹² 'Self' mutual aid can result in personal apocalypses. Efforts to accommodate those busy with dystopian efforts often result in care-based efforts on the part of those trying to utopia as part and parcel of everyday interactions and relationships. Some of these may have to end as a result of self-care.

¹³ It is likely that 'endings' refer to beginnings just as often. Apocalypses unveil or reveal knowledge (or truth). This does not entail their instantiation as only-ever an 'end.' This said, I have chosen to concentrate on endings as they pick out transformational moments during which the phenomena I am describing might occur.

¹⁴ Frase (2016, opening epigraph) asserts that "One thing we know for sure, capitalism will end." I mention this example of a perceived 'end' not as a condemnation of any specific economic system but as a reminder that life-sustaining resources are, by definition in a closed system, finite. We are all approaching a resource-driven crisis of a more globally-impactful nature. What cannot be ignored is the fact that certain economies, based perhaps on capitalistic principles, have accomplished much that most would admit has been positive for many. It has also harmed many. The fact remains that unbridled consumption will, at some point, result in life-changing apocalypses.

6.4 Different (Fictional) Realities Following Apocalypses

If the symbol is a motivated sign, then allegory, conceived as its antithesis, will be identified as the domain of the arbitrary, the conventional, the unmotivated. In pointed opposition to the symbol, allegorical signifier and signified do not 'flow into each other' but instead are set off in mutual and frequently antagonistic opposition to one another: due to its 'brittleness,' allegory can easily break into its component parts. Allegory thus causes a kind of semiotic distress, it works to disfigure and unsettle the world of things so that 'only the fragments of the world are left to it now, as object of its brooding (Benjamin, 1999, 349). According to Benjamin, as the 'allegorist' dislodges things from their context and, from the outset, relies on its profundity to illuminate their meaning, 'his or her world image' cannot be explained apart from the passionate, distraught concern with this spectacle.

- Golston¹⁵

In this section I consider a fictional work to further illustrate the concept of endings just presented. Fiction has an ability to sneak past biases based on cultural programming, bypassing inculcated defenses against alternate narratives. There is a danger in this effort – that of conflating fiction with reality in ways that are patently inaccurate, especially as to their theoretical implications. The risk is worth that danger, however, for it is often the lens of fiction that clarifies reality. Here I will demonstrate some of the forms in which doing utopia might be described in order to stimulate our collective consciousness to imagine alternatives.¹⁶ My focus will be the role that tropes of dystopian fantasy play in conjuring images of different futures that might turn out to be utopian ones.

These so-called dystopias (both fictional and/or real catastrophes) have the ability to shed empirically-derivative light on what utopian struggle can look like. This is due to the way in which utopian possibilities might be highlighted within them. As they are

¹⁵ 2015, 39

¹⁶ Another way to highlight the methods in which fiction might inform doing utopia is to appeal to our 'inner artists' and the way we paint possible worlds. Reflecting on the paucity of people of color (indeed, on people not affirming dominant narratives in general) in theater and other broadly-available entertainment products, perhaps casting these kinds of characters prominently within fiction becomes both an external and internal exercist that could be seen as a utopian tactic. Maybe how we construct these variances requires an element of fiction in order for them to be utopianly creative. See Womack (2013, chap. 8) for an argument along similar lines.

ostensibly not the focus of the story, their utopian potentiality is not overt. They might be accidental, or at least non-primary, constructions that remain on the margins of the central plotline. While I can only treat this phenomenon superficially here, I think it is a fruitful vector for further research.

To begin, these implications might certainly be the case within fictional work that loosely approximates conditions in the actual world, even if they are temporally displaced in order to suggest possible consequences to current dystopian vectors. I am not the first or the only author to suggest this.¹⁷ It is hard to find analyses of fictional dystopias, however, even concentrating on how they illuminate alternative imaginings, which connect their theoretical import with attempts to imagine alternative futures by authors in the “here and now.” I suggest this connection merits more attention. As the epigraph to this section notes, the nexus of theory and contemporary practice flows from a “passionate, distraught concern with [the] spectacle.” Allegory, within science fiction, fantasy, and other such genres of performative image-casting might have the potential to destabilize currently-accepted realities. This would allow more granular analysis of the marginalized constituents hidden within them. Motivations for current accounts of alternate futures are roughly equivalent to these fictional motivations in that they posit dystopian motives and expected results while counterposing a utopian alternative from the perspective of others (situated as being othered within the status quo).

