

# The Dialectics of the Religious and the Secular

*Studies on the Future of Religion*

*Edited by*

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## Theo-Utopian Hearing

*Ernst Bloch on Music*

*Roland Boer*

This study offers a critical commentary on an unjustly neglected dimension of the work of Ernst Bloch, namely, his philosophy of music. The key text is the long opening section of his *Spirit of Utopia*, although a number of other shorter pieces are also relevant (gathered in *Zur Philosophie der Musik*, of which a selection has been translated as *Essays on the Philosophy of Music*). By critical commentary I mean an in-depth engagement that is both exposition and critical assessment, an approach that is indebted to the long tradition of biblical criticism. Briefly put, Bloch's philosophy of music is a sustained re-narration of the story of music. His story emphasises the human nature of music, focusing on the basic category of the note and its associated features, such as hearing, voice, dance, song, and rhythm. Bloch listens and writes with what may be called a philosophical and theo-utopian ear, which he deploys to 'hear around corners' in order to espy the contours and glimpses of utopian promise.

I propose to offer a critical commentary on what must be one of Ernst Bloch's most neglected pieces, namely, the bravura *Philosophy of Music* section that opens his *Spirit of Utopia* (Bloch 2000:42–164).<sup>1</sup> Like Adorno's *Kierkegaard* book (Adorno 1989, 2003), more than one critic has admitted that Bloch's sustained reflections on music are as sibylline as his writings can get. So I will keep it relatively simple, for what follows is in large part – as Marx put it in regard to

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1 For ease of cross-referencing, I use the version that opens the collection, *Essays on the Philosophy of Music* (Bloch 1985c), which is itself a selection from *Zur Philosophie der Musik* (Bloch 1974). The only recent work on Bloch's philosophy of music is the book, *Listening for Utopia in Ernst Bloch's Musical Philosophy* by Benjamin Korstvedt (2010). While an extremely welcome and useful work, its interest is musicological, seeking to develop the potential of Bloch for musical analysis today, especially with regard to the composers with whom Bloch himself deals. So one finds detailed analysis of scores from Mozart, Beethoven and Wagner, in an effort to fill out Bloch's treatments and then take them further. Unfortunately, the book fails to deal in any extended fashion with the philosophical core of Bloch's philosophy of music, a problem exacerbated by the tendency to build an argument from specific analyses. The result is that we never move from the fragments to a systematic and coherent treatment, for Korstvedt prefers to retreat into yet more micro-analyses. It does not help that Korstvedt treads gingerly around both Bloch's Marxism and misses crucial features of his thought, especially his heavy debts to theology and the Bible and the very human nature of music.

his notes on Hegel – an exercise in self-clarification. This study may best be described as a critical commentary, an exposition laced with critical assessment, a commentary that is both intimate and immanent and has its own neglected heritage deep within biblical criticism. However, before the commentary begins, let me offer a brief statement of what Bloch sets out to achieve in his philosophy of music: it is a thorough retelling of the belated story of music by emphasising its very human nature, recounting that story in terms of the basic category of the note and its hangers-on (hearing, voice, dance, song and rhythm); Bloch listens with a philosophical and theo-utopian ear that is able, every so now and then, to hear around corners.

### Overview: Theo-Utopian Hearing

The ear perceives more than can be explained conceptually.

BLOCH 1985c:113; 1974: 135

Let me say a little more about each of the carefully weighted terms in this brief description. To begin with, Bloch's philosophy of music is a thorough retelling of the story of music. Now, at one level Bloch assumes that music itself does not have a narrative and that it cannot be represented in conventional terms. As David Drew writes in his detailed introduction to the English translation of Bloch's musical essays: 'it is essential to his philosophical purpose that music is imageless and without narrative form' (Drew 1985:xxv), precisely so that Bloch may assume that music is itself philosophy, requiring the merest gloss and clarification. True enough, at least as far as this position enables Bloch to avoid the narrative pull of those forms he favours, such as song, fugue, sonata and opera. However, at another level Bloch offers a profound retelling of the story of music, now in terms of the twisting fortunes of the note.

More of that in a moment, for now I wish to reprise the second phase of my brief description: the story of music is a belated one. Although he later qualifies the point,<sup>2</sup> Bloch argues that it is crucial for understanding music that it appears lately, as one untimely born: 'The Persians, Chaldeans and Egyptians, the Greeks and schoolmen, all of them without any music worth mentioning' (Bloch 1985c:136; 1974:159, 160). Why? Not only does music take up the role of a seemingly fading religion, but the lateness of music gives it a uniquely dialectical

2 In *The Principle of Hope* Bloch modifies his earlier bold statement, noting the contributions to musical theory (but not practice) of Pythagoras, Boëthius, Petrus Hispanus and the Scholastics (Bloch 1985c:213, 214; 1974:300, 301).

role in the anticipation of utopia, for it both negates and transforms, or rather sublates (*Aufhebung*) the hope embodied in religion.

Further, Bloch never tires of emphasising that music is a distinctly human activity: 'We hear only ourselves' is the opening statement of the whole work (Bloch 1985c:1; 1974:7). Known only through that most embedded of sense receptors – the ear – and manifested first as a listening to oneself, music is what we would now call a very human construct. For Bloch, this means that the building blocks of music are, after the note, voice, song and dance, in which rhythm first manifests itself. But it also means that Bloch opposes any argument for the mathematical, supra-human and divine existence of music, whether of spheres, planets or angels (Pythagoras and his myriad successors); or rather, he reads these in a dialectical fashion that enhances intimate human creativity in and through music.

I have already mentioned the pivotal role of the note in Bloch's philosophy, as indeed its fellow travellers on the journey (voice, song, dance and rhythm). The note follows a varied and twisting path; or rather it cuts a very new path through what are a mostly European collection of musical forms and a German collection of musicians. What Bloch does with his dialectical readings of the fugue and sonata, or Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, is thoroughly recast the story of music so that, in transforming its past, the future of music begins to look decidedly different and more hopeful.

Three items remain in by brief statement of Bloch's philosophy of music: he listens with a philosophical and theo-utopian ear, all the while striving to hear around corners. The first is obvious, especially in light of my earlier point that Bloch – the philosopher – sees music as philosophy in and of itself, needing but a touch-up here and a gloss there. However, Bloch's philosophical interest has a particular curve, for his lifelong pursuit was for a philosophy of hope, seeking not only to discover within the existing, albeit limited, parameters of philosophy its own irrepressible utopian drive, but also to reconstruct philosophy with an opening to utopia. Hence the 'utopian ear'; but theo-utopian? As any reader of Bloch's *Philosophy of Music* soon discovers, theology is never far from the surface. And when Bloch comes to close the various sections of the work, particularly the work as a whole, theology comes into play, explicitly, heretically, apocalyptically, in what I like to call his theo-utopian flourishes. More than one commentator has become uncomfortable with this theological Bloch, preferring to see such flourishes (elsewhere in his work, for few have commented on the *Philosophy of Music*) as unfortunate slips or at best peripheral rhetoric. I cannot disagree more and cannot emphasise enough how important theology is for understanding Bloch's work as a whole, let alone his musical reflections (see further Boer 2007a:1–56). This theo-utopian ear has

two dimensions. First, Bloch is astute enough to realise that the Bible and theology are laced with utopian themes, especially those relating to the last days, the eschaton and salvation, whether individual and collective, themes that he is keen to appropriate and reshape in a utopian direction. Second, we must not forget that Bloch saw music picking up the mantle of religion, a mantle that had slipped with the onset of modernity and secularism. So it should come as no surprise that eschatological themes from theology infuse his philosophy of music, for music functions as the *Aufhebung* of theology itself.

Finally, what does hearing around corners mean? Simply put, it is an intuitive grasp of the deeper urges and drives of music, well beyond analysing scores, techniques of production, performance and recording, or assiduously learning the 'rules' of musical (dis)harmony. For Bloch that hearing is, as we have seen, distinctly utopian, dialectical and theological, for the ear 'perceives more than can be explained conceptually' (Bloch 1985c:113; 1974:135). So it will not do to analyse what musicians say about their own work, or to criticise Bloch for his obvious lacks concerning musical history, theory and technique (some of which he sought to correct in his later work), or to challenge his interpretations of composers such as Bach, Beethoven and Wagner, or indeed – as I am inclined to do – to castigate him for a very European and especially German focus (both of which may feasibly be argued to be anomalies within world music).<sup>3</sup> Instead, the specifics become the means to a deeper insight into the very workings of music, requiring what he calls a clairvoyance in interpretation. Yet, this also means that Bloch's approach is far more amenable to analysing material seemingly at some distance from what he does study – in my case, rock music after 1950. But that is another part of the story of the note, beyond my mandate here.

### Structure

Bloch's concise study is organised into two equally weighted sections. After some introductory comments on the earliest moments of music and the method for what follows, the first section deals with the history of music, while the second concerns the philosophy of music per se (one may easily peruse the headings of each section in my appendix to gain a sense of Bloch's own structure). In perhaps too good a dialectical fashion, each part is divided into three,

3 In this respect I differ sharply from Korstvedt (2010), who mines precisely these very German composers even more deeply. I am interested in a very different path from Bloch, from his philosophy to the potential with rock music.

with greatest weight given to the third section – three quarters of the total argument is found in these two final sections.

As for history, Bloch is keen to develop a working model that feeds off Lukács's curious idea of the 'carpet' (*Teppich*),<sup>4</sup> alongside a dialectical structure that moves through three types of song: singing-to-oneself, the uniform song and open-ended song. Each of these forms corresponds to what is constitutive, impinging and fulfilled. Or, in terms of the following schema:

- (a) singing-to-oneself, which is manifested in the dance and in chamber music; a form that is constitutive and not merely prior or preliminary, awaiting its sublation in a more sophisticated form.
- (b) the uniform song (*geschlossenes Lied*), secular version of which is the oratorio (with which Bloch spends relatively little time), while the sacred one is the fugue; a form that is impinging, expecting something more, not so much so that it can be discarded but be transformed.
- (c) the open-ended song (*offenes Lied*), the place of the sonata, of Beethoven and Bruckner, of the transcendent opera, the symphony and Wagner; this form is fulfilled in a way that draws the other two forms into itself, realising their potential and transforming them in the process (Bloch 1985c:14–15; 1974:22–23).

