SEVEN

The Politics of Hope

DANIEL CHIU SUAREZ, SOPHIE CHALFIN-JACOBS, HANNAH GOKASLAN, SIDRA PIERSON, AND ANNALIESE TERLESKY

We are frequently told we must "never give up hope." But what is at stake in hoping? In this course, we will interrogate this ubiquitous injunction to hope. We will analyze contemporary debates about the possibility of hope in the face of uncertain planetary futures to consider the politics of how, in what ways, toward what ends, and why we hope. At what point does hope become misplaced, turning into a "cruel optimism"? How is hope mobilized politically? How are different futurities—optimistic and pessimistic, utopian and dystopian, redemptive and apocalyptic—distributed among different groups? And what might happen if we let go of commonly held yet narrowly conceived hopes and tried imagining something different?

Course description for DAN SUAREZ'S course, "The Politics of Hope"

This chapter explores what emerged from a class on the "politics of hope." It includes reflections from the instructor and short essays by four undergraduate students coming to terms with how they were relating to their futures (in other words, how to hope) in the face of escalating planetary crises.

The following student reflections were written during an intensive one-month course I designed for Middlebury College called "The Politics of Hope," which I built around the course description above. For their final papers, I invited my students to respond to the question, *How should we hope?* The prompt asked students to reflect on the variety of hopes and ways of hoping we had engaged over the semester and to subject these hopes to critical scrutiny. Their task was to try to reconstruct for themselves something that felt personally compelling, analytically rigorous, and politically generative: something that was honest and unflinching in its reckoning yet something that also amounted to more than just paralysis or despair.

The course was premised on the idea that hoping is political and therefore an inherently social process: it is collectively derived and relationally experienced. To help reconcile our more theoretical concepts *about* hope with the more dynamic, contradictory, and everyday

lived experiences people have *with* hope, I thus had my students go out and talk to some people. They conducted interviews with their professors, older family members, and peers (their age or younger), which they contextualized with discussions and texts from class and with their own continuing efforts to discover where they stood among the big questions animating the course.

It goes without saying that learning about the enormous stakes and dire implications of contemporary ecological crises can be deeply troubling. Yet for this class I made a conscious effort to let those sensations in rather than keeping them at bay. Admittedly, designing a class around a sustained confrontation with acute planetary devastation was a risk. Although I had come up with what I thought were careful plans for addressing the range of powerful affects inherent to the subject matter, I could not be certain of what the results would be. This lack of guarantees felt both exciting and dangerous.

Many notable things started to happen when we ditched the careful avoidance and forced optimisms that had defined many of the environmental classes I myself had taken as a student. Insofar as those treatments did acknowledge the systemic character and profound severity of current crises—confounding hopes in efficient light bulbs, reusable straws, and smart thermostats—those earlier instructors would often conclude the class by finally arriving at such realizations (right before releasing students and wishing us a happy holiday). In contrast, we began with this observation as a bewildering premise, and a defining challenge for the course, and we spent most of our time together essentially picking up the pieces and trying to recover something coherent (and potentially even rigorously "hopeful") in the aftermath.

As we proceeded, I came to realize how this starting point for the class aligned with the starting points of many of my incoming students and the sensibilities they were bringing to questions of planetary transformation, upheaval, and crisis. Annaliese, for instance, described a "painful, mostly terrifying" reality, while Sidra lamented a predicament often compelling her to feel "sad, scared, and angry." Whether acknowledged or not, these feelings are already out there roiling our classrooms. In this context, students seemed to appreciate the willingness of the course to drop the circumspection and level with them honestly about the unsettling implications of what was presently unfolding. In perusing their writing, you can see them not just stress-testing logical propositions and trying out different arguments derived from the assorted literatures I'd curated for them: they were undergoing a discernibly and sometimes powerfully affecting process, demanding not just analytical rigor from their instructor but deliberate scaffolding responsive to the intense emotions that came to saturate our pedagogical engagements with the topic.