¹⁷ See Jameson (2005) and (2009) for accounts of how conceptions of utopia, and dystopia, run through science fiction and other genres of literature. Thaler (2019) analyzes “Bleak Dreams” as instances of critical dystopia catalyzing utopian hope. Archer-Lean (2009), Cain-Gray (2009), and Maxwell (2009) unpack utopian and dystopian vectors in specific works of fiction (or genres referenced to that domain).

To set the fictional stage for the example I gloss here: on Jemison's "Stillness," the singular continent in her constructed world, existence is peppered with apocalypses.¹⁸ They are called Seasons (with a capital "S"), and the population lives in one or another state of either reaction to, or preparation for, them. Yet despite their number and severity over thousands of years, the systemic marginalization (and ongoing genocide) of a particular people group (one with a powerful and sometimes dangerous ability) continues unabated. The most skilled of these, Alabaster, finally decides to use his mastery of this special ability in a way that irrevocably changes the conditions of existence on that continent. He orchestrates an ending that will destroy the majority of all life, to include diverse human varieties. As a result of numerous personal apocalypses, informed by a devotion to critical historical inquiry, he concludes that only this kind of destruction, or ending, will make alternate futures possible. Alabaster rends the continent in two and precipitates a Season that will last thousands of years, one that will challenge the ability of humankind to outlast it, one that will *require* an experience of shared risk while struggling for existence.¹⁹

Simultaneously, and far south of the place where this rifting takes place, a woman named Essun (a disguised member of the marginalized human group) is stunned into shock looking at the body of her dead son. She has lost a son before, in an act she herself precipitated as a response to the horrific killing of a lover and the threatening of an idyllic

¹⁸ Jemison (2015). Pages one through eight document the "rifting" described here.

¹⁹ We should be careful of extending this kind of response to our own 'reality' in order to argue for the necessity of physical revolution and deadly violence to precipitate utopia. There are differences in play, highlighting the pitfalls of applying fictional lessons too literally. In Jemison's world, there has been no abatement of the killing and ongoing commodification of this people group for millennia. They are not demarcated by any physical or aesthetic attribute; they possess a mental (even magical) ability that has been used very rarely to cause wide swaths of death and destruction. These occurrences have been mythicized and incorporated into the world's cultural structures such that *no movement towards allowing them agentic autonomy has been entertained. It would, I think, be hard to argue that such a case exists to this extreme in the 'actual' world such that this kind of world-breaking is required.

island community.²⁰ This time, however, *her* world ends. She is unable to move, act, or even think. Subconsciously her ability temporarily saves the town she lives in by blocking the earthquake caused by the continent's rifting in the north, yet her self-awareness remains blank, even singular. Her son is dead, and her daughter is gone with the father who killed him. It is in the wake of this ending that she decides to leave this town where she tried to make a normal life, intent on finding her daughter in some attempt to salvage something of what life signifies to her now. Her journey takes her to Castrima, an underground community made up of 'both' kinds of humans (together with non-human species as well) attempting to survive this Season. As a contrast to Alabaster's world-ending solution, Essun devotes herself, and her powers, to this small, hybrid community's existence comprising an example of what shared risk and mutual aid might accomplish.²¹

Lerna, a doctor in Essun's village, has to abandon his home when the water supply fails. He finds his way to Castrima as well, becoming the medical provider for that experiment in shared, intra-species existence. His cultural biases are hard to suspend, as he has been taught all his life that these people who can do both wonderful and terrible things are dangerous, sub-human, and erratic. Yet he immerses himself in the town's affairs, and he loves Essun, despite experiencing dramatic shifts in his own emotional responses to 'her kind.' His world ends twice, once when forced to leave his home after the water failure and again, more interesting for my purposes, *internally* as he re-

²⁰ Note that this island community is a type of utopia with a vastly flatter hierarchical social structure, one that acknowledges this marginalized, yet gifted, species as uniquely qualified to both lead and protect the community. What is fascinating to me is its location as a 'detached' space (on an island). The fact that it does not endure is important in the context of my argument against a fixed construction of utopia over and against a liminal characterization. See Jemison (2015, 77-296, 344-387, 413-442).