How do the song – a deliberate choice, emphasising the human nature of music – and the constituent-emerging-fulfilled schema relate to one another? The first is a pure form which is corrective in nature, for which Bloch uses not Plato (God forbid!) but Lukács's term *Teppich*, or 'carpet', which is 'a certain encircling or a certain encompassing, detailing of the possible contents' (Bloch 1985c:14; 1974:22). The second item, the schema from constituent to fulfilled, is where reality bites.

This threefold structure provides the key to the whole first section, which we will explore in a moment. Before we do so, one might question the rigidity of three phases, precisely because of its theological (Trinitarian) and Hegelian pedigree. Bloch himself is a little nervous, postulating myriad qualifications and then proposing comparable 'syllogisms' – in painting, (still-life, portrait and large landscape), ornamentation (linear ornament, plastic art and multi-dimensional ornament), story-telling (short story, lyric poetry and great epic or dramatic poetry), theology (emotional craving for miracles, Protestantism and then the mediated faith of the Church), and of course music (the Grecian Mozart, Gothic Bach, the Baroque Beethoven and the incomparable Wagner).

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4 For a detailed treatment of the *Teppich* metaphor, see Korstvedt 2010:5–18.

Philosophically, Bloch is less resolute about a distinct schema, for now he wishes to lay heavy emphasis on his own preferences for a philosophy of music: the stress on very human creativity and musical production, the emphasis on the note and thereby dance and rhythm, harmony, the song, fugue, sonata and opera, and the search for the inner workings of music, to locate the 'thing-in-itself' of music, the utopian promise that is just around the corner. Yet even here dialectics are never far away, with Bloch seizing yet again (it is a key feature of the first section) on the relation between the Bachian fugue and the Beethovenian sonata in order to seek out the deeper-lying hope.

Perhaps this is a good moment to outline a double-problem and a proposal. The first part of the problem: as I have already indicated, Bloch works overwhelmingly with European and particularly German music, so much so that he is really offering a Western philosophy of music, in content at least. The trap is a common one, for the very particular and anomalous history of Western economics and culture (D'iakonoff 1999) becomes the norm for universalising 'the' philosophy of music. The second part concerns Bloch's tendency to focus on individual genius – Bach, Beethoven, Bruckner, Wagner are merely the most common names. Of course, Bloch realises the difficulty and therefore offers a defence of such genius, which may be accounted for to a limited extent through socio-historical context, but which does not in the end answer the simple question: why did Beethoven appear when he did while the Greeks provided no one of such stature (Bloch 1985c:7–10; 1974:14–17)? To my mind, Bloch does not solve this conundrum; suggesting a more complex relation between individual expression and socio-economic situation without elaborating what this might mean is not sufficient, especially when Bloch clearly sides with individual, largely German, composers. He is by no means the only one to operate with such assumptions – German and individual – but I flag them as problems here both in order to keep them in mind and seek possible ways to step beyond these foci. And that brings me to the proposal: what I seek in Bloch is a working method for approaching music. I am interested less in the historical reconstruction (its outline will appear below as part of the exposition) and more in the philosophical agenda, namely the effort to hear around corners with a theo-utopian ear.

## History

...that realm of heretical freedom which, in Bloch's world, is music's own, but which music has nevertheless had to reconquer again and again through history.

DREW 1985:xxiii

Bloch opens his account with an important if somewhat contentious argument: the flourishing of music has come belatedly (Bloch 1985c:2–4; 1974:8–10). In both theory and execution, music is a late bloomer, one who arrives when the party is almost over. As we saw in my earlier summary, Bloch opines that the ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians (from the fabled ‘fertile crescent’), let alone the Greeks, had little to show in terms of music. The Greeks might have left an incomparable body of drama and philosophy, if not the first historical writings (at least, around the pond known as the Mediterranean), but virtually nothing musically. The same might be said of those who produced the Bible, or the body of Roman Law, or the intricate systems of Medieval thought. Even the Thomist Schoolmen of the Middle Ages left dry, academic theories of music that had little life in them – in sharp contrast to the popular and inventive music of troubadours, folk songs, drinking songs and so on. To be sure, Bloch will later, in the section on music from *The Principle of Hope*, qualify this argument somewhat (Bloch 1985c:213, 214; 1974:300, 301), pointing out key elements of musical theory that include Pythagoras, Boëthius and the contrapuntists of Burgundy and Flanders (Jean de Muris, Jacob of Liège and Philip of Vitry).<sup>5</sup> But these theoretical elaborations come too close to the mathematical and heavenly theorists of the supra-human eternity of music to make Bloch feel overly comfortable. As we shall see, he attacks such arguments in the name of the humanity of music on more than one occasion.

Does Bloch’s argument hold water? Restricted to the West, yes – although the untroubled classicism whereby the ancient Greeks become forebears of Western civilisation needs to be troubled. With these qualifiers in mind, the great flourishing of musical practice and theory does indeed only emerge with the modern West, of which the infinitely rich variety of rock music is but the latest instance. No matter how much effort goes into reconstructing the music of, say, the ancient Israelites or Etruscans or Thracians or Greeks of Romans, the results are paltry.

Yet for Bloch the point is but a precursor, for it gives him an insight into the utopian function of music, on at least two counts. First – and less persuasively – the very youthfulness of music is the means by which it leaps back over the

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5 One may detect the qualification of his earlier stark statement in the way Bloch uses a favoured Luther quotation concerning the scholastic Josquin: ‘The other masters of song have to do as the note wants; but *Josquin* is the master of the notes, and they have to do what he wants’ (Bloch 1985c:3; 1974:9). Here it designates what might be possible if the dry academicism of scholastic music were to receive a jolt from below, from the inventive troubadours and popular customs. Later, in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1985c:202; 1974:287), the same quotation, albeit with Bloch’s characteristic rearrangement, recognises the achievements of Josquin’s complex works.

accretions of centuries to regain what is simplest, oldest and most basic.<sup>6</sup> Here Bloch runs the danger of a search for origins, which in musical terms (reiterated ad nauseam in discussions of rock) means the recovery of the primal, instinctual, Dionysian nature of music. Far better is his other dialectical take on the belatedness of music.

A few lines above I wrote the ‘modern West’; it should have included ‘secular’, for Bloch’s argument is that music comes into its own only when secularisation begins its long and bumpy path, unwinding the theological certainties of the feudal era and signalling in its own way the emergence of the modern world – which he would soon enough describe as capitalist. All that is theologically solid melts into air, to gloss Marx. Only now, in a world abandoned by God (Lukács) is music able to find its stride, because, as Bloch puts it, modern times ‘need and love the musician’.<sup>7</sup> The reason: kicked out of its primitive torpor by popular song and dance, music appropriates and transforms many of the functions of religion, including experiential ecstasy, formal diversity, theoretical elaboration, orthodoxies, orthopraxis and heresies, but above all – for Bloch – the deeply utopian function of theology. We can see how this dialectical argument for the utopian interplay of religion and music works itself out in Bloch’s argument, not least because the theological tenor of that argument is a major concern of mine.

### Phase One: Magic Rattle, Human Harp

All of this means that Bloch is most interested in the last of his three stages (outlined a little earlier), namely, the phase of the open-ended song, the fulfilment of the previous two stages. Indeed, his discussion of this third stage dwarfs the combined work of the other two by a ratio of 4 to 1. So brief is his discussion of the first phase – concerned with singing-to-oneself and dance (Bloch 1985c:16; 1974:24) – that we need to consider other works to fill in the

6 ‘Because they go deeper, musical structures do not possess youthfulness simply as an attribute. Rather, they grow younger precisely by virtue of the fact that they are growing older and rest upon themselves, thus attaining the new-and-old of the secret behind this repose.... And in the end it is exactly what is most reckless and painful, most “breakaway” and paradoxical that is closest to what is old, most primevally basic, simplest, given, longed for in a previous world, lost in an adult one’ (Bloch 1985c:12; 1974:20).

7 The full text reads: ‘If, therefore, the modern note is in itself the better one, it is certainly not because of its young looks or its surprisingness, attractive only to those who crave change. It is better because the times – modern times, the time of Advent understood as symbol – need and love the musician’ (Bloch 1985c:13; 1974:20).

picture (and not merely see what he says later about them in the grand dialectical uptake of the third phase).

In particular, in the brief essay, 'Magic Rattle, Human Harp' (Bloch 1985c:140–145; 1974:202–207),<sup>8</sup> he offers *in nuce* but with different emphases yet another sketch of the history of music. Here we go behind the first stage of song to identify the first moment of music itself. Before this moment, the instrument was primary, the note an attribute. This is the time of magic drum, rattling shells, tinkling bells. Endowed with magical power, the instrument itself heals, brings rain and ensures a favourable outcome in war. However, at an indefinable moment, the note detaches itself from the instrument, using it now as a means of assistance but gaining a life of its own. For Bloch with his European focus and unchallenged classicist assumption of the Greek origins of the West, the pan-pipe marks this crucial turning point. No longer a collection of 'fear-some and muffled sounds' but a well-ordered series of notes, music itself is born, 'music as a shout of sorrow or pleasure and not as material magically sounding' (Bloch 1985c:140; 1974:202). One may wish to question the assumption that music must be well-ordered sound and not noise, as Attali (1985, 1977) also assumed, or even that noise itself does not have its own patterns, but this feature of his argument is not a necessary one. The point that the note lifts from its base to set out on its own still stands, marked – to extend Bloch – by the role of the note itself rather than the instrument as a cure for one's ills (as with David playing of the harp for a troubled King Saul in 1 Samuel). Indeed, when music itself is born, one could argue that the instrument too emerges, for it becomes an aid to the note rather than the prime focus. And the signal of the note's autonomy is that the note may be played by any number of instruments, since no longer is the note tied to its specific instrument. One does not need feathers, incisions or animal tails to enhance the power of the instrument, nor does one wear the instrument as amulet, since it has slipped into the background: 'The musical note evinced much vigour in turning from the attribute of a thing to the very thing that matters, in a developed state; from an adjective into a substantive; from a fortuitous excrescence of objects that were rubbed, struck or blown into a universal, though purely "artistic", realm with melodic and above all human relations of its own' (Bloch 1985c:141; 1974:203).