In this regard, I found myself grappling with a dilemma each time I taught the course. What if I exposed my students to these materials and they began to doubt, or worse, lose hope? And yet, expecting a preordained conclusion from them—instructing them that they should not doubt but instead force themselves to believe—seemed cheap and manipulative. Their final paper was intended to let them confront their own doubts and hesitations and grapple with whatever arose from the encounter. Rather than presuming that students must or necessarily would hope by the end of class, or furnishing them with whatever per-

sonal reassurances I could offer that things would work out, I let them do it themselves: to face the sources of their dread, to come to terms with what they believed was actually happening, and to reforge their own orientations toward the future (and past and present) tempered by a hard look at things. I was fairly candid with my students about not having answers to the momentous questions I was posing to them and we proceeded with the understanding that we would simply have to do our best to muster a satisfying response, both collectively as a group and individually for ourselves.

After hearing from Hannah, Sidra, Annaliese, and Sophie reflecting in their own words on the politics of hope—each of them, in the process, struggling to come to grips with an outrageously disconcerting situation—I will conclude with some final reflections highlighting the generative potential of such an approach to teaching about (and with) the climate crisis.

HANNAH GOKASLAN

In a high school literature class, at the impressionable age of seventeen, I read Dante's *Divine Comedy*, an epic poem written centuries before I was born. The story details the protagonist's journey through the nine circles of Hell, up the slope of Mt. Purgatory, and, finally, into the splendor of Heaven. My teacher was a soft-spoken man named Dan Christian who had the reputation of being one of the "life-changing" teachers at my small, Baltimore high school. He was trained as a theologian and spoke in a medley of song lyrics and quotes from his favorite authors, sprinkling in his own meditations between the words he memorized.

To my surprise, I grew to love the class and often find myself thinking about the conversations we had. Hope is at the center of Dante's story. The opening lines, arguably the most famous from the text, mention the absence of it explicitly, reading "Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark / For the straightforward pathway had been lost."[1] The narrator has lost hope and spends the next ninety-nine cantos of the poem on a mission to reorient himself. He feels the helplessness and weight of an uncertain future, symptoms associated with modern understandings of clinical depression. Dante's conception of hope, which he defines in one moment as "sure expectancy of future bliss," is what I see as a traditional understanding of hope.[2] It centers a future that is better than the reality of the current day. It is this sort of hope that lends itself to a reimagining, especially in the context of the climate crisis.

Even so, the poem does address questions similar to the ones that we encounter in our discussions today. In Dante's vision, Hell is a stagnant world of despair and the complete absence of hope; the very entrance gates read "Abandon hope all ye who enter here."[3] Meanwhile, Purgatory manifests as a mountain rising towards heaven populated by the toiling souls who work, seemingly against all odds, to climb towards a paradise that they cannot even imagine. The hope that motivates these souls is one that requires action embedded with the belief that what they are working towards will be better than their reality. Once in Heaven, time ceases to matter. There is one eternal present. No longer a future to strive for, Dante's Heaven becomes the embodied accumulation of those acts and the manifestation of that hope.

Although the story exists within these Judeo-Christian frameworks of the afterlife, it provides us with insight into culturally traditional understandings of hope and in doing so, can help guide our reimagining of Hope. The seemingly unexpected connection between these worlds, one of hope in the face of climate change and the other from this archaic, religious story, is what compelled me to reach out to my high school teacher in the context of this class.

When I probed him about hope in the context of climate change more specifically, he paused for a minute before responding "I don't feel hopeful, but I am hopeful." This very distinction between feeling and being hopeful, and the ability to hold the two in tandem, is central to how I believe we will exist in the coming decades.

Our future may require a reimagining of hope from a primarily emotional experience, something relatively passive and situational, to a verb that describes an approach—to hope rather than to feel hopeful, or perhaps in addition to that emotional response. The latter conception of hope is also the one that we tend to mistake for a sort of reckless optimism, which Nietzsche so directly criticizes. Hope as action has been central to abolition and radical social movements across the world for centuries. Climate educators, students, and activists can look to these examples to see how reimagining hope as an action allows it to become a form of resistance rather than the form of interpretive denial that Jem Bendell rejects in "Deep Adaptation."[4]

Rebecca Solnit articulates a vision of hope as an active pursuit, beautifully writing: "To hope is to gamble. It's to bet on the future, on your desires, on the possibility that an open heart and uncertainty is better than gloom and safety."[5] Solnit's work not only highlights the distinction between feeling and being hopeful but also addresses a secondary, crucial aspect of hoping today: the uncertainty of what is to come. In order to act with a hopeful orientation, there has to be a confrontation with the unpredictability of the future and an understanding that it may be hard to foresee the impact of our actions.