²¹ Ibid, 1, 42-60, 264-276, 332-343, 388-411

imagines his own reality within processes of: 1) struggling with and against his own biases (utopian hope), and 2) living with those he has been programmed to fear and despise (utopian struggle).²² This latter sharpens the contours of the temporality within utopian affectivity in that his (and his world's) past, coupled with an uncertain future, is always 'present' within Lerna's current time strand.

Castrima itself, as an experimental and plural community thrown together in crisis, can be seen as a collective expression of utopia embodied within a process motivated by mutual vulnerability and characterized organizationally by the necessity of mutual aid. It is telling that Castrima's population (to challenge an anthropocentric point of view) is not limited to humankind.²³ That the nonhuman "Stone Eaters" have members within and around Castrima is due, it appears, to the stakes in this world-ending apocalypse. The planet itself is at risk, and as a result, even they experience a level of vulnerability that drives them to take a critical interest in this hybridized melding of previously antagonistic actors.

What I want to highlight in this fictional imaginary is that differently-scaled apocalypses, within personal and collective endings, offered *opportunities* for questioning previously bounded conceptions of the future. They did not entail utopian initiatives; however, they were useful in order to unveil performative space within which utopian futures became pre-figurable. We should note the diverse forms these efforts took. Nothing I have said should be interpreted as militating for a specific or constrained construction of utopia to the exclusion of all others. On the contrary, I am suggesting that doing utopia requires that gradients of risk, vulnerability, and security flatten the agentic

²² Ibid, 7-24, 388-411

²³ Ibid, 264-276, 332-343, 388-411, and her 2016. Castrima is one of two plot-centered venues in this context.

landscape (especially as a result of *internally* acknowledging shared risk) so that actors might visualize present actions as potentializing alternate futures based on mutual assistance.²⁴ Jemison's world provides us an example of this kind of flattening, similar in some ways to that suggested by Solnit and her post-disaster communities of hope. If an affective attitude of imagining alternative 'post-ending' realities is called for while striving for the utopian novum, perhaps fiction provides us another avenue for orienting our performativity in what Bloch (with Benjamin) would call 'the now.'

Indeed, the concept of shared disaster might be an antecedent condition to processual utopia. This would not just be the actual occurrence of the event – but a communal *recognition of it as a disaster*. This is described within Augustinian (and Biblical) accounts. The 'fall,' represented within humankind's original sin, resulted in the separation of the *civitas terrena* from the *civitas Dei*. To use Blochian language, the core of humanity's existence forever thereafter contained a "null," indicating something missing within its essence. Utopia, or the effort to strive towards it, then truly does come from a place of loss. Within Christian doctrine, the desire for it comes from a place of *infinite* loss – the loss of direct access to the kingdom of heaven on earth. What seems necessary is the acknowledgement of a preceding disaster, one resulting in the loss of something central to what it is to 'be human.'

To recap, Solnit and Jemison seem to be saying similar things. Reified relationships of normative privilege flow from past-within-present singularities of loss.

As such, they compound Walter Benjamin's initial catastrophe by (re)constructing

²⁴ One example might be the recognition of shared survival risk as a result of converging pasts and futures such that, while mutual inter or intra species risks are not acute in the present, they can be seen as 'present' in both the past and the future. See Van Dooren (2014) for a characterization of these as "flight ways" picking out vectors of extinction and survival that intersect between species with both positive and negative ramifications.

ongoing structures to sustain it. Perhaps this is why Solnit describes her communities of more flattened agentic hierarchies as sites of “falling out of disaster.”²⁵

6.5 Conclusion

I have argued for a process-driven characterization of utopia, one that describes efforts towards its realization as just that: affectively motivated ruptures, performances situated within actions, in short as *verbs*. Anything else runs the risk of being concretized within currently cognizable modalities, and as such, is either represented as a noble, but unreachable, goal or disregarded as unrealistic hallucination. Utopian effort must remain liminal; it must always inhabit spaces of becoming. This results in two admissions: 1) to utopia must always reach for the currently unimaginable or uncognizable (and thus be ‘out of reach’), and 2) to utopia entails performative, pre-figurative *action*. It requires personal commitment and cost. New beginnings can only be made possible through disruptions of the present. These occur when the temporally linear, normatively affirmed limitations in the ‘now’ are concatenated in their recognition (i.e., unveiling) as ongoing disasters - that is to say: in apocalypse(s).