Of course, traces of this material connection remain, as in the continued association of trumpets with kings and trombones with priests, but now that the note is autonomous three further developments take place. First, the voice itself comes into play. Here we have the necessary correlate with Bloch's abiding concern with the human dimensions of music, manifested in the song as a

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<sup>8</sup> The argument is repeated in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1985c:196–197).

central category of analysis. The open-ended song is the natural outflow of the voice, manifested most intimately as a singing-to-oneself. Secondly, as an inescapable accompaniment to the voice and its song, the tapping of the foot, the gentle bobbing of the head and the first signs of a sway take place, almost involuntarily. The vibrations of the vocal chords do not take place in isolation, for the dancing body is itself part of the picture dance. Third, now we arrive at the following dialectical point: through the note's autonomy from the instrument, it is now enabled to appropriate the voice as a physical, instrumental location. In a fashion we will encounter with the third stage of the song, in which the previous two stages are transformed, so also does the pre-history of music return in a different form. With the singer, we have a body that sings, not so much a beating drum or sacred instrument, but a human harp. The singer, writes Bloch, 'is distinctly in touch with the archaic remains, with music as the object set in motion and emitting its own sound' (Bloch 1985c:144; 1974:206). But why make such a dialectical argument? Bloch is in the end a historical materialist and not an idealist: for that reason this argument provides the underlying logic for the persistent theme of the humanness of music, a theme that resonates through the following analysis.

### The Uniform Song

As we pass to the next stage, Bloch draws into this category (of the uniform song) the many-faceted shapes of the song – folksong, Minnesingers, aria, cantilena, even opera. Yet he is keen to focus on recognisable composers in order to further his argument. The two who appear here are Mozart and Bach, the one a representative of the secular side of the uniform song and the other of its sacred side. Both have a role to play, although Bloch favours Bach over against Mozart, whose songs are light, enchanting, buoyant, aerial (The Magic Flute is the key reference<sup>9</sup>), but also charming and amiable, lacking the tensions and contradictions of what Bloch seeks: 'no energy is charged and discharged; snowbound passes, the mist and the forest are lacking, there is no going astray and no warm light in the distance' (Bloch 1985c:19; 1974:27). By contrast, Bach is the one who cracks open the sheer dominance of the solo melody line of the voice, thereby opening up the possibility of the fugue (his own forte) and the sonata of Beethoven. He does so by taking the singularity of the human voice as instrument and rendering it yet another instrument in the orchestra,

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9 See especially Korstvedt's effort to extend and deepen Bloch's analysis of *The Magic Flute* (Korstvedt 2010:125–152).

a move that had the dialectical effect of opening up many more possibilities for the voice through the union of the orchestra and contrapuntal development – precisely the conditions for the fugue and sonata.

Despite his obvious affection for Bach, Bloch is keen to identify the utopian moment in both. For Bach it is a matter of glimpsed possibilities, of the way the limits of his instruments anticipate future possibilities (for example, music composed for the harpsichord had to await the grand piano to realise Bach's full potential), or of the way his music looks towards another universe. By contrast, Mozart gives voice to the Luciferan and very human rebellion against the oppressive and dogmatic powers that be. Or, in Bloch's words: 'Hence Mozart presents the – always small – secular, Luciferan self, and Bach the – again always small – sacred Christian self, the self of goodwill or the released Adam attainable through the more subjective, Protestant outlook which comes closer to it...' (Bloch 1985c:23, 24; 1974:33).

### Fulfilled, Open-Ended Song

At the dawn of the modern age, the note encounters a moment as immense as its first breath of freedom, for now it breaks out of the confines of the previous stage, desirous of stretching its legs and seeing the world. Or, in a theological register, 'The early cloister is opened, and the chaotic world, the external dream before the genuine cloister shines in' (Bloch 1985c:24; 1974:33).<sup>10</sup> Yet, just when the note sets its eyes on wide horizons, Bloch paradoxically restricts his references to names like Wolf, Strauss, Klopstock, Weber, Marschner, Schubert, Hayden, Beethoven, Bruckner, Mahler and Wagner – all German (with an Austrian or two), although his – flawed – heroes are Beethoven and Wagner. I will come back to them in a moment, for first I wish to draw attention to the key features of this long section.

10 This breaking out of the cloister does not necessarily mean the beginning of the end of religion, as the secularisation hypotheses would have it, but a deep transformation of the nature of religion. As Bloch puts it in terms of collectives: 'Now, the old religious community has burst apart, and we can no longer enjoy or even create a choir, the work of this community, as a religious force: we can only have it as a longed-for strength and unity. There is now a different gathering together, a different seeking and finding on the part of the souls firmly united in this gathering. There is a different longing for organisation and above all for the coherence of something global which will bring men together and will, in the choir, endow them with a thousand voices in order to seek for the one God, to proclaim their vigil to the heights, to invoke salvation with a thousandfold, now musically transcendent cry...the community has less to praise the Holy Spirit than to bear witness to it' (Bloch 1985c:27; 1974:36).

To begin with, as the final step in the dialectic, this stage draws the other two up within it, transforming them in the process. Thus, while the promise of the fugue is realised in Beethoven's sonata, when the internally sacred focus of the former turns to the world, the earliest phase of singing-to-oneself and dancing is thoroughly sublated first in Bruckner's chamber music but above all in Wagner's grand project. Second, Bloch is careful not to let his enthusiasm for Beethoven or Wagner get the better of him, for he balances an awareness of their breakthroughs (and in Wagner's case defends him against his critics (Bloch 1985c:44–45; 1974:56–57)) with sustained criticisms – especially of Wagner. The reason: they have glimpsed in only a glass darkly the utopian promise of music. Third, I note again Bloch's resolute focus on the song so to keep the human orientation of music to the fore. Finally, woven into the fabric of his argument is his – heretical – theological concern to identify the utopian mantle music has picked up from the ground where it was dropped by religion.

*Beethoven, the wrecker of keyboards.* Bloch moves quickly to Beethoven, who clears away the false and stifling, the leaden and the distorted. As 'Lucifer's benign offspring (Luzifers gutter Sohn)' (Bloch 1985c:31 and also 132; 1974:42 and 156), he embodies 'the universal spirit of music who wrecked keyboards (der die Klaviere zerstrümmert), swept in like a hurricane and turned even the strongest orchestra to jelly in the face of his music's a priori exorbitancy' (Bloch 1985c:30; 1974:40).<sup>11</sup> Beethoven carries on Bach's task, blasting open the voice for vastly new purposes, dialectically relegating it to the choir so that it may emerge renewed and multitudinous. The result is the sonata, which Bloch traces from the tail-end of Bach's duothematic music, through Hayden's persistent development of this approach until it emerged in the polyphonic sonata, Beethoven's authentic form, with its passion, pain, cheerfulness and liberation. In an ecstatic couple of pages (Bloch 1985c:34–35; 1974:44–46), Bloch outlines why Beethoven is so important: in providing the decisive break into the secular realm, Beethoven embodies that rebellious spirit found in Lucifer or Prometheus, in Eve and Cain, in the Murmuring Stories of the wilderness of Sinai and the courageous protest of Job. Yet, it is also implicitly atheistic, as the

11 Or, as far as the note itself is concerned: 'The extravagantly treated note, the surging sound and the constant admixture composed of tension, chaos and destiny overflow into a style of music which is largely non-melodic, which is melismatic in terms of recitative, thematic in terms of motifs and develops purely symphonically as a whole' (Bloch 1985c:26; 1974:35). On melisma – a melodic passage of several notes sung to one syllable of text, as a utopian moment when the vocal melody breaks free of the signifying word, when music itself tries to reach for the absolute – see Korstvedt (2010:80).

conclusion to *Atheism in Christianity* also postulates, in which the exodus out of Yahweh is an atheism of protest. Similarly, Beethoven offers a secular voice that grows with strength as the old religious myths and their universe fall away and a new human claim is made. All the same, Beethoven does not dispense with these myths; instead, he transforms them into a renewed utopian promise, for this Luciferan figure is ‘the seed of the Paraclete, the active substance of humanity itself’ (Bloch 1985c:35; 1974:46).<sup>12</sup> Yet even Beethoven fails to make the distance, falling short, for his promise is barely an outline and nowhere a full utopian picture.

*On reading Wagner, dialectically.* What, then, of Wagner? Why does Bloch wish to retrieve him, and at such length (Bloch 1985c:43–65; 1974:54–80)? Wagner, I must admit leaves me cold, so it is a salutary lesson to see what Bloch does with him.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, it should not surprise me that Bloch wishes to retrieve Wagner’s utopian dimensions and that for three reasons. First, Bloch seeks to show how Wagner draws up the previous two phases, the singing-to-oneself and the uniform song, fulfilling their utopian potential. Further, as with *Heritage of Our Times* (1991), Bloch does not want to hand Wagner over to the fascists, as Adorno is wont to do;<sup>14</sup> instead, he wishes to locate the utopian element in midst of Wagner’s dross. In doing so, Bloch provides an incisive assessment of Wagner’s greatness and deep failures. A third deployment of the dialectic focuses on Wagner’s wholesale parleying with myth, which now brings out Bloch’s strategy for the discernment of myth, later to come into full

12 The complete theo-utopian text reads: ‘Beethoven in contrast stirs up the rubble and magic of the end quite differently. He does so with a violence that can indeed enter upon the three higher stages, Faith, Illumination and the Apocalypse, as the stages of the complete self. Here, and in just this way, it is no longer the first Jesus and not yet the second Jesus that is Beethoven’s guardian spirit and object. The role is filled by Lucifer: the fighter in the front rank, the *seed* of the Paraclete, the active substance of humanity itself’ (Bloch 1985c:35; 1974:46).