In a similar vein to Solnit, Laurie Penny emphasizes the active part of hope when she writes "It's not a mood. It's an action. It's behaving as if there might be a future even when that seems patently ridiculous."[6] We do not have to feel hopeful. We can (and responsibly should) acknowledge the harm and inequities associated with the climate crisis. We can wholeheartedly believe that we are doomed and that no amount of intervention now will save us, and nevertheless act in ways informed by hope. I often find myself navigating this space. My hope becomes less about the emotional response, although that is visceral and important, but rather an orientation of action. If we can emphasize this contradiction, this new existence of hope allows us to experience emotion, to acknowledge the sadness and frustration, and to still act. It does not ignore the sadness, the pain, and the fear associated with this work, but it does give us space to reduce harm, to think creatively, and to actively care for our communities.

While conducting my interviews, I identified two threads of this more traditional understanding of hope in the responses: it was external, meaning that the hope was located in other (often younger) people, and there was a faith in the existence of a certain future. My mother immigrated to the United States when she was my age. Newly married and unfamil-

iar with her new home, she and my father built the life to which I was born. Their transition was eased in many ways (they came to the U.S. with advanced degrees, they spoke English well, and they were white), but they still faced periods of deep uncertainty. She and my father found work in separate cities and spent the first years of their marriage apart. When I asked her about navigating this period of time, she placed her hope on her future family; her hope was based on the belief that my brother and I would live full and consequential lives. While it was a touching sentiment to hear as her daughter, my mother's hope built on my future existence during some of her hardest moments does not translate to the sort of hope I envision in the face of the climate crisis. It is too specific and isolated. We need a hope that extends beyond the future of individuals. We must hope for a collective future that we take an active role in constructing.

Mr. Christian also talked about future generations when I asked him about where he finds hope. Although he does not have children of his own, his 40-year career as a high school English teacher means that he has spent a great deal of time engaging closely with the minds of young people. He said, "I am hopeful because of young people—because people like you exist and are studying and thinking about these kinds of questions." Although I know his faith in our abilities to enact change is well-intentioned (and not entirely unfounded), there is also an unfair weight that comes with this sort of hope, one that young activists have critiqued before. An externally-based hope tends to absolve older generations from their own responsibility and can justify inaction, therefore becoming a form of denial.

In both cases, their hope carries a weight of certainty. My mother was motivated by the belief that she both could and would provide a better life for me and my brother, and her hope was contingent on the possibility of that future existing. Mr. Christian's hope in his students' ability to change the future is based on an expectation that the younger generation will find some sort of solution. What I am imagining is a hope that shifts from a basis in certainty to one that not only acknowledges the unknown but emphasizes it, allowing it to become a catalyst for creativity.

The context of the climate crisis is uncertain on an entirely new scale, so our hope will have to be different from what we believe today. We can balance being realistic without falling victim to a sort of reckless optimism or ineffective denial. In acknowledging these framings and tendencies in these traditional conceptions of hope, I am working to bring attention to the ways in which they can be limiting and by doing so, call to reimagine a hope that resists them. Our future will be different than today, that we are almost sure of. So, it only makes sense that our conception of hope should adapt along with us.

SIDRA PIERSON

The more my awareness of climate change grew, the more I came to see hope as senseless; anyone holding hope was practicing a form of denial, refusing to face both the facts of climate science and the reality of global governance. I recognized that we still have control over just how bad things are and will be, but I shared David Wallace-Wells' belief that the world

is "surely not alarmed enough."[7] Now I recognize that what I saw as realism has a darker, more dangerous side, and that while some hope is naive and misguided, there are other more nuanced forms of hope that are not only justifiable but essential.