This will require sacrifice. Indeed, it will require what might seem to be a dystopian vector of effort on the part of the more fortunate. Of course, who counts as privileged in any context will be more complex than a simple ad hominem target convenient for political or polemical purposes. We have also seen that utopian effort by those more advantaged will be almost impossible without the aid of those not so lucky. The self-reinforcing hierarchies within societally affirmed ways of thinking problematize access to different realities, to include how these latter might be initiated and constructed.

²⁵ 2009, 86, 107-109

Privileged actors are impoverished epistemologically *and* ontologically when pursuing processual utopia. Only systemically disadvantaged actors can help to bridge that gap.

This raises an ethical dilemma that needs navigating. How do we justify asking the oppressed to aid an oppressor, even if she (the latter) is seeking to be an ally? The summum bonum of humankind, the Blochian novum we cannot imagine now, the Augustinian City of God –these trump this ethical discomfort and exhort us to inhabit uncomfortable spaces. The highest good of utopia, of the kingdom of Heaven, justifies this awkward request for aid. To be sure, the marginalized have been trying for a long time to describe their conditions of existence and their dreams for a better tomorrow. Privileged actors need to focus on developing the art of listening and attending to these accounts that broaden ‘allowed’ types of existences.

The eventual (hoped for) realization of the novum entails the ending of certain contingencies. The apocalypses revealed within their death are necessary conditions for the unveiling of something new. And in one way or another, global apocalypse is coming. Whether it arrives in the form of world-threatening climatic and geological shifts or in the collapse of current social and economic systems makes no difference to the certainty that wide-scale endings, in the form of current imaginaries of existence ceasing to be sustainable, are eminent. In the case of St. Augustine’s City of God, the unveiling of the Christ is the ultimate apocalypse, catalyzing the instantiation of what for the faithful must, in the here and now, consider as a horizontal target for a communal arrow of desire. Utopian effort doesn’t ‘arrive’ at a finite destination that we recognize.

On a smaller scale, personal apocalypses happen all the time. Whether they are interactional, resulting in the rupture of current relationships, or intrapersonal, in the form

of decisions to disrupt the status quo, these finalities create abysses within which new baptisms, in the form of naming events, can occur.²⁶ These, in turn, have the ability to create opportunities for potentializing different futures. Recognizing (and reinforcing) these will be necessary to effectively strive for utopia. Of course, the difficulty that remains is the liminality of these hodge-podge, communal constructions. The question of whether or not hierarchies can be more permanently flattened is likely not to be answered by this, or any other, particular instance of local (or global) disaster. Yet the potential is clearly there, and it is in this potentiality that what Bloch calls the utopian trace might be perceived, if only opaquely, or, to use St. Paul's terminology, "through a glass darkly."²⁷ These are instances of the city of God invading the earthly city. This dissertation has been a call for the privileged to attend to that trace in ways that come neither easily nor naturally.

As recent events have highlighted, there is yet another ethical tension in this discussion of processual utopia that must be recognized. This is the latent ability for what could be utopian tactical initiatives to lapse into unfortunate tropes of vengeance. Grasping the master's tools moves these efforts into the realm of the merely-political. Political victory, aimed at destroying the rationality of the 'other,' is rarely utopian in nature. Ideological domination is opposed to hierarchical flattening; it is, instead, a reflection of the will to dominate. The line to be straddled in this case is fine indeed. To pursue utopia will require humility and compromise by all actors, as quotients of

²⁶ Thurner (2009, 46-49). He uses three terms to describe this naming process. The first is the "abysmal event," which he characterizes as the ontological fissure (or destructuring) of what was prior to the concatenation of previous existences. The second he refers to as (Badiou's) "baptismal event" (in Catholic liturgy, baptism is coincident with naming the infant or convert). During this phase, the subject is newly christened, creating a new identity for it. The final phase is the 'inaugural performance' of the newly (re)created subject.