13 Here and elsewhere: see also ‘Paradoxes and the Pastorale in Wagner’s Music’ (Bloch 1985c:146–182; 1974:218–255), ‘On the Text of Beckmesser’s Prize Song’ (Bloch 1998:178–184; 1974:208–215), ‘Hans Sachs’s Address to the Elder-Blossoms: On a Passage in Wagner’s *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*’ (Bloch 1998:186–188; 1974:214–217), and especially the comparable dialectical analysis in ‘Rescuing Wagner Through Surrealistic Colportage’ (Bloch 1991:338–345; 1974:176–184). See the detailed treatment in Korstvedt (Korstvedt 2010: 87–124), where he traces Bloch’s efforts to reclaim the utopian dimensions of Wagner amidst the dross.

14 In this respect, Bloch offers a better reading of Wagner than Adorno’s very undialectical reading (Adorno 1981, 2003 (1971)). As Drew puts it so well: ‘The disillusionment Adorno pursues and cherishes so ardently belongs within the dark circle at the foot of Bloch’s lighthouse’ (Drew 1985: xliv).

play in both *Atheism in Christianity* and in parts of *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 2009, 1968, 1995, 1985a), but also at other moments of musical analysis (Bloch 1998:138; 1974:199). In essence, Bloch's discernment – which I have had occasion to call upon more than once (Boer 2007a, b; 2009) – designates a sophisticated approach that does not hand over myth to reaction, wrestling out the emancipatory moments of myth from the midst of its oppressive narrative; indeed, it argues that those instances of liberation are enabled by the patterns of oppression. Let us take each point in turn.

As Bloch makes clear in his opening lines on Wagner, the latter thoroughly sublates the two earlier phases of the song, especially in terms of voice, harmony and rhythm. Thus far we have had the breakdown of the uniform song by means of the voice being relegated to the choir and then the orchestra, a move that had the effect of breaking up its former patterns (solo melody, uniform patterns) so that now it is ready for a new role. Bach may have first put the crowbar to the uniform song, Beethoven may have wrenched it open and given us the sonata, but Wagner offers the full breakthrough, in which the voice is no longer a melody influencing the course of events, but leaps out of the orchestra into vocal polyphony. But as it does so, singing-to-oneself returns – the feature of the first phase, the thoroughly human origins of music itself.

So also do the harmonic features of the first phase return, which Wagner completely recasts through his renovation of the chord. In order to show how, Bloch retells the story of the chord, recalling Bach, Bruckner and Beethoven as they lead in to Wagner, via fugues and symphonies and counterpoint. Above all, Wagner dialectically brings together the other levels, now in terms of the subtlety of chamber music (from phase one) and the sacred fugue of the uniform song (phase two). The result: in Wagner's chords 'all the notes are actively moving, all going somewhere, leading or being led; the third strives upwards, the seventh downwards, until the key asserts its will and the concluding consonance appears' (Bloch 1985c:49, 50; 1974:62).

And so also do dance and rhythm return from the first phase, which Wagner retrieves through the shock of syncopation. 'Discovered' by Beethoven and fully exploited by Wagner, Bloch defines syncopation as follows:

It is a dragging or urging forwards, a retarding or anticipation of the melodic impulse; or, as Grunsky first accurately defined the syncope in answer to Hugo Riemann, a new way of emphasising and freshly accentuating unstressed passages, a new element to the beat, a bracing and matching of the stressed against the unstressed and vice versa. By means of the friction arising through the presence of different time-divisions, it thus becomes possible to execute several rhythms simultaneously, even if

these can only be sensed in the jolt at the end of the beat. By this means, but not of course through this alone, the beat is frequently subdivided. Indeed it is a useful exaggeration to say that one beat now turns into myriad, and with unstable, strongly syncopated, poly-rhythms there is now room for any kind of polyphony.

BLOCH 1985c:46; 1974:58-9

I must admit that it requires an effort for me to perceive the shock effect of syncopation. For one who has played rhythm and lead guitar, both solo and with bands, syncopation seems so natural, so much part of the way music works, it requires a moment of estrangement to sense the outrage caused by syncopation's first deployment, before (as Bloch points out earlier with each renewal of music) it became part of the accepted way in which music operates. But how does syncopation recover and transform the first phase's focus on dance? In a brilliant move, Bloch argues that syncopation is actually a dialectical pick-up of ancient practices – dervishes, the rotating souls of Dionysius the Areopagite, David dancing before the Ark of the Covenant, or indeed (to go beyond Bloch), the complex poly-rhythms one finds in some forms of African drumming and so on. All of these Wagner appropriates, transforms and deploys in new ways.

Nonetheless, Bloch is not thoroughly mesmerised by Wagner. In the great final flourish on Wagner (Bloch 1985c:52–65; 1974:65–80), with a focus on Tristan, Bloch brings the retelling of the story of the note to a close. Wagner offers much, for through his sublation of voice, harmony and rhythm, he touches on the promise of what Bloch calls the astral myth, in which the hero is a usurper, reaching for the sun and overthrowing the old gods. Yet, Wagner falls short, miserably so.<sup>15</sup> Much in Wagner is musically undesirable (Bloch 1985c:60; 1974:74), for the note lapses into emptiness, if not mere brutishness. Indeed, redemption becomes futile, a narcotic to dull one's pain, and what seemed to offer the promise of revolutionary utopianism turns out to be nothing more

15 In the midst of the initial praise of Wagner, an early hint suggests the assessment will not remain so rosy: 'But however thoroughly the quieter, more deeply Christian splendour of the adagio already overlies this, the fact remains that what is behind the yearning process – repose, out-and-out soul, the Bachian fugue as *musica sacra*, the metaphysical adagio, music as "space", the music of the Paracletian self, architectonic counterpoint of the highest order – all this remains unachieved because of the profoundly un-Christian mysticism of the universal and general in Wagner' (Bloch 1985c:57; 1974:70, 71). See also the later comments, in which Wagner may be the elaborate working out (unknowingly at first) of Schopenhauer's philosophy of music, but in which they both come up very short (Bloch 1985c:125–130; 1974:147–153).

than a facade, a 'world of cardboard, greasepaint and grotesque heroic poses (von Pappe, Schminke, und heilloser Heldenpose)' (Bloch 1985c:61; 1974:75). Why the trenchant criticism after hailing Wagner's breakthroughs? The reason for such a discernment of Wagner's promise and failings has much to do, I would suggest, with the Nazi appropriation of Wagner. Much is 'smut, gold and narcotics, provided in terms of its breadth, bogus ecstasy and impersonal glory in the service of the Nature principal', so much so that the music becomes 'pathologically poisoned' (Bloch 1985c:64, 65; 1974:78–79, 79). If Bloch had rested with such assessments, he would have sided with Adorno's undialectical assessment. Yet he does not, for he wishes to retrieve from the midst of Wagner's flimsy constructions and narco-redemption a genuine utopian moment, one that could not have happened without all that is dystopian about Wagner.

A similar strategy operates in Bloch's approach to myth in Wagner. The content of Wagner's works is thoroughly mythical, seeking to recover the richness of especially Teutonic mythology. Bloch digs deep into the mythical roots of Wagner (Bloch 1985c:58, 59; 1974:72, 73), especially with the basic astral myth in which the solar cauldron is stolen from the giant, the grail is attained, the sun conquered, rain brought and light mastered. And this cauldron or pitcher of light is also the grail with which Joseph of Arimathea collected the solar blood, the blood of the Saviour. Bloch espies revolutionary gunpowder here, in this storming of heaven that promises something vastly new. And it is by no means completely pagan, for it is woven with Christian themes that are atrophied if one applies an artificial separation of pagan and Christian. For Bloch, this division is simply mistaken, missing the point that the real concern is whether liberation may be found.

In other words, unlike Adorno or Benjamin or even the out-and-out liberal, Ernst Cassirer, or in our own day, Badiou, Bloch does assume that myth is the default territory of reaction. Indeed, he challenges the nationalistic and even racist recovery of 'serious' myth in the 18th and 19th centuries – with its Indo-European hypothesis, the northern origins of human civilisation and the championing of the Volk (see Lincoln 2000) – by arguing for an inescapable emancipatory element in myth. The same may also be said for his effort to see the positive dimension in Wagner's recovery of rhythm through syncopation and the dance, for here we find myth, chthonos, paganism and the body's lower register. Bloch attempts a dialectical reading of this feature of music without falling into a dead-end primitivism (or at least he tries to):

It (syncopation) is also accompanied, in practice, by the paganism embodied in it from ancient times. One purpose of this was to communicate its Dionysian character; another was to dictate to music all manner of

delirious self-destruction, tyranny of the lower body and physiologically earthbound, indeed starbound, Dionysian-Mithraic, astral transcendent.

BLOCH 1985c: 49; 1974: 62

When I read comments such as these, Bloch begins to provide the nascent elements of a dialectical theory of rock, but that is another task. So, for Bloch, Wagner provides the resolution of the earlier phases, in terms of voice, harmony and rhythm, and he offers a utopian glimpse in the midst of all his dystopian and reactionary rubbish. Like Bach or Beethoven, Wagner is but a frail forerunner and necessary precedent for the new 'realms of the note'. In what has by now become an expected theo-utopian flourish at the end of each section of his text, Bloch writes: 'the complete freedom and consistency of objective music, the incipient speaking in many tongues and hence the Luciferan-Paracletian willing of the man-linked spirit of music itself could have proclaimed the true mystery, the mystery of the intelligible realm' (Bloch 1985c:65; 1974:79, 80).

So much for the history of music, with which I have taken some time, for this is as much an expository as a critical study. The twisting path of a very human note (even if it sings with a noticeably German accent) still finds us short of its promise. But at least Bloch has listened closely for the theo-utopian strains of the note, even if it lacks eloquence just yet, 'a fervent stammering (*heisses Stammeln*) like that of a child' (Bloch 1985c:65; 1974:80) so that it still cannot be fully understood. But now we leave the history of the note in order to examine the philosophy of music.