In today's world, it is easy to be sad, scared, and angry. As Rebecca Solnit writes, I "spend a lot of time looking at my country in horror."[8] Despair is not much of a leap, and it can feel like a nobler and more pragmatic stance than an insistence on unjustifiable hope. In fact, despair requires much less emotional work. It is often a premature determination induced by impatience in the face of uncertainty. While hope demands clear-sightedness and imagination, despair "demands less of us, it's more predictable, and in a sad way safer."[9] Despair can make the latest findings and forecasts more tolerable because you cannot be surprised or devastated by confirmation of a belief you already hold. But this resignation eats away at motivation for change-making; as Solnit notes, "activists who deny their own power and possibility likewise choose to shake off their sense of obligation: if they are doomed to lose, they don't have to do very much except situate themselves as beautiful losers or at least virtuous ones."[10]

Despair is therefore dangerous. Defeatists replace "the superstition of progress with the equally vulgar superstition of doom,"[11] providing a new cause for a familiar paralysis. Defeatism supports narratives that characterize climate change as an inevitable result of human nature and that frame continuing down our current emissions path as similarly unavoidable.[12] "[Attributing] tragedy to evil actors" disallows "individual or collective autonomy."[13] It is no wonder then that those in positions of power and privilege "prefer that the giant remain asleep," promoting media depictions of resistance as ridiculous and pointless.[14]

To say that despair is unproductive and dangerous is not to say that the feelings that fuel it should be ignored. The scientific reality of climate change and the lack of existing urgency to address it "[require] that we get very worked up indeed."[15] My peers and I have found that expressing our fear and cynicism is often necessary in order to get to a place of feeling motivated and capable of making change as an individual. There is a fine line between sitting with these feelings and letting them overwhelm you. Finding this balance means clinging tighter to what we cherish, which becomes more vivid in the course of loss.[16] For "to wallow in despair that the natural world is dying is to fail to be aware that it is still, in many ways, very much alive."[17] Fury and sadness are justified, but they must be channeled into passion. This means recognizing that "the fury you feel is the hard outer shell of love: if you are angry it is because something you love is threatened and you want to defend it," and that such anger needs to serve as motivation.[18]

Hoping is terrifying. It is an "anticipatory consciousness [that] involves risks," risks of betrayal and incredible disappointment.[19] These risks exist because hopefulness is "a form of trust, trust in the unknown and the possible even in discontinuity."[20]

But hoping is imperative and powerful, for many of the same reasons. Acknowledgment of uncertainty promotes an acceptance of agency and responsibility.[21] Solnit believes this lays the groundwork for an entirely different kind of hope: "that you possess the power to change the world to some degree or just that the world is going to change again."[22] This hopefulness does not depend on success or happy endings. It is fueled by determination to

fight for a less tragic future, with the knowledge that the act of fighting will allow different futurities to become more intuitive.[23] Hope therefore is an act of defiance, "or rather [. . .] the foundation for an ongoing series of acts of defiance."[24]

Hope is further strengthened by the possibility that comes with a future that is still in the dark. The past becomes a torch we can carry forward into that darkness, and hope is born out of the opportunity for action created by "the spaciousness of uncertainty."[25] While we know that it is too late to "solve" or "stop" climate change, we also know that "the nature of that change is still up to us."[26]

Depending on the day or the hour, I may or may not be able to lean into this uncertainty or illuminate it with hope. News alerts, class readings, and personal observations of the world around me threaten to pull me back toward the comfort of despair. What keeps my cynicism at bay is remembering the positive impacts of holding such a difficult hope.

If we understand hoping to be a social process with political consequences, then we know it is not a self-contained act. Sometimes hopefulness is an act of self-care, but sometimes it is a choice to influence politics, ways of knowing, and other people's affects. Hope inspires imagination and actively encourages creative thinking, not only in ourselves but in others. It means being at "peace within shifting terrain" and recognizing that uncertainty presents an opportunity for radically undertaking "a grand project of mutual reinvention."[27] It means avoiding unrealistic utopian visions that place a better existence in temporal isolation without a clear path from now to then, and instead emphasizing process, cultivating "real and imagined strivings for a livable and social existence."[28]

This radicalism and boldness must include practicing freedom daily, which involves doing away with the distinction between activism and daily life. Practicing freedom entails a refusal to cooperate with grief and despair and a refusal to "collaborate by lending energy to that which oppresses you."[29] By defiantly hoping in a sick society, we can withdraw our consent from the systems we wish to change and make ourselves "unavailable for servitude."[30] Welcoming uncertainty and allowing it to form a foundation from which to hope allows us to delegitimize systems and rules that have become entrenched.[31] Rather than making ourselves out to be victims who must endure and suffer through climate change, we can use hope to frame ourselves as subjects with agency.[32]

As we break free, we can also recognize those who have done so before us and who are striving alongside us now. Effective technological, political, and social solutions to the climate crisis exist, and in our eagerness to rebuild, we must not negate the valuable effort and thought that has already been put into changemaking. We must therefore strike a balance between embracing uncertainty and recognizing knowledge, practices, and values that we should take with us into the unknown.