²⁷ I Corinthians 13.12 (ESV)

privilege and disadvantage wax and wane across multiple, complex fields of discourse and relationality. Sacrifice, of some type, turns out to be required by all, even if this seems clearly unfair at times.

This brings us back to the concept of utopian citizenship more broadly, a topic I broached in the first chapter referenced to both its individual and collective forms. A useful analogue to clarify this concept might be St. Augustine's description of life in the earthly city by those he references as citizens of the City of God. This 'otherness' he applies to utopian citizenship finds its genesis in the writings of St. Paul. He (Paul) describes Christians as heavenly citizens and divine ambassadors, dwelling in a foreign context for a short time while actively working to usher in 'the kingdom.'²⁸ In contemporary accounts of utopian process (and for Augustine as well) this idea is expressed as the 'now and the not yet.' The concept of extended (or estranged) citizenship seems very similar to Blochian conceptions of the ultimate fulfilment of humankind's utopian impulse. The utopian subject is bound to *act* such that better states of affairs are made possible, all the while situated within current conditions of privilege and marginalization. This is to say that aiming for utopia (i.e., pre-figuratively practicing utopia as performance) necessitates straddling a temporal tension (between the now and the not-yet). It will be an unstable and uncomfortable space. It will require risk. It will force us to become vulnerable to relational and ideological 'gut checks' – challenges that will likely have real (and not simply theoretical) costs.

I also mentioned in the first chapter the similarity that doing utopia has with 'musicking,' as described by Chris Small. The affinity these concepts have brings into focus the centrality of aesthetic performance to their related instances, to their existence

²⁸ E.g., II Corinthians 5:20; Philippians 3:20.

as action words (i.e., as verbs). Utopian risks can thus be imagined as types of improvisation. They work within ‘concrete’ melodic and harmonic structures to complicate them and, at the same time, enhance them in order to redefine them in ways that are auralized (or visualized) in a particular moment or for a particular audience. These improvisatory, non-scripted and non-normed, interjections into performative space serve as starting points from which to identify a direction of travel for utopia’s struggle. This is the function of utopia’s citizenry. Utopia’s directionality must be determined collectively. To be clear, “collectively,” does not simply pick out the concept of a multiplicity of actors. It instead refers to a more holistic set of ontologies recognized and then featured from a multiplicity of agentic viewpoints on a scale of autonomy within normative space. The privileged do not enjoy preference in this decision-making process. In fact, the default intuition of privileged actors, referenced to these contexts, may indicate the obverse of utopian directionality.

This last bit is important, so as a final summation I will describe it another way. Often, the majority of actors within a given normative sphere of influence might be considered members of the advantaged class (with, of course, varying degrees of that condition relatively dispersed throughout). This set certainly does *not* coincide with a utopian collective determining a directionality for improvising utopian imaginaries. Virtually all the members of that class might join in enterprises aimed at ‘better’ conditions yet still reflect (and be rooted within) a relatively narrow ontological and epistemological framework. What Unger considers collective determination in this context is correct when he centers it within a diversity of ontologies and disparate ways of interpreting those realities so that a collision of epistemological lenses challenges

strategic narratives recreating the status quo.²⁹ These result in trials of novel practices, experiments with ‘real utopias’ always-already doomed to current failure yet perhaps making future successes possible.³⁰ These pre-figurative practices still need a direction, and without a collective negotiation (speaking agentially) of that heading, strategic pressures will locate this utopian-become-dystopian train on rails with predetermined destinations.

This will not be easy. If we are not willing to put privilege at risk, if we cannot sacrifice the relative security of certain hierarchical identities such that some level of mutual vulnerability is experienced, the majority of visions and their accompanying actions for addressing disparate conditions of social justice will remain *merely* charity, normed by the forms of aid affirmed by merely political structures of power. And charity, while valuable and laudable at times, unfortunately continues to reinforce extant relationships of power. It is by embodying, through affective practice, a willful, Ahmedian ‘snapfulness’ and committing to the idea of being ‘utopian killjoys’ that we can potentialize alternative futures which are currently unimaginable, enabling us to identify and follow that arrow of desire towards its ever-receding target – that flash of the Absolute – beckoning on the horizon.

²⁹ 2007, 150

³⁰ See Wright (2010) for more on the concept of ‘real utopias.’

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