### Philosophy

For as hearers we can keep closely in touch, as it were. The ear is slightly more firmly embedded in the skin than the eye is (Bloch 1985c:73; 1974:89).

There is no music of fire and water or of the Romantic wilderness that does not of necessity, through the very note-material, contain within it the fifth of the elements: man.

BLOCH 1985c:227; 1974:316

In the second part of his study on music, Bloch shifts from history to philosophy, from wholesale reconstruction of the past in order to generate a different possibility for the future to an effort to provide the glosses on music's natural philosophical curve. I shall focus on the main aspects of the philosophical side, stressing the most important and fruitful. The two foundational features of his

analysis are, firstly, the very human nature of music, a humanness emphasised by stressing hearing and singing, and, secondly, the proactivity of the note – whose story, we should remember, this is. With these prolegomena kept in mind, I focus on the massive third section of part two, called 'Means, formulae, forms and phenomenal aspect of the transcending theory of music'. At first appearance, the structure of this section is obvious, for it concerns four topics: means, formula, form and phenomenon. However, the detail is a little more complex, for Bloch squeezes six categories into four (two go into each of the last two). The four may be summarised as follows (before I sink into more detail).

While means designates the note and its very human nature (concerning which I will already have said enough), formula designates an old tension in music, between technique and expression, mechanical skill and feeling. Bloch returns time and again to this topic, so I bring together those various discussions, drawing attention to the tensions in and between Bloch's treatments. The third category is form and here Bloch includes both an insightful treatment of rhythm and then a contrapuntal dialectic between Bach and Beethoven, a topic to which he returns in *The Principle of Hope*, now sharpening the opposition so that Beethoven's breakthrough takes on the colours and shapes of revolution. In the fourth and final level we come across the phenomenon, which designates the effort to hear around corners, the search for another way of hearing. It is thoroughly dialectical: while one expects that Bloch's increasing theo-utopian momentum would squash the note's humanity, the opposite is true. The more he stresses the transcending, theological dimension of the note's internal drive to utopia, the more does its deeply human nature come forth.

### **We Hear Only Ourselves: On the Humanness of Music**

I have already indicated clearly that for Bloch music is an intimately human practice, but now I explore that inescapable feature of his philosophy of music in a little more detail. After some general comments, I focus on two dimensions of this human music, namely hearing and singing. To begin with, if we thought that the note was entirely autonomous from its human maker, then we miss the mark by a long way indeed. No matter how much the note may lead one to an ecstatic, 'explosive aha!'-experience of the parting of the mist', no matter how visionary it might be, the note is still 'heard and used and apprehended...sung by human beings and conveying human beings' (Bloch 1985c:92; 1974:111). For the note cannot, of course, sound out by itself. It needs human

beings to be a note at all. Or, as Bloch puts it, beautifully, more extensively and with a Christological touch:

It is only within us that it can flower and awaken. The note is intensified by us, qualitatively coloured and dispersed immediately by us. It is only we who exalt it – more than that, who stabilise it and allow it to be animated with our life. True, it is no accident that precisely this delicate, transparent body is chosen. Certainly intoxication lies not in the wine but in the soul; nonetheless, there is palpably at work in the natural note a preternatural buoyancy and eloquence which renders it pre-eminently suitable as the material of music.

BLOCH 1985c:93; 1974:112

Above all, the humanity of the note is most obvious in two dimensions, welling up in both hearing and singing. For Bloch, any philosophy of music that does not fold back and include the act of listening within its deliberations shirks its responsibilities. So we find that both of the two great sections of the essay are introduced with a typical Blochean statement: ‘We hear only ourselves (*Wir hören nur uns*)’ is the opening statement of the first part; ‘All we hear is ourselves (*Wir hören aber nur uns selber*)’ begins the second (Bloch 1985c:1, 66; 1974:7, 81).

Note what has happened: a philosophy of music involves not merely a listening to music produced by others; it begins with hearing ourselves. What does that mean? Music is internal; it is not heard from outside and then appropriated, but comes from within. Music is not alien to us (he uses the image of being absorbed by a forest of which are a part), like a fire ‘in which not the vibrating air but we ourselves begin to quiver and to cast off our cloaks’ (Bloch 1985c:1; 1974:7). Here of course dance emerges, closely and intimately from this hearing ourselves.

When Bloch returns to this theme in the second part of the essay, he shifts focus slightly. True, hearing is a thoroughly intimate bodily experience, for the ‘ear is slightly more firmly embedded in the skin than the eye is’ (Bloch 1985c:73; 1974:89). But now he stresses the imperfections and uncertainties of hearing, the lapses in attention, the weaknesses of the ear, the limits of one pair of faulty ears. Add to that levels of tone deafness, histories of deafness within one’s own family (which threaten to afflict one’s own ears), the knowledge of those infinitely more talented, and Bloch’s point is well taken. Of course, Bloch also means that inability to hear more deeply, the difficulty of developing a utopian clairvoyance (which we will meet in a moment) or a listening around corners. Yet, lest we begin to think that Bloch speaks of hearing for a blessed

and supremely-endowed elite of hearers (as one might expect given his tendency to focus on individual musical geniuses), he both dispenses with the strange deafness of academic listeners, musicologists, savants and artists (Bloch 1985c:66; 1974:81) and emphasises the central role of the ordinary listener, for such listening is the key to wonder and the utopian ground of the soul. In fact, in order to hear our own selves, the ‘deeply moved, supremely innocent listener (*zutiefst unkennerische Zuhörer*) must be preserved and comprehended just as he is in order for him to re-emerge as the man for whose sake the whole thing is happening’ (Bloch 1985c:130; 1974). All of which is a welcome correction to, if not also a tension with, his liking for individual – and usually German – geniuses like Bach, Beethoven and Wagner.

But what of singing? More physically intimate than the ear is our own throat. We are able to hear ourselves precisely because we sing to ourselves. As we have already seen, at the heart of music is the simple act of singing to ourselves, which is as bodily original as dance. The hum while engaged in a mundane task, the whistle along the path, the riff that we sing again and again, the tune that is stuck in our head – in these ordinary and everyday moments singing and hearing are almost inseparable and, for Bloch, the foundations for any philosophy of music. Hence his description of the voice as the ‘human harp’ and his point that the key to a piece of music is not the values of the notes themselves, but what ‘it contains of the actual person singing, and thus of the quality the singer or player “puts into” the note’ (Bloch 1985c:68; 1974:83).

### The Proactive Note

A second foundational feature of music is, as we have seen, the note. In my discussion of the first part of Bloch’s essay, I traced the way his retelling of the history of music becomes the story of the note. In the second, philosophical part of the essay, the emphasis on the note is perhaps even stronger, but now in terms of the note’s own initiative and in a search for the utopian dimensions of the note, as phenomenon and as thing-in-itself. I shall return to the second point later, but here my concern is the proactivity of the note (never forgetting its intimately human and bodily nature).

The sharpest statement of that proactive nature is found in a section called ‘the creative musical setting’, which I will exegete for a few moments (Bloch 1985c:73–84; 1974:89–102). To begin with, Bloch argues that the note renders ‘every happening sharper, more penetrating, more sensuous’ (Bloch 1985c:73; 1974:89). What does this mean? He draws upon an oft-used example of the way sound in a film encourages hearing to fulfil the role of all the other senses bar

seeing (Bloch 1998:156–162; 1974:185–191). With the eyes taken up with viewing the screen, the remaining senses are denied any role, blocked out and silenced. But then the music seeks to fill the gap; or rather listening to the music makes up for the lack, with hearing now representing smell, touch and taste. Bloch first made this argument in relation to silent film, in which a live pianist or even an orchestra would play as the reel rolled, but it applies just as well to the so-called sound track on ‘talkies’.

The second element in the proactive nature of the note is its role in leading us towards what Bloch calls the ‘truly significant’ – to be distinguished from the ‘merely striking’ (Bloch 1985c:73; 1974:89). Little more needs to be said on this point, in which Bloch warns us away from florid excess and urges us to exercise restraint in what is best described as a cranking up of the (utopian) potential of the note so that it may spring forth at the right time. But how does one tell when the note achieves this status? It seems like a deeply intuitive grasp of the promise of music, when a piece of music breaks through and touches me just there, triggers a deep and unexpected association, a memory, a person or a place, catching me unawares and unmasking a glimmer of possibility that another world might be possible. It is what they used to call the revolutionary power of music (back in the sixties at least, although that is by no means the only time the power of music has been felt). Bloch’s language is more theo-utopian: ‘the beam of a musically penetrative awakening, realisation, accentuating’; or ‘that mystical musical area of ultimate reality’, which ‘exhausts the spiritual ontologies beyond any possible world-destiny, any continuing epic of the world’ (Bloch 1985c:75; 1974:91, 92).

The third and fourth points deal with the relation between note and word.<sup>16</sup> Partly for polemical reasons (Bloch directs his criticism at a certain Pfitzner<sup>17</sup>), he distinguishes sharply between note and word, to the detriment of the former. Thus, his third point is that when the note and the word come into contact with one another, the note itself takes the lead, ‘composing’ under its own steam and even producing ‘a dramatic outline of its own making (*einen selbst-tätigen dramatischen Umriss*)’ (Bloch 1985c:75; 1974:92). Dramatic action becomes subservient to the note, which now draws the word after it. Is this really the case? Does the note count rather than the word, the music over against the lyrics? Are not the two intrinsically entwined? In Bloch’s favour,

16 See also the subtle revisiting of this question in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1985c:203–207; 1974:289–294).

17 As a good polemicist, Bloch did not hold back when engaging in public debate concerning music. See ‘Lehár–Mozart’, ‘The Full Beard as Harp’ and ‘Arrival and Overtures’ (Bloch 1998:11–17, 184; 1974:192–195, 201).

one need only recall the function of the riff in a song, especially one that has entered into the sub-stream of 'great' songs. For it is not usually the words that mark the song, but its riff, even if we designate the song by its title: 'Smoke on the Water' by Deep Purple, 'Aqualung' by Jethro Tull, 'It's a Long Way to the Top' by AC/DC, 'The Fifth Symphony' by Beethoven...