ANNALIESE TERLESKY

"The foundation of nature seems to be hope." In an interview with my mother, she concluded that hope exists all around us—in acorns, in all of nature's pregnancies, in an octopus laying

half a million eggs though only a handful will survive. Hope seems to be embedded in nature, so how shall we, a collectivity of humans staring into the face of climate change, hope ourselves? As I interviewed Professor Hatjigeorgiou from Middlebury's Religion department, she brought up the three Christian cardinal virtues announced in 1 Corinthians 13:13: faith, hope, and love. Paul, she explained, cleverly placed hope in the middle because it is a deep biological, transcendental state built into us as human beings, and a "bridge" between the "prerequisite" foundation of faith and the end goal of love. Looking then to the process and practice of hope in the climate crisis, this framing can be reinterpreted and applied: faith is the foundation of first trusting and then understanding the reality of climate science and coming crisis; hope is a bridge we imaginatively, collectively, and actively create to adapt and reach a future we desire; and love is the end goal, a future state of harmony between peoples and respect for life on earth.

The facts are painful, mostly terrifying, but exposure to them is necessary. In order to spring into hope and into action to make changes within ourselves and within harmful broader systems, a foundation of faith must be developed, however unsettling and overwhelming. Faith, in this context, moves beyond common cultural and political connotations of the word; it is neither blind nor necessarily religious. Rather, in exposing ourselves to the truths of climate change, we must interpret this faith in its most basic definition, stripped of overdetermined understandings. It is trust in something, founded upon realism and clarity. This being said, David Wallace-Wells puts it simply: "It is, in fact, worse than you think."[33] There is a very real sense of doom that must be clearly evaluated and faced. As Roy Scranton argues, global climate change is the greatest threat to the world—and we will face an "apocalyptic future: no matter what changes we make."[34] Thus, as Jonathan Franzen writes, if we abandon our "false hope of salvation"—of "stopping" climate change or "saving" the planet—and accept coming disaster, then we can remodel our hope with acceptance.[35] We can then act from a place of reality, not blind optimism. We can do the best we can, and do good—do better—for the sake of good, not for a utopic future or a future akin to the present.

Beyond avoiding blind optimism, we cannot shrink into despair after facing the worsening present right before us along with the kind of future Scranton and Wallace-Wells warn against.[36] However, as Jennifer Atkinson suggests, grief is not only "a healthy and necessary process we have to undergo in order to heal" after a loss, but it is also a sign of "deep attachment and connection"—of love and praise.[37] In the face of such ecological catastrophe, as we lose more and more of the natural world and its wild creatures, our grief can actually remind us to honor earth's remaining lifeforms, "to hold even tighter to our values, and to resist with all we have any act that threatens to extinguish the life that remains." In other words, we have to sit with the negative emotions that come with learning the dooming reality of climate change. However, we cannot stop there: we must learn from our grief, anger, and anxiety, and channel them into both gratitude and loving, transformative action in order to lose as little as we can moving forward. Grief and hope can coexist.

This brings us to the bridge that is hope, and the more important question of how we can hope in the face of a future that is undoubtedly complicated if not catastrophic. Hope, as

Rebecca Solnit explains, "doesn't mean denying" reality, but rather facing it.[38] Perhaps the object of our hope isn't a continuation of how we comfortably live now. Hope is a bridge from faith to love: it is something that requires not only our imagination to build as a collective, so that it can stand the weight of many bodies, but requires that we move our feet and walk over it—hope requires action if we want to achieve our goal of getting to the other side, past the chasm beneath. Without the bridge, our life is a fall into this chasm. If we do not build the bridge of hope, we remain where we are or fall; and if we do not cross the bridge, putting our hope into action, we also stay exactly where we are.

Our hope must be radically *imaginative*. As Sarah Jaquette Ray explains of moving past eco-grief into hope and action, "We will get nowhere if we do not [first] imagine the future we hope to live in."[39] It is for this reason that if we believe we are entirely doomed to extinction and the problem is out of our hands, we have decided on a future we have no part in shaping, and we become entirely immobilized, even nihilistic. Eagerly desiring something different will help us better adapt to a changing world. Jem Bendell proposed just this imaginative adaptation and argues that we cannot continue operating and hoping with the assumption "that we can slow down climate change, or respond to it sufficiently to sustain our civilization."[40] Facing reality, he argues we should prioritize adaptation over mere mitigation of climate crises. Bendell redefines and reimagines hope: the object is not that our current way of life will continue, but rather, with what he calls "radical hope," we can creatively, imaginatively adapt to things falling apart, to everything changing before our eyes.

Our hope must also be *active*: drawn out of the imagination into action. While hope, through the power of our imagination, builds and is the bridge, action gets us across the bridge. Atkinson describes what Joanna Macy has called "active hope." As a practice, it is "something we do rather than have."[41] Hope is not the passive belief that everything will be fine. Rather, hope is powerful in that, informed by reality and embracing uncertainty, it demands that we act against this suffering and destruction. Solnit champions uncertainty's space for action, writing, "Anything could happen, and whether we act or not has everything to do with it."[42] In uncertainty, the space of hope, we can act, taking informed risks. Solnit concludes, perfectly bringing together the relationship between hope and action, writing, "Hope calls for action; action is impossible without hope."[43]

Our hope absolutely must be *collective*. Turning again to Solnit, we understand that "popular power is real enough to overturn regimes and rewrite the social contract. And it often has."[44] The unimaginable has been made possible in the past, and the question of how has always been a matter of active hope championed by more and more active individuals. Solnit describes the public as the "sleeping giant," for when it finally wakes up, having gathered faith and clarity, it is not just the "public" but civil society, forcefully capable of creating change.[45] Crossing our bridge of hope, toward the future we have imagined, "we write history with our feet and with our presence and our collective voice and vision."[46] Her words raise the question: what if we were all to resist the current status quo, which is so clearly wreaking havoc on the planet and inducing vast suffering for most human beings and prosperity for a select few? It could not survive in the presence of such active, immense

resistance. We cannot and do not do anything alone, and thus we must come together with our grief, channel it into loving hope, and act. We must build the bridge that is hope as a collective, centering joy and love in our activism to sustain us, and we must cross this bridge as a collective in order to create and experience a changed world.

At the other side of the bridge is *love* and the pursuit of a collectively created future of equity and compassion. Love directs attention outward from the self, and moves us to act on behalf of others, whether that be a person or a planet. Maybe doomsayers are correct in saying it's too late to do anything, but I really cannot see how this helps anyone, or moves anyone to act from compassion and agency. There are so many other maybes, and perhaps the one we choose to fight for is acting as compassionately and ethically as we can. If a future of widespread joy and love is what is on the other side of the bridge, we can, starting today, live in accordance with this end. Emily Dickinson wrote, "Hope is the thing with feathers / That perches in the soul." Hope has wings. It waits, "perches" deep within us, ready to take flight if we choose. As Professor Hatjigeorgiou explains, once we, the "vessels" of such hope, rise, there is a lift from the inside and we can overcome our circumstances, no matter how bleak. In our hope, if we ourselves in the reality of the crises likely to come, imagine the best, most equitable future, if we act, and if we form a collective, our hope can work. The daunting, exciting part is that it is a choice.

SOPHIE CHALFIN-JACOBS

When I think of the question, "How should we hope?" my first thought is who is "we"? There is much consensus that the climate crisis was neither caused by nor are its effects equally distributed across a collective "we." As Meehan Crist puts it, "We know that climate risk and the worst effects of ecological disaster are unevenly distributed across race, class and gender, and among industrialised and developing countries—for many people, conditions tantamount to the end of the world have already arrived."[47] However, theorists from Roy Scranton to Steven Pinker invoke this "we." I believe these thinkers who appeal directly to intellectuals in academic arenas such as TedTalks or research journals are not really speaking to all of us but rather those of us untouched by the horrors of climate change or, as Rob Nixon describes, the "comfortable minority in the boat [who] ponder how many of the drowning masses they can afford to take on board."[48] The way that we each approach hope, as my professor Spring Ulmer states, is "dependent on context."