Fourth, 'the whole of the action that can be spoken is latently overtaken in this way by the sounds originating in us, by the subjective streak in the note' (Bloch 1985c:79; 1974:96). That is to say, the very human quality of the note enables it to take the lead in its relation with the word, drawing it up and elevating the word in the process. Thus, allowing the word to overtake and dominate the note leads to a ridiculous outcome; by contrast, when the note takes the lead, it lifts the word up to new levels in which even the modest boatman has oars of gold.

Does it always happen this way with the relation between word and music? I suspect not always, for at times the poetry of the lyrics may stand alone and not to their detriment. The words of a militant anthem are as important as the music and hymns have long been recognised as key statements of faith. Yet when we expand what is meant by the 'word' beyond lyrics and into the realm of interpretation and criticism, Bloch's argument has a point. Not only are the words of critics inadequate to the music heard, but the spoken or written words of a composer are invariably highly dubious. Bloch cites Wagner's 'most questionable of interpretations' (Bloch 1985c:81; 1974:99), to which I would add Nick Cave's incessant speaking and writing, often with a view to directing interpretation of his own music (see Boer 2005). Or as Elvis Costello once said, 'Writing about music is like dancing about architecture' (Gracyk 1996:vii). Yet Bloch wishes to go further, for the note itself is incomparably more capable of drawing us to utopia, not least because the qualitatively different simply cannot be described in terms of words: 'even the well-chosen word (*das gute Wort*), the word that has poetic value, will necessarily fall short of the note' (Bloch 1985c:82; 1974:100). Bloch takes an example from one of his favoured authors, Hoffmann, to show how the note outpaces the word, drawing it breathlessly along in the ride to utopia:

The voice in every great song, every profound setting of words, is like the voice of that ghostly traveller from Hoffmann's *Kreisleriana* who tells of many distant, unknown countries and people and unusual destinies on his far wanderings, and whose speech finally "died away into a wondrous sounding in which he intelligibly uttered unknown, extremely mysterious things without recourse to words".

BLOCH 1985c:80; 1974:97

### Transcendence of the Note

Thus, far we have explored the deeply human nature of music, especially in terms of hearing and singing, and then witnessed the emergence of the note from behind the scenes, whether in terms of its sharpening effect, its potential to unearth an unexpected utopian moment and its superiority over the word. Now I pick up the third section of the second part of Bloch's essay, a vast chunk of text that is supposed, according to Bloch's announcement at the beginning of the plunge, to lay out the means, formula, forms and phenomenal aspect of the note (Bloch 1985c:93–133; 1974:112–157). However, what he really means is the human nature of the note, which I have already discussed, the contradiction between technique and performed interpretation (formula), the philosophy of rhythm and (contrapuntal) dialectic (forms) and a final theo-utopian push to locate what he calls the thing-in-itself of the note (phenomenon). Since this long section forms the main part of Bloch's philosophical discussion, I will deal with each item in turn – apart, of course, from the human note.

*Technique versus interpretation.* I begin, then, with one of the great tensions in music, between technique and feeling, skill and intuition, mere reproduction and interpretive 'attack', even static score and dynamic performance – the way one posits the opposition unveils yet another angle. Again and again Bloch returns to this opposition, reiterating his arguments or taking a fresh approach. So, apart from the discussion in the section under immediate consideration here, 'The Theory of Harmony as Formula' (Bloch 1985c:93–99; 1974:112–119), we find him already broaching the issue in the opening pages of *Philosophy of Music* (Bloch 1985c:5–7; 1974:12–14), in the sections called 'Attack' (Bloch 1985c:68–72; 1974:83–88), in the essay entitled 'On the Mathematical and Dialectical Character in Music' (Bloch 1985c:183–194; 1974:267–279), in his reprise of the philosophy of music in parts of *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1985c:208–219; 1974:295–307) and briefly in 'Magic Rattle, Human Harp' (Bloch 1985c:141–212; 1974:202, 203).

Throughout these various discussions Bloch is caught between two positions: he wishes to maintain a dialectical approach, attempting to locate the utopian possibilities within a resolute devotion to technique (see Bloch 1985c:208–219; 1974:295–307),<sup>18</sup> and yet he obviously prefers the side of feeling, intuition and interpretation, as one would expect, given his expressionist leanings. Already in the opening pages of *The Philosophy of Music* (Bloch 1985c:5–7; 1974:12–14) he accords technical mastery second place, for otherwise one loses

18 Korstvedt mistakenly argues that Bloch consistently takes a dialectical position concerning this relationship (Korstvedt 2010:74, 81–87).

the reason for such technique in the first place. However, more is going on in Bloch's various analyses, for each time he discusses this problem, he does so from a slightly different angle. I am reminded of a room with a number of different windows; all of them look into the same room, but each one provides another view, a different perspective. So in order to gain a full sense of his argument, I will consider each window in turn.

To begin with, technique-versus-inspiration is the first window through which I choose to look – 'The Theory of Harmony as Formula' (Bloch 1985c:93–99; 1974:112–119). Here it becomes a question of the tension between hard theory and cold, calculating technique (used by the best composers for maximum effect) on the one hand, and the knack, inspiration, the passion and miracle of musical performance on the other.<sup>19</sup> Despite a full awareness of the power of carefully deployed technique, of exploiting the 'rules' of music to one's advantage, Bloch sides with the latter: 'the most successful methodical musical mind takes care that form does not override its object as a purpose in itself' (Bloch 1985c:94; 1974:113). The whole section seeks to back up this assertion. Breathing the spirit of Schoenberg, Bloch effectively deconstructs one so-called rule after another: the idea of key (Schoenberg's last movement in his F sharp major Quartet has no key notation), harmony of the chord (via vagrant, unusual, exposed, new and thereby expressive chords), counterpoint (in which anything can be countered by something else), the assumed moods of minor and major (even Bach disregarded them). In short, the difference between an untalented and a talented composer is that rules become barriers for the first and education for the second. But just when we might think that Bloch is tied too closely to the breakthrough of 'New Music' (to which Adorno had signed up), Bloch indicates once again the larger picture, namely the utopian glimpse in which inspiration overrides technique: 'The song closes, then, with something new, unending or unfulfilled. It travels without arriving, the sense being in the path it takes' (Bloch 1985c:96; 1974:115).

The second window offers us a slightly different view, now from the perspective of musical score and the performed piece, between the written music and its expressive performance (Bloch 1985c:68–72; 1974:83–88). Take a song, suggests Bloch (his example is the German hymn, 'O Sacred Head Sore Wounded'), and trace its wildly various incarnations, all the way from folk love song to resounding Easter hymn. Or take a song that is 'covered' by another

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19 So also: 'The "what" of artistic creation is amply defined, rather, by how the artist is and not by virtue of how he does it, quite apart from the fact that a sober, purely technical working definition is incapable of doing justice to the needfulness, the exuberance of the artistic will and its object' (Bloch 1985c:85; 1974:103).

artist and one can immediately see what a difference the performance of the same piece can make. Out of a long, long list, one might mention Bob Dylan's 'Hard Rain' as it was thoroughly revamped by Bryan Ferry, or the Hunters and Collectors' classic 'Throw Your Arms Around Me' as sung by Neil Finn or Eddie Vedder (of Pearl Jam), let alone the more acoustic performances by Mark Seymour of Hunters and Collectors, all of which gains a completely new twist when both Eddie Vedder and Mark Seymour played the song together (one may fruitfully listen to all these variations on Youtube).

However, when it seems as though Bloch has sided firmly with the expressive side of the 'attack' or interpretation of a piece of music, he begins to hint at the utopian dimension of the necessarily unfinished business of the score. For the musical score is merely a rough a rough indication of what might be: 'For what happens in the note is still empty and uncertain', for what exists in the work does so 'as a rough indication, as a mere code for its realisation' (Bloch 1985c:71; 1974:86–87). Indeed, 'Until it is performed, sound remains blind' (Bloch 1985c:69; 1974:84). In other words, precisely because the score remains unfulfilled does its utopian possibility emerge. Is it fulfilled in the interpretation of the performance? Sometimes Bloch suggests as much,<sup>20</sup> but then he realises that even with the most expressive performance one could imagine, the performance too falls short. All of which leads him to see the dialectical value of both elements:

A piece of music, when viewed from the technical angle, will be perfectly in order and tell us nothing, like an algebraic equation; but when viewed from the poetic angle, it says everything and decides nothing – a peculiar dichotomy in which, seething as the content is, any centre and any reconciliation accessible to the understanding is still lacking. Hence it is pointless to confine ourselves to the technical element, which will remain a lifeless stereotype unless it is interpreted through its creator. It is also pointless to confine ourselves to the poetic aspect so as to force the 'infinitely hazy character of music', as Wagner put it, into categories which are not proper to it. The only remedy is to listen well and to wait expectantly for whatever may take shape in music – this pealing of bells from a wholly invisible tower – in terms of eloquence and supreme explicitness both supra-formal and supra-programmatic.

BLOCH 1985c:72; 1974:88

20 'Sound wants to turn towards the human being. With all music it is important to heed the *expression* which is only added to the written notes through the act of singing them, through a violin section's bowing, a pianist's attack, but above all through that creative practice without which neither dynamics nor rhythm could be tackled in the way the composer intended' (Bloch 1985c:70, 71; 1974:86).

Through the third window Bloch peers more than once. It may best be characterised as the tension between the objective and subjective dimensions of music, that is, between music as an objective, mathematical entity that exists independent of human beings and to which human are subject, and music as a contingent, frail human product. We have already seen enough to know that Bloch sides with the latter. So on at least three occasions – in *The Philosophy of Music*, in ‘On the Mathematical and Dialectical Character in Music’ and in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1985c:121, 122, 183–194, 214–217; 1974:267–279, 301–305) – he attacks the ancient and long-held idea that music is like mathematics, that it exists independent of human beings. Whether the mathematical deliberations of Pythagoras, or the Platonic music of the spheres, which was then transformed into the planetary intervals (of which there as many as the planets), or angelic and thereby divinely established harmonies to which we, mere mortals, can falteringly approximate – Bloch argues that all this is so much nonsense, albeit a nonsense that deflates any possibility for human agency in both music and utopia. In short, it has the effect of ‘taking us away from man’ (Bloch 1985c:189; 1974:273).

All the same, lest we think that Bloch’s dialectical rigour has finally failed him, he turns even this argument around in at least three ways. To begin with, he points out that the mathematicians do not own the question of musical time, for such use of number is anything but eternal and universal, a contingent guide and spur for a musician rather than an inflexible law that must be followed. Further, when speaking of form, Bloch does not dismiss it as mere secondary technique, but prefers to push back, as it were, pointing out that the search for form and precision is a foundational moment for any composer: ‘It is a question of the actual forming process, the concerns of precision, those questions of the will to influence and to communicate which, for an artist, can even come before the question of the content which is our one consideration’ (Bloch 1985c:86; 1974:104). And if form is an inescapable element in human creativity, then it is also important for any utopian dialectics of music. Thus, by the time Bloch comes around to his third foray into the mathematical nature of music, he argues that we must move beyond the opposition itself – between objective and subjective, mathematical and human, eternal and contingent, cold form and human expression – to a ‘form-utopia’ (Bloch 1985c:217; 1974:304).

What can we say about this opposition in Bloch’s thought? He is, of course, not the only one to reflect upon it, although I would suggest it is intimately connected with his distinction between the warm and cold streams of Marxism, between its very human concerns and the need for scientific analysis. Here too Bloch more often than not prefers warm Marxism, or at least attempts to gain a reputable place for it within the Marxist coalition. However, he is too much

of dialectician not see that cold Marxism too is part of the dialectical and utopian promise that Marxism offers. So it is also with his philosophy of music.

*Rhythm and dialectics.* Having broached the issue of form already, it now becomes the centre of attention in the next section (Bloch 1985c:99–104; 1974:119–124), except that now it allows Bloch to reflect on one of my own favourite topics, rhythm, and for him to return to one of his own favourites, namely the opposition between Bach and Beethoven. Let us begin with rhythm, which (as we have seen) emerges from the body's own inner vibration, inseparable from a singing-to-oneself and thereby hearing. A small element of scandal creeps into Bloch's favouring of dance, for the dance he envisages belongs to the realm of popular and folk culture and not the stylised forms of ballet and so on. For those familiar with Bloch, a feature of his philosophy is the weaving in of the everyday activities of working people, the *Ludwigshaften* factor of his thought (see Bloch 1985b:208–211),<sup>21</sup> and the role of dance and rhythm is yet another instance. But why scandal? Dance is intimately of the body, sensual and thereby sexual, for as he suggests in his opening lines, the inner vibration at the heart of dance leads to the removal of one's clothing. Left unsaid but hinted at are the multiple rhythms of sex.

Yet the main point of Bloch's main section on rhythm is to argue for the intrinsic role of rhythm with and within the note – contra Wagner et al, who would see rhythm as the most external feature, the outward point of contact with the world and we as hearers, that which draws us to the inner world of music. This is not an unexpected argument from Bloch, given the metaphysical importance of time for his philosophy, with its 'Not Yet' and 'Novum' and the eschatological tenor of his utopian explorations. But here he runs through a number of examples to show how rhythm – and thereby time – is integral for Wagner, Mahler, Tintoretto and especially Beethoven.

Why not offer a systematic reflection on time and music? Why rhythm specifically? Apart from the embodied element of dance, rhythm here means not merely a beat, the time signatures or strikes of the bar, but anticipation and delay, departure and arrival, striding and climbing, the very energy of music itself. Perhaps it is best if I let Bloch speak, now on Beethoven:

In Beethoven's music in particular, the rhythmic tonic takes precedence over all harmony. It assumes the latter's office and, as the explosion of

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21 This resort to the popular practices of music is a constant theme in Bloch's occasional pieces. See especially 'On the Threepenny Opera' (Bloch 1991:211–213; 1974:165–167), 'Time-Echo Stravinsky' (Bloch 1991:214–220; 1974:168–175) && and 'Rescuing Wagner Through Surrealistic Colportage' (Bloch 1991:338–345; 1974:176–184).

tonality advances, becomes increasingly destined for victory. For how else could Beethoven be understood, without this music within the music? He drives restlessly on, lets go in order to build up energy in the meantime, compresses his material quietly and imperceptibly so as to set it alight later all the more fearsomely. He leads it, pulls it awry, sends hither and thither, treating his small melodic structures like lifeless creatures, and he sees, does this tremendous strategist of time, masses of music before him and under him from which he selects those that best suit his purposes. Whole groups of notes follow one another like a single lean, economical, stretching family line. But now, at the crucial moment, with a single bar of genius more than richly endowed with rhythmic-dominant power, comes the flash of prodigality, and the enormous masses discharge their load.

BLOCH 1985c:102; 1974:122

Needless to say by now, Bloch is keen to espy the utopian vibrations of rhythm, not only in those discontinuous moments when one may glimpse utopia, but also in the time when all the various rhythms sound together to signal an imminent change.<sup>22</sup> Once again, when I read Bloch on rhythm and dance (let alone the note and song), I see a nascent theory of rock, so much so that Beethoven in Bloch's hands becomes a drummer in the 'best fucking band in the universe'.<sup>23</sup>

Rhythm is, however, but one element in Bloch's reflections on form. The other offers a return to Bach and Beethoven, but now in an explicitly dialectical register (Bloch 1985c:104–115; 1974:124–137). The specific issue at stake is the relation between the fugue and sonata, particularly in terms of contrapuntal technique (which naturally opens itself out to dialectical analysis). Bloch offers not one but two analyses of this same theme, one a milder version in *The Philosophy of Music* and the other a much sharper Marxist analysis in *The Principle of Hope*. In sum, while Beethoven's musical breakthrough has, in the first argument, only muted political implications, in the second it becomes decidedly revolutionary.

22 As he puts it in one of his more esoteric formulations: '*Musically*, it passes into the sonant-contrapuntal space-stratum of a fugue or collective symphony; *philosophically*, into the lucid, qualitatively discontinuous historical space of a self-contained epoch or even the whole history of the world just as soon as the whole of it, disregarding the decrescendo of the contemporary reality unrolling again with a particular finale, can vibrate in a sufficiently unified, utopian way' (Bloch 1985c:103; 1974:124).

23 As Chris Bailey, lead singer in The Saints (Australia's first, if not the world's first punk band), said when introducing Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds on Goat Island, Sydney, 2008.

Thus, the purpose of the long and involved section of *The Philosophy of Music* is to use counterpoint as a key instance of multi-layered dialectics, which, by transcending counterpoint itself, lifts us once again to a utopian moment. Bloch tracks in some detail the formal style of the 19th century fugue (Bach), before showing how it is broken open in the new use of counterpoint in the sonata (especially Beethoven but also Bruckner). Beethoven's stunning use of rhythm is the key to this breakthrough. Running through this analysis are multiple dialectical layers: the contrapuntal patterns of, first, the fugue, and then the sonata, the interactions between them and then the generation of a new level through this fourfold interaction.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, the political element is at best muted in this analysis. Bloch offers the relatively brief assessment that the fugue constitutes solidity and stratification, that it embodies the 'mediaeval idea of society, put into music', much like the careful scholastic explanation of dogma. By contrast, in Beethoven's sonata we find a break with such an ordered social formation, for here 'freedom, the person, Lucifer reign, not Jesus and completely rounded theocracy' (Bloch 1985c:107; 1974:128). Yet even these observations are prefaced with a cautious '*cum grano salis*' (Bloch 1974:128).<sup>25</sup> By contrast, in *The Principle of Hope* the qualifier disappears and the political and economic analysis is

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24 All of which is summed in the following: 'There are, then, four great hierarchies of contrapuntal technique. The relation which they possess to the ethico-metaphysical spheres of the "I" is a constitutive one, although it has to be complemented by listening, by creative activity and is thus not direct, not demonstrable without further ado. Mozart, according to this classification, is Grecian and offers the small secular self; he is lightness, Attic counterpoint, pagan joy, the self-aware or sentient soul, the stage of the self that takes the form of play. Bach is mediaeval and offers the small sacred self, built in a sturdy and hallowedly uniform fashion, a musical ruby glass, architectonic counterpoint: filled with charity and hope, the commemorative or authentic "I"-soul, the expiated soul of Adam, consequently the stage of the self that takes the form of faith. Beethoven, Wagner have revolted against this. They are adjuring and lead into the *great secular, Luciferan self*, questing, rebellious, not to be satisfied by anything given, full of militant presentiments of a higher life, bound on an ineffable march of discovery, as yet without obvious booty; they are the masters of dramatic counterpoint and assaults upon the interior, ultimate heaven. But what is still absent, the great sacred self, the upper stages of human essentiality, music that has reached its final destination, will be the art of the later Holy Roman age. In its arrived state, crowned by eloquence and triumph, this unimaginable music would have to condense sequential counterpoint into the simultaneity of an expressive statement, an understood significance that could be instantly grasped, a *musically emphatic language of prophecy a se*, a really telling musical meaning' (Bloch 1985c:115; 1974:137).

25 The English translates as 'to stretch a point' – not quite the same thing (Bloch 1985c:107).

much sharper. After revisiting the relation of fugue and sonata, first via Schoenberg, Bloch points out that the contrapuntal oppositions of Beethoven's sonata was 'full of revolutionary tension' (Bloch 1985c:233; 1974:323), signalling class conflict and the anticipation of a break.<sup>26</sup> The key to the sonata is its moment of arrival, without which the tensions would be meaningless. For class struggle works itself through revolution: 'a tension and resolution – at a new level' (Bloch 1985c:234; 1974:323).<sup>27</sup> Even the fugue – which he calls elsewhere 'the song of the sacred soul' (Bloch 1985c:132; 1974:156) – is caught up the excitement; no longer the negative moment of the comparison, the solidity of the ruling order against which the sonata revolts, the fugue also embodies such tensions in its own way.

All of this is, to my mind, a bravura piece of analysis, offering an extraordinarily good model as to how one might go about a dialectical analysis of music.<sup>28</sup> For my own purposes, I am less interested in Bloch's baptism of counterpoint as the revolutionary moment par excellence (in *The Principle of Hope* he compares it favourable with the capitalist flatness of 'new music'). Rather, I prefer to use the form of analysis for other purposes, especially in dealing with rock music (Boer 2012).

*How to hear around corners, or, recovering clairvoyance.* The final topic of Bloch's study deals with the phenomenon of music, music as thing-in-itself, that is, as inherently utopian (Bloch 1985c:155–133; 1974:137–157). It is followed by a last, great theo-utopian blast called 'The Mystery' (Bloch 1985c:133–139; 1974:157–164). However, since Bloch's text in these last pages is laced with theology, I propose to bring them together in terms of Bloch's inescapable theo-utopian preferences. As I have already pointed out, Bloch tends to complete the various section of his philosophy of music with a flourish that I have

26 See a comparable analysis of *The Magic Flute*, which portrays the space before all revolutionary periods (Bloch 1998:250–255; 1974:261–266). By contrast, Stravinsky is 'so far removed from revolution' (Bloch 1991:218; 1974:172).

27 See also the subtle Marxist analysis earlier in *The Principle of Hope* (Bloch 1985c:200, 201; 1974:285–287).

28 As one example, again on Beethoven: 'It is at this point that the notes spiral upwards, striking fire, but the impetuous flight does not lack stability. Another element arises continuously and with growing intensity: the struggle or soul of the emergent relation... We can sense how, from a rapidly vanished cadence or at an apparent full-stop, there grows a tiny structure. At first barely visible and without significance, it then becomes strong, seeks allies, goes to war with the old element, and soon overgrows the whole situation with powerful limbs, with sovereign fulfilment. This music speaks of rallying, flagging and setbacks, a going astray, argument and victoriousness, presented either in close succession or in sweeping movements...' (Bloch 1985c:110; 1974:131–132).

dubbed theo-utopian: elements from the eschatological traditions of the Bible and Christian theology share the space with heretical strands drawn from paganism, secular challenges to theology and myths of revolution. Lucifer joins a rebellious Christ along with the revolutionary human beings, as long as they all stand up to oppressive powers that be, spying in the distance the contours of a very different land.

The themes in this vast collection of theologically inspired utopian moments are as varied as their sources: it may be God's awareness of himself (Bloch 1985c:10; 1974:17); the time of Christ's 'Advent understood as symbol' (Bloch 1985c:13; 1974:20); the kernel of eternal life, 'this Jericho and first township of the holy land' (Bloch 1985c:139; 1974:167); the 'correspondence between the motion of the note and the motion of the soul' (Bloch 1985c:123; 1974:145); the eschatological hope embodied in a new language of the soul, in which what 'is still a fervent stammering at the moment will one day share in the eloquent language of music, in increasingly expressive certainty' (Bloch 1985c:133; 1974:157); the breakup of the old religious community in Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* as the necessary revolutionary task, carried out by the Holy Spirit, in order to achieve a universal choir that may seek God as one (Bloch 1985c:26–27; 1974:35–36); Beethoven who transcends both the first and second Jesus (of the Second Coming) and invokes 'Lucifer: the fighter in the front rank' (Bloch 1985c:35; 1974:46). The theological invocations roll on: it may be the 'leap of faith' (Bloch 1985c:89; 1974:108), the 'projection of the heart of Jesus into things', the 'statement "it is I", an inner God-seeking devoid of images', the 'transcendence of the direct or religious object' (Bloch 1985c:90; 1974:108–109), the anticipation of an 'as yet unfallen beyond' (Bloch 1985c:120; 1974:142), or music as 'miraculous and transparent', which is both the first moment of the divine human face and the name of God recovered (Bloch 1985c:133; 1974:157). In sum:

Music is so completely the guarantee of the beyond, a song of consolation, Death's enchantment, a yearning and our own arriving simultaneously. It is a nocturnal flower of faith which gives strength in the ultimate dark, and the most powerfully transcendent certainty between heaven and earth.

BLOCH 1985c:132; 1974:155–156

This collection might go on endlessly, but it does at least reinforce the point that any analysis of Bloch, which ignores his theological tendencies, is hobbled from the beginning. How are we to understand the role of theology in Bloch philosophy of music? My answer to this question has four parts: first, I draw out a narrative of secularisation and music from Bloch himself; second, this

narrative leads to Bloch's call for a new clairvoyance, which is really another way to speak about hearing around corners; third, the question of language makes an appearance; finally, I dig out what may best be called a dialectic of transcendence and immanence.

In order to establish the need for interpretive clairvoyance, as well as (yet again) the utopian function of music, Bloch traces a vast narrative – of what can only be called secularisation – that compares in its daring breadth with that of Adorno and Horkheimer's narrative concerning enlightenment. Well before them, Bloch argues that already in the Hellenistic world one may trace a loss of a sense of the preternatural, transcendence and the occult in the face of the determined advance of reason (embodied by the privileged and elitist sight). By the time of Caesar Augustus, reason had come to dominate, only to be outflanked by the birth of Christ, who is the metempsychosis of God Himself. So much for the first stage of reason and religion; in the second stage, which runs from Luther and the Renaissance, the rebirth of reason has led in two opposite paths: the black night in which all external spiritual light fades; the bright interior of the soul, which believes that Christ will return even while the empirical evidence suggests he will not. Already clairvoyance is needed to mediate between the moral self who keeps a candle burning in the darkness and a God 'who is falling silent, leaving us and hesitating on the brink of His transformation into the Holy Spirit on the other' (Bloch 1985c:135; 1974:159). More of that in a moment, for now a third stage appears: the belated arrival of music, which, as we have already seen, takes up the fallen utopian mantle of theology.

I can hold off the discussion of clairvoyance no longer. The provocative association with occult practices, crystal balls and smoky rooms is no accident, although Bloch seeks not so much deeper insight as a 'clair-audience' (*Hellhören*), a word he coins from the German for clairvoyance, *Hellsehen* (Bloch 1974:163).<sup>29</sup> Elsewhere he calls it a 'metaphysics of divination and utopia' (*Metaphysik von Ahnung und Utopie*) (Bloch 1985c:131; 1974:154), or, as I have preferred until now, a hearing around corners to identify the utopian dimension of music. In Bloch's terms, the planet of music has not revolved enough yet for us to see what is on the other side. And since we still live within the intersection of stages two and three, within the late arrival of music and the focus inwards, clairvoyance needed both to discern what goes on deep within ourselves and to see the dark side of that vast planet.

29 So Korstvedt 2010:153, although one might also translate as 'clair-hearing', except that Korstvedt's rendering has a certain resonance with clairvoyance. 'Visionary hearing' in the translation by Palmer is less than adequate (Bloch 1985c:138).

The third question begins with a moment of hesitation, for I have wondered on more than one occasion why such an ecstatic Bloch is so appealing for me, given my suspicions of ecstasy. The best way to make sense of Bloch's appeal is that in those regular theo-utopian crescendos, if not in the dense, prophetic and ecstatic style favoured by Bloch, he tries to tap into the often theological language of myth. Fully aware that we do not have a language adequate to speak of a qualitatively different world known as 'utopia', a major strategy is to make the most of the vast utopian resources of myth and theology. What he writes in an analysis of *The Magic Flute* in relation to symbols also applies to myths, for they are 'deployed as mirrors of what has not yet come into existence' (Bloch 1998:255; 1974:266).

Finally, Bloch's theo-utopian anticipation moves both vertically and horizontally, temporally and ontologically. It may look forward to a better world, but it also lifts on the wings of heavenly anticipation (heaven here understood as a persistent criticism of earth). Does this mean Bloch leaves behind the very human focus that has characterised his philosophy of music until now? Not at all, for the more theo-utopian he becomes, the more resolutely human is his focus. Music may well appear beyond us, containing a full metaphysics well clear of the banality of harmony, of thirds and fifths, beyond even the physical note, embodied above all in the 'acoustical atrocities' of the late Beethoven,<sup>30</sup> and yet this music comes from within ourselves, from our bodily vibrations, our impulses to dance and sing and therefore hear ourselves. The metaphysical note, beyond anything yet experienced, is not external to us but produced by us, for 'we are the origin of what the note of music says' (Bloch 1985c:137; 1974:161). If there is a mystery, then that mystery is nothing less than the human object, 'which in practice is hidden from its own sight' (Bloch 1985c:138; 1974:162). Is that not in the end a dialectic of transcendence and immanence, in which the key to transcendence lies in its radical immanence and vice versa?

### Conclusion

This, however, is a place where one has never been before, although it is still native to us (Bloch 1985c:120; 1974:142).

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30 Bloch speaks of the B flat major Sonata and the Diabelli Variations: these 'acoustical atrocities' are 'ultimately unplayable because they are written for an instrument which has never existed and never will exist'. These two works 'do not employ real sound but incorporeal, purely cerebral abstractions of sound, borrowing the language of the keyboard only as a rough, basically sketchy alphabet' (Bloch 1985c:118; 1974:140).

Those people who listen will have found another way home (*gelangen anders nach Hause*).

BLOCH 1985c:86; 1974:104

Thus, the note in all its metaphysical, utopian and ontological dimensions is thoroughly human, even if that human being remains hidden from a full realisation. The way forward: 'If, therefore, we do not advance with the note, nothing can continue singing' (Bloch 1985c:115; 1974:137). But any advance with the note must realise that the 'has consequences' (*ibid.*), especially those that 'do not yet exist musically' (Bloch 1985c:116; 1974:138) and for which we must brace ourselves.