I would also like to consider the nonhuman species excluded from this "we." Max Chalfin-Jacobs, my younger brother, is a birder. He notes the changes he has seen in bird populations within his lifetime, reaching a conclusion that "maybe there's a chance for people, maybe there's a chance that we will create inventions that clean the air for us, but for birds and for other animals, I don't see any hope." While humans have outlasted many species, and many species will likely outlast humans, I think it is important that the nonhuman be a part of the conversation. As Jennifer Atkinson asserts, "The ability to mourn for the loss of

other species is an expression of our sense of participation in and responsibility for the whole fabric of life."[49] "We" are a part of nature and should not forget that.

At the heart of these exclusions lies a certain amnesia. For Mary Annaise Heglar, white supremacy amplifies this "existential exceptionalism" (the belief among those with privilege that climate change is the first or most significant threat to survival) and perpetuates a view that is "not only inaccurate, shortsighted, and arrogant—it's also dangerous. It serves only to divorce the environmental movement from a much bigger arc of history."[50] She urges us to remember that communities of color "have even more to teach you about building movements, about courage, about survival."[51] Rebecca Solnit also speaks of the dangers of forgetting, arguing that "amnesia leads to despair in many ways. The status quo would like you to believe it is immutable, inevitable, and invulnerable, and lack of memory of a dynamically changing world reinforces this view."[52] She connects memory with hope and history, saying, "Things don't always change for the better, but they change, and we can play a role in that change if we act. Which is where hope comes in, and memory, the collective memory we call history."[53] These remarks point to the same conclusion: Forgetting the violence and inequality embedded into our history, or forgetting the small victories in our struggles for justice, can lead to cruel optimism or blind pessimism about the path forward, and forgetting the successes of social movements that have come before us closes the door to powerful generational knowledge about creating change. Just as we should not forget the implications of a collective "we" or the nonhuman cohabitors of this earth, we should not forget our complex history.

While hopelessness need not be debilitating, it is exceedingly common these days to hear that, without hope, people lack the motivation and vision to put in the work of building a better world. Speaking on her own feelings of hopelessness, Laurie Penny reminds us that "the same muscles that are required to survive an episode of depression are the muscles that are required for what is nebulously called 'resistance' to this current dark tide."[54] Perhaps hopelessness itself presents an opportunity for growth and perseverance. I, too, am not convinced that hopelessness itself is inherently dangerous, although there are circumstances where it can be. I asked Ulmer about hopelessness in the classroom. She responded, "The hopelessness that I've encountered is apathy . . . I think apathy is the biggest evil in some way. Or like flat-out denial. Apathy seems even worse because at least denial has passion attached to it." This reminds me of Lisa Duggan's postulation that "hope and hopelessness exist in a dialectical rather than oppositional relation, and that the opposite of hope is complacency—a form of happiness that will not risk the consequences of its own suppressed hostility and pain."[55] In other words, denial (while still problematic) and "bad" sentiments like cynicism and depression have strong emotion behind them, while apathy and complacency imply a lack of caring altogether and an aversion to reexamining the status quo. Another takeaway from this notion that hopelessness need not be debilitating is that despite the multitudes of feelings we experience facing the climate crisis, we tend to move through them in dynamic ways. Inheriting a climate emergency, I have felt my fair share of hopelessness, optimism,

and a seemingly apathetic numbness. Yet each time I find myself in these numb periods, they ultimately pass, as I pull myself forward or am jolted by a call to action.

The question of how we should hope still remains. Essentially all of the authors we have read are in agreement that major political, economic, and cultural transformations are necessary if we want any chance at combating the climate crisis. Scranton proposes we "learn to die," Duggan and Muñoz propose "educated hope" and "concrete utopianism," Stephanie Wakefield proposes we explore the possibilities of "the back loop," Sarah Jaquette Ray proposes resilience that is "bound up with resistance." For Ulmer, my professor, hope means "ongoing life, planetary and otherwise." While I find myself averse to the death metaphor and partial to analogies of perseverance and transformation, different frameworks will reach different people. I still find myself left with questions I strive to answer, like "Why am I unable to envision a world without capitalism?" and "How can I build this imagination?" So, once we confront our complex histories and move past apathy and complacency, the question for me becomes not how we hope but how we move forward, because the world keeps turning nonetheless.

DAN (AGAIN)

This course was, and remains, an experiment. While I initially reeled at the intense feelings it dredged up, the courage my students showed when approached in this manner—when given the chance and without too many guardrails—offered glimpses into a rich reservoir of experience, wisdom, and insight that I have since learned not to condescend to or to underestimate. Interestingly, the process of streamlining these reflections in preparation for this volume—while helping to sharpen claims and clarify arguments—has also had the noticeable effect of smoothing over the more visceral sensations of bewilderment, existential self-questioning, and creaturely messiness I remember defining our experiences together in the course. Indeed, many students emphasized this emotional core of the class as one of its most lasting and important features. Crucially, as I came to appreciate, opening the door to such feelings appeared not only to court "negative" emotions like grief and anxiety but to also create openings for curiosity and excitement, fellowship and solidarity, and even humor and joy, as we struggled (professor included) to make sense of the fateful questions set forth by the class.

While harrowing, at times, I have learned to see these emotional dynamics as not only compatible but welcome and even necessary aspects of a more critical environmental pedagogy. Although critical educators working in other settings have long sought ways of teaching aimed at undermining complacency in the face of suffering and injustice, I have observed the manifestly radical implications of the climate crisis—when tackled directly—prompting potent reckonings among my students and serving to interrupt (if not completely dislodge) ingrained attachments, investments, and complicities in the systemic inequities and the forms of structural violence driving current planetary devastations. Rather than sidestepping all these bewildering and existential questions, my students taught me how

rigorous confrontations with global ecological crisis—in part, *because* of its distinctly unsettling nature—could, with careful scaffolding, prove vital to their efforts to foster more expansive political horizons and radical imaginations better proportioned to the vast environmental transformations currently in motion.

NOTES

1. Alighieri, *Divine Comedy*, Inferno 1:1–3.
2. Ibid., Paradiso, 25:26.
3. Ibid., Inferno, 3:9.
4. Bendell, "Deep Adaptation."
5. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*.
6. Penny, "On Hope."
7. Wallace-Wells, "Uninhabitable Earth."
8. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 108.
9. Ibid., 20.
10. Ibid., 20.
11. Hannah Arendt, as quoted in Mann, "Doom," 92.
12. Malm and Hornborg, "Geology of Mankind?"
13. Mann, "Doom," 92.
14. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, xxv.
15. Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 20.
16. Jamail and Cecil, "As the Climate Collapses."
17. Bringhurst and Zwicky, *Learning to Die*.
18. Solnit, "Letter to a Young Climate Activist."
19. Gordon, "Something More Powerful than Skepticism," 264.
20. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 23.
21. Bragg et al., "Hope."
22. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 23.
23. Back, "Blind Pessimism."
24. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 110.
25. Ibid,, xiv.
26. Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 28.
27. Wakefield, "Inhabiting the Anthropocene" 85; Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 21.
28. Gordon, "Something More Powerful than Skepticism," 258.
29. Ibid., 271.
30. Ibid., 272.
31. Klein, *This Changes Everything*.
32. Wakefield, "Inhabiting the Anthropocene."
33. Wallace-Wells, "Uninhabitable Earth."
34. Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*.
35. Franzen, "What If We Stopped Pretending?"
36. Scranton, *Learning to Die in the Anthropocene*; Wallace-Wells, "Uninhabitable Earth."
37. Atkinson, "Eco-Grief: Our Greatest Ally?"
38. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, xii.
39. Ray, *Field Guide to Climate Anxiety*.
40. Bendell, "Deep Adaptation."
41. Atkinson, "Eco-Grief: Our Greatest Ally?"

42. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, 4.
43. Ibid., 4.
44. Ibid., xxiii.
45. Ibid., xxv.
46. Ibid., xxv.
47. Crist, "Is It OK to Have a Child?"
48. Nixon, "The Great Acceleration and the Great Divergence."
49. Atkinson, "Eco-Grief: Our Greatest Ally?"
50. Heglar, "Climate Change"
51. Ibid.
52. Solnit, *Hope in the Dark*, xix.
53. Ibid.
54. Penny, "On Hope."
55. Duggan and Muñoz, "Hope and Hopelessness," 280.